



JACINTO RODRIGUEZ works the grill last week at Mexico City’s El Califa de León, the world’s first taquería to earn a Michelin star.

# Michelin discovers the taquería

The taco guy didn’t quite get the fuss. “I didn’t realize the magnitude of the whole thing,” recalled Arturo Rivera Martínez. “I had no idea of what a Michelin star was.”

He does now. El Califa de León, the modest taquería in Mexico City where Rivera has labored over a sizzling grill for more than two decades, was awarded a star last week in the first-ever Michelin Guide Mexico, instantly turning him and the rest of the staff into epicurean heroes. The humble taco is a great unifier across this vast and fractured capital. With more than 11,000 taco joints in Mexico City, there may be no sight more iconic here than the all-night puesto — wealthy businessmen, civil servants and taxi drivers alike hunched side-by-side stuffing their mouths with a food that has been around, in one form or another, since before the Spanish conquest. For its new Mexico guide, Michelin bestowed one or two stars on 18 restaurants across Mexico, most of them high-end dining experiences. El Califa de León, a cramped, no-frills establishment in the working-class district of San Rafael, is

El Califa de León’s simple menu transforms a modest taco stand into a gastronomic giant in Mexico City. Here come the two-hour waits.

By Patrick J. McDonnell and Cecilia Sánchez Vidal  
REPORTING FROM MEXICO CITY



HAPPY CUSTOMERS munch on tacos from El Califa de León. The French dining guide lauded the gaonera taco as “exceptional.”

the first taquería in the world to get one. As the news spread, the line outside began to grow. This week it stretched more than two blocks alongside street stands selling everything from toys to underwear and cell-phone cases. Newcomers settled in for waits of at least two hours. “We’ve never seen anything like it,” said co-owner Mario Hernández Alonso, 66, as he answered nonstop questions from journalists swarming his shop. “My parents would never have imagined it.” His father opened El Califa de León in 1956, naming it for the moniker of a well-known bullfighter who happened to be a friend. The spot was long a haunt of politicians given its location down the street from the headquarters of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, which governed Mexico for much of the 20th century. An homage to Luis Donaldo Colosio — a regular patron and presidential candidate when he was assassinated in Tijuana three decades ago — is one of the few wall adornments. There is no room to sit at El [See Taquería, A4]

## Why Silicon Beach stalled

With investment in startups down sharply, L.A. struggles to retain its perch as a tech hub. What happened?

By Wendy Lee and Samantha Masunaga

High atop a Century City tower with floor-to-ceiling views of the Westside, a group of venture capitalists, other investors and startup founders picked at charcuterie boards, sipped drinks and debated the future of tech ventures in the Los Angeles area. The mood was upbeat. L.A. is a sleeping tech giant, they said, home to a diverse range of successful companies, including dating app Tinder, Riot Games and Hawthorne-based SpaceX. But when the subject turned to the once-hyped Silicon Beach, there were grimaces. “We don’t need to be the ‘silicon’ of anything,” said one attendee. “It does L.A. a bit of a disservice,” remarked another. It’s a delicate subject among investors and local tech entrepreneurs — for good reason. Last year, venture capital funding of startups in Greater Los Angeles totaled \$6.9 billion, down 73% from 2021, when investment peaked during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to research firm CB Insights. Investment in the L.A. tech sector during the same period dropped 63% to \$4.2 billion, CB Insights said. The sharp falloff highlights the challenges L.A. has faced in trying to retain its perch as a major tech hub and how it fell short of lofty goals to promote itself as an alternative to Silicon Valley and New York, the biggest U.S. markets for venture capital. Last year, L.A. dropped to fourth place, behind those areas and Boston, in VC funding, according to CB Insights. “We’re certainly a lot further along than where we started, but ... it boggles my mind that there isn’t more [See Silicon, A7]

## Reevaluating ‘deaths of despair’

UCLA report undercuts belief that white Americans face greatest risk of dying from addiction and suicide

By Tyrone Beason

Nakeya Fields has seen how the stresses that come with being Black — racial injustice, financial strain, social isolation — can leave people feeling hopeless and push some into substance abuse. It’s one of the reasons the Pasadena social worker started offering “therapeutic play” gatherings for Black mothers like herself and children. “I’m trying to host more safe spaces for us to come and share that we’re suffering,” the 44-year-old said. Yet while Black and brown mental health practitioners such as Fields have labored to address these issues within their communities, a very different conversation has been occurring in the nation at large. For years, discussions [See Despair, A7]



NAKEYA FIELDS is a social worker in Pasadena who focuses on the mental health of Black women.

### Rift in Europe on Palestinians

Ireland, Norway and Spain announce they plan to recognize statehood, reflecting a growing impetus. WORLD, A3

### UCLA’s police chief reassigned

Top cop faced sharp criticism for response to violent attack on protest encampment. CALIFORNIA, B1

### Hollywood’s abuse targeted

MyConnext, a reporting platform, aims to decrease harassment in entertainment industry. BUSINESS, A6

**Weather**  
Low clouds, then sun. L.A. Basin: 70/56. **B6**

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## In discussions of Gaza war, a line between free speech and hurtful bias

Jewish families say anti-Israel messaging tolerated in Bay Area classrooms is making students feel unsafe.

By Hannah Wiley

SAN FRANCISCO — In the weeks after Hamas’ deadly cross-border attacks on Israeli towns and Israel’s ensuing bombardment of Gaza, a seventh-grade Jewish student at Roosevelt Middle School in San Francisco grew accustomed to seeing her classmates display their support for Palestinians. Students wore shirts that read “Free Palestine” and “All eyes on Gaza.” But it was more of a background hum until spring, when things took a sharper turn. During a school assembly,

a classmate spoke out against the war, equating it to genocide. Then, one teacher asked students to create a “propaganda poster” that would “persuade your audience” on an issue important to them. Many students used the opportunity to create public service announcements for cleaner oceans or against food waste and texting while driving. A handful called for an end to the war in Gaza. One poster, prominently displayed by the teacher, caught the seventh-grader’s attention. A student had drawn an image of a Star of David exuding thick chains shackling what appeared to be an outline of Israel and the Palestinian territories. Beneath the image, written in red and all capitals, was the phrase “from the river to the sea” — a slogan many Jewish people consider a call for the expulsion and genocide. [See Messaging, A10]



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