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Sangria
901 West Weed Street, Chicago
312.266.1200
www.sangriachicago.com
ITLC's Overall Rating: B+
Cuisine: B+ Ambiance: A- Service: B+

Owner Marc Bortz and Executive Chef Jason Paskewitz have created a lively and colorful spot in the Clybourn Corridor. The main dining room is spacious with a large, welcoming bar. The design is modern, with retro colors associated with Latin America. Like the food, the ambiance is casual and fun. Service is cordial and casual. Seasonal patio dining is available.

No excuse for going thirsty here. There are six "house sangrias" as well as several mojitos and the expected caphirina, Cuba libre, tequila sunrise and more. Red, white and sparkling wines are available, many by the glass, along with several sherries.

The extensive menu offers something for every taste. Starters (\$4-12) include plates to snack and share plus soups and salads. The Peruvian seafood chowder and the Cuban black bean soup were finely flavored and textured. Ceviches and tiraditos (Latin-Asian fusion) and an extensive list of "more hot tapas" (\$3-8) will encourage you to rely on the guidance of friendly service staff to narrow your choices, customized to your preferences. The bacon-wrapped shrimp were tasty, if not very moist. The Peruvian ahi tuna ceviche was subtly seasoned with citrus, aji pepper, red onion and cilantro. The chef favors less oil, and less intense flavors, than one typically expects in tapas. This style is reflected throughout the menu.

And if you've exercised some restraint, there are eight entrees from which to choose (\$12-19). The paella had just the right amount of moisture and perfectly cooked shellfish, but with all-but-absent taste of saffron. The grilled Atlantic salmon was perfectly cooked, slightly translucent at the center, and accompanied by a tasty gazpacho and avocado "salad" that was more like a tomato coulis. There are tempting offerings of churrasco paella (skirt steak and pork tenderloin); oven roasted chicken with green olives, sweet Spanish onions, garlic and white wine; and cumin dusted grilled ahi tuna with corn salsa.

Desserts (\$4-5) are worth the calories. The warm chocolate cake with coffee sauce and vanilla ice cream, and the fried goat cheese with clove honey and cayenne pepper (judiciously applied) are recommended. The more adventurous diner might go for the warm avocado pudding. Traditionalists may go for the pastel de tres leches.

If you're in the mood for a fun, casual, kick-back experience of tasty food and drink, head on over to Sangria Restaurant & Tapas Bar.