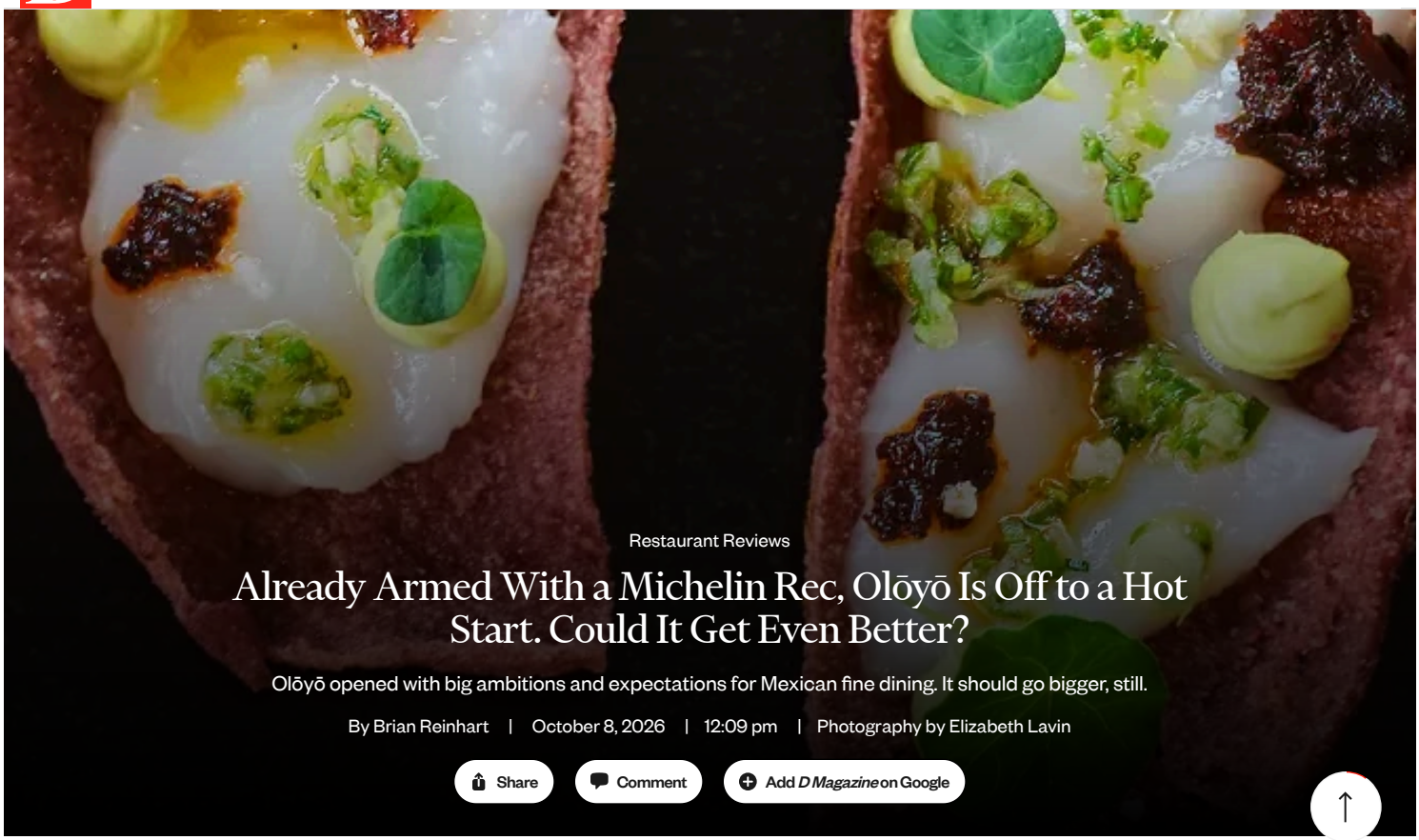

Restaurant Reviews

Already Armed With a Michelin Rec, Olōyō Is Off to a Hot Start. Could It Get Even Better?

Olōyō opened with big ambitions and expectations for Mexican fine dining. It should go bigger, still.

By Brian Reinhart | October 8, 2026 | 12:09 pm | Photography by Elizabeth Lavin

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Scallop tostadas are served with salsa macha.
Elizabeth Lavin

For years, chef Olivia López and her partner, Jonathan Percival, served Dallas breakfast tacos and other street snacks at pop-up events. They sold their salsa macha and heirloom corn tortillas at food festivals, cooked carne asada under sidewalk tents, and served dinners in art studios and homes. But their debut restaurant isn't a street food joint. It's one of the state's most anticipated fine-dining kitchens.

Olōyō occupies the Old East Dallas space that was once Cry Wolf, with an open kitchen and long counter, ideal for watching the chefs at work. The dining room has been sensitively remodeled in a color spectrum ranging from pink to copper. It's a stage for López to present the foods of her native Colima, one of Mexico's smallest states, tucked between Jalisco and Michoacán on the Pacific coast. If something can be made inside the restaurant, the cooks make it: requesón (ricotta-like fresh cheese), jams, hot sauces, pickles, infused vinegars, and not one but two recipes for salsa macha, designed to pair with different meats. As many ingredients as possible are sourced from Texas and Mexico, including heirloom corn, Yucatán octopus, Rio Grande Valley citrus, and Colima salt. Baja California features on the bar's wine list.

The kitchen already shows the superb technique needed to live up to its promise. Duck for a mole dish is stacked in layers of ideally tender, pull-apart meat and crispy-crackly skin. A bed of sautéed squash under summertime tamales is chopped in precise cubes.

Jonathan Percival and Olivia López originally served their tamales at events and festivals. Now they've given them a fine-dining makeover.

Elizabeth Lavin

For all that finery, my favorite dishes reveal Olōyō's Pacific coast street-food roots. A half-dozen oysters are dressed with seasonal toppings. In August that meant watermelon, which had the refreshing effect of combining oysters' sea brininess with a hit of freshwater.

Sopes, their masa batter thick and sturdy but still crisp, come topped with cubed brisket and creamy white bayo beans. The brisket is cooked until crisp, its texture and fatty richness like a beef version of carnitas. The sope also comes with Olōyō's wonderful hot sauce, made with guajillo and habanero peppers, seasonal fruit (Texas peaches, this summer), and a tiny dose of the previous batch. Carrying one batch of hot sauce into the next adds depth of flavor, much like a sourdough starter. On my first visit, I lamented when a server took our hot sauce away between courses. When I came back, they left it for the rest of the meal.

López's tamales were a standout offering at her pop-ups and remain so at Olōyō. Tender, flavorful masa is matched to a variety of seasonal ingredients.

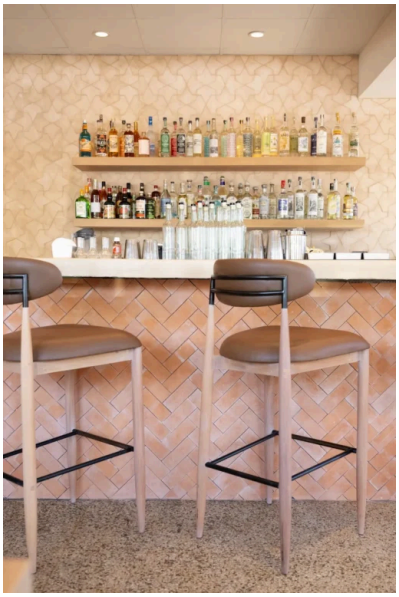
In high summer, the tamales were filled with pork and blanketed in pumpkin seed-based pipián verde. The flavor was mild but complex.

Former Midnight Rambler bartender José González devised the cocktail menu.

Elizabeth Lavin

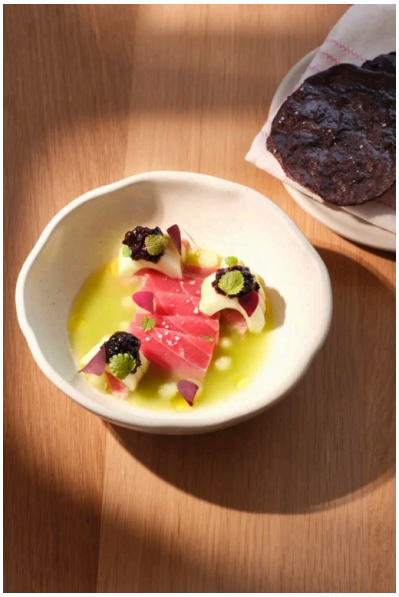
Pinole ice cream is a satisfying, playful end to a meal.

Elizabeth Lavin



The bar at Olōyō has the same mellow color scheme as the rest of the dining room.

Elizabeth Lavin



Tuna, honeydew, and blackberries.

Elizabeth Lavin

Other dishes can be cerebral, more interesting to think or write about than they are to eat. At times I found myself taking slow, contemplative bites. When a server told us that a lamb huarache was “all about the flavor of carrots,” we picked it apart like surgeons, looking for the tiny slivers of carrot within. When pescado zarandeado arrived without a strong marinade, we debated whether it was a moment overcooked. This kind of eating takes place when food doesn’t tug at the emotions.

Part of the problem is a conservative approach to spice and acidity. I saw morita and jalapeño chiles mentioned in the description of the veggie tostada —the restaurant’s only vegetarian dish—but didn’t taste either pepper. If a

wedge of lime arrived with a plate, it was not a garnish but a need. My fork moved to the edgier elements of Olōyō's plates: hot sauce, pickled green tomatoes draped over a scoop of rice, pearl onion petals next to the duck.

The hero flavor of Olōyō's menu is salt, every crystal of which is imported from Colima. Colima's saltworks produce all the varieties necessary, from fine table salt to the finishing flakes sprinkled over all the dishes, even desserts. "Flakes" might be the wrong word, though; this salt forms tiny, precise cubes, like ice for a Lego person's drink. It has a salty flavor, of course, but with less of the strong, bitter, tongue-scratching quality that makes "salty" such a damning word. The result is a bit like a magic trick. Olōyō can serve food with salty flavors without them becoming grating or unpleasant.

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To see Colima's salt at its best—and Olōyō's main courses at theirs, too—order the steak. A rib-eye from Rosewood Ranches is grilled to flawless medium-rare and sprinkled with salt. The secret of the rib-eye is that it's a chance to play with your food. It comes with superb blue corn tortillas, a cup of beans, a nopal salad, and morita chile-based salsa macha. Don't eat it like a steak; build some majestic tacos. If you've saved the hot sauce from the sope, add both salsas together. With taco in hand, I can turn off my brain and enjoy the fruits of Olōyō's technique.

Desserts are another playful relief. Flan, firm but oh-so-smooth, sits atop a wonderful encaladilla (corn cookie) and is sprinkled with puffed rice and lime zest. Pinole ice cream punches hard with both sweet and salty flavors. If you like anything to do with caramel, you'll love this; the actual flavor is different, but it satisfies the same pleasure zone in the brain. The final dessert is a set of two petite paletas, tributes to the paletería López loves back home. "I might not see any of my friends," she tells me, "but I always go to the paletería."

Olivia López imported pottery and other artifacts from Colima.
Elizabeth Lavin

Olōyō's pricing has generated much conversation in local comment sections, social media posts, and chef group chats. It has also inspired at least one scene at another restaurant, where, three witnesses tell me, two guests quarreled about Olōyō's cost, raised their voices, and drew the attention and irritation of nearby tables. (One witness called it a "hostile confrontation.") A single veggie tostada is $18, a half chicken $58, two tamales $34.

This reflects Olōyō's technical precision as well as its insistence on the best and most ethical sourcing of every ingredient. Prices are one of the ways in which restaurants signal their intentions to their customers, and the prices here tell us that this is a restaurant for thoughtful dining, a restaurant with an eye on a page in the Michelin Guide.

For several reasons, I think Olōyō's value proposition is fair. First, the restaurant has modified sourcing and portion sizes on its most recent menus. Second, it's smart to pay more for better things and less for worse things. Third, a per-person average bill of $150 to $200 is the going rate for fine dining in Dallas right now. Indeed, compared to some tasting menus and steakhouses, it's a bargain. (The $140 rib-eye is big enough for three to share.) Finally, there is no reason why Mexican food should always be cheap gas-station items with low-quality ingredients and hurried cooking. Japanese and French foods exist as both bar snacks and fine-dining temples. Why not Mexican?

Olōyō debuted with high expectations and was featured in the *New York Times* after only 20 days. If my own praise in this article is fainter, it's because I can see Olōyō both as it is now and as it can be, a higher level the restaurant is reaching for. That includes its plans for a tasting menu and a more casual space next door, Molino Olōyō, which will open in 2027 and serve the kinds of tacos that López and Percival made for their pop-ups. It might also involve a service touch that briefly describes Colima cuisine or folds López's personal

stories into descriptions of cooking techniques. It might mean just a little more acidity and spice.

The best restaurants get better over time. I can't wait to see what will come from this kitchen when it sheds its nerves and bares its soul.

Author's note, Oct. 8, 2026: This article was completed and edited before a recent high-profile social media debate over the restaurant's pricing, and before Olōyō was added to the Michelin Guide.

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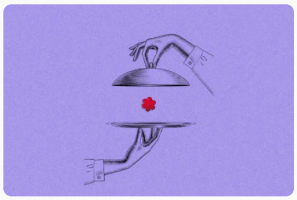

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By Brian Reinhart | October 8, 2026

Author

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Brian Reinhart became *D Magazine*'s dining critic in early 2022 after six years of reviewing restaurants for the *Dallas Observer* and the *Dallas Morning News*.

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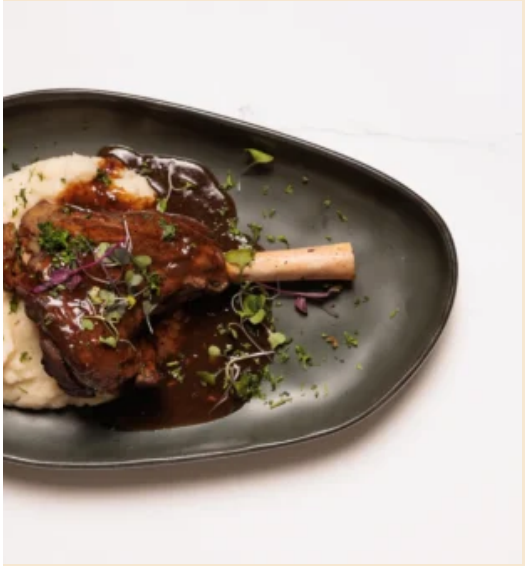

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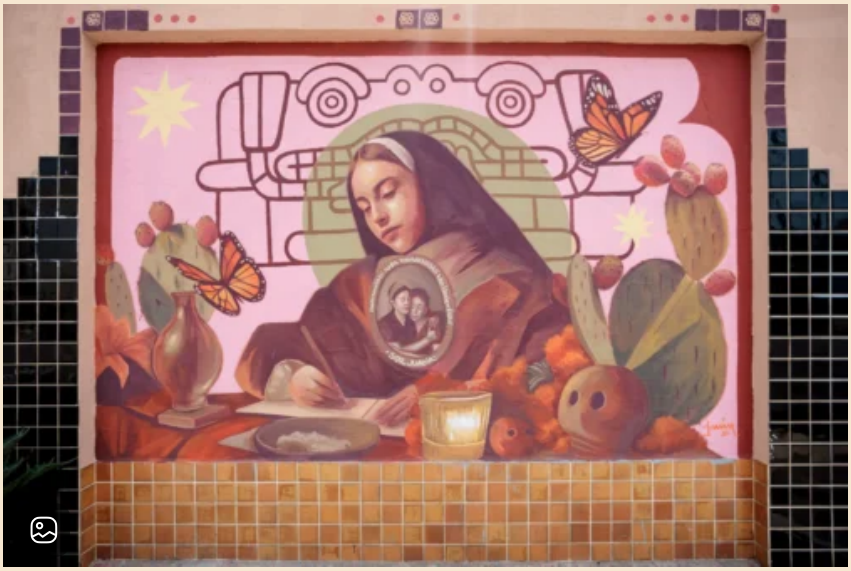

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The Downtown Mexican Cantina With the Best Dining Room in Dallas

By Brian Reinhart

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