

Puesto expanding to OC, Silicon Valley

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By Lori Weisberg | 8 a.m. Aug. 2, 2016



The next Puesto opening, as shown in this rendering, is planned for Irvine, with another eatery scheduled for next year in the Silicon Valley area. *Courtesy of Puesto*

Puesto, the gourmet taqueria that was a near-instant hit the day it opened at The Headquarters at Seaport, is preparing to spread its brand of Mexican street food beyond San Diego County.

Later this year, Puesto, which also has a restaurant in La Jolla, will open a restaurant in Irvine and will follow that in 2017 with an outlet in the Silicon Valley.

Co-owner Eric Adler said he hoped to have a total of five Puesto locations by the end of next year but stressed that he wanted to take care not to expand too rapidly.

“Ever since we opened, we’ve been approached by some of the best landlords and developers throughout the country, but we took a step back and wanted to fine tune everything we were doing and make sure first that we had all our systems in place,” said Adler, who partnered with his brother Alan and cousin Isidoro Lombrozo to open Puesto. “Even though we’re going to open in Irvine and Santa Clara, we’re not on a schedule here. These happen to be opportunities we really like.”

Adler anticipates opening a 4,800-square-foot Puesto in the Los Olivos Marketplace in Irvine by November of this year. Already in the Irvine Company center is another homegrown San Diego concept, Burger Lounge, which has exported its fast-casual brand to Los Angeles, Orange County and Las Vegas, and will soon be moving into Northern California. Overseeing the design of the restaurant will be local designer Paul Basile, whose Basile Studio has worked on a number of high profile restaurant projects.

Puesto also has signed a lease to open a restaurant in Santa Clara Square, also an Irvine Co. property, that is a mix of office, retail and residential located near Levi’s Stadium, the home of the 49ers. The restaurant, which will be

about 6,000 square feet and seat 300, is larger than the Headquarters location, which is 4,500 square feet, not including its patio. The Northern California restaurant should open by next summer, Adler said.

The rapid surge in Puesto's popularity — it's grown from 600 diners a day to more than 1,000 — is helping the ownership pay for the development of new stores. Adler estimates the build-out cost for the Irvine location at between \$2.5 million to \$3 million. He doesn't have an estimate yet for the Santa Clara location.

Mixology 619: Puesto Perfect Margarita

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Customers, he said, also have come to appreciate the restaurant's take on authentic Mexican cuisine, although it did take time.

"I think we've helped educate guests as to what real Mexico City tacos are, and now it's very normal to them," Adler explained. "For example, our cactus zucchini, it's super traditional in Mexico but in the beginning people were shocked about it. Now it's a big seller."

For now, Puesto wants to limit its expansion to California, with a focus, at least for now, on Orange County and the San Francisco Bay area.

"We've had a lot of guests coming from L.A., Orange County, the Bay Area, and they really want us to be in those markets and that's the way we want to grow," Adler said. "We'll also get guests from Japan and India and Dubai and London, but that's not in our plans right now. After Orange County, L.A. makes sense for sure."

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