

Jalisco Authentic Mexican Restaurant
243 Neff Avenue
Harrisonburg, VA 22801
Attn: Martin Zambrano

Dear Mr. Zambrano:

First of all, thank you very much for coming to me for assistance with your menu design. The content is well-written and enticing, and its overall organization has been designed quite well, so we're starting with a nice menu already, but with a little work, it will become even more effective. Experienced restaurateur Lorri Mealey says on about.com, "A restaurant menu design is a reflection of the restaurant itself. Restaurant menu descriptions, layouts and colors, whether formal, casual or playful, should match your restaurant concept, location or theme." The important thing is just to commit to an approach—a consistent image your restaurant will conform to—and stick with it.

The following proposal discusses colors, fonts, menu style, organization, and images.

Colors

When I look at your menu, the first design choice I notice is that it has been printed in monochrome green with a pixelated design—i.e. the only color used was a shade of green, and lighter and darker shades were achieved by printing smaller or larger dots on the page. This type of printing may have saved a bit of money in the short term, but I think it ultimately does the restaurant a disservice by making the images less engaging to the customers and decreasing text legibility. What I recommend is that we have the menu printed in full, vibrant colors.

Of course, if we print in full color, that means we will need to come up with a color scheme for the menu. We don't want too many different colors, as that can distract the customer from the content of the menu itself, but using a small variety will help keep the customer's attention. I noticed that the sign on the restaurant transitions from green to red, so I suggest that we use that same design for the title on the menu. We can also use these colors as a basis for a color scheme.

Fonts

My first recommendation with the fonts is simply to enlarge them. Of course, this will mean enlarging the menu, too, and I will address that later. But as for fonts, I also recommend using serif fonts rather than sans serif for menu items, as studies have shown serif fonts to be more readable on paper.

To continue with the color scheme based on the sign, I also recommend we use green text for regular menu items. Perhaps you might also consider using red text, as well as a slightly larger font, to draw attention to daily specials or high-profit items. I've recreated three items from your menu in this style to demonstrate how these ideas come together.

Chimichanga Steak – 10.50

Large chimichanga filled with chunks of steak and cheese deep-fried or soft topped with cheese sauce. Served with rice, beans, lettuce, guacamole, sour cream and pico de gallo.

Vallarta Fajitas – 13.50

Shrimp and scallops grilled with onions, tomatoes and bell pepper. Served with rice, beans, lettuce, guacamole, sour cream, tomatoes and tortillas.

Shrimp Fajitas – 12.50

Shrimp grilled with onions, tomatoes and bell pepper. Served with rice, beans, lettuce, guacamole, sour cream, tomatoes and tortillas.

In this example, I used the font Bernard MT Condensed in 14 pt. size for the item names and the font Athelas in 12 pt. for the descriptions. I also raised the size to 16 pt. for the title and 14 pt. for the description in Vallarta Fajitas as a way to draw attention to the item.

I like the font you chose for section titles, although I'm not sure what the font's name is. It adds a bit of character to the restaurant without sacrificing legibility. The one minor point I want to mention is that this font suggests a bit of a different character than the font used for the restaurant's name. It isn't a big issue, but it's worth considering. If you do decide to use the same font for the restaurant name and the section titles, though, I suggest changing the section titles to match the name, rather than the other way around. As for colors in the section titles, I recommend using the same green-and-red effect as in the restaurant's name, as this would create some consistency.

One last note on fonts. Your menu has three small paragraphs that directly address the customer: "Our Promise to You..." on the first inside page, "Not all Mexican food is hot..." on the third inside page, and "Please read this..." on the second outside page. All three of these paragraphs use different fonts, none of which are used elsewhere in the menu. Using different fonts is an excellent tool to draw customers' eyes to certain areas on a page, but using too many different fonts can end up being a distraction instead. I recommend that we either pick one of the three fonts you used for all three paragraphs, or that we use the same font as in the item descriptions.

Menu Style

Before we discuss where each section will go on the menu, we'll need to decide what type of menu to use. Since we're making the fonts larger, we will need to make the menu itself larger to accommodate. I recommend bringing the page size up to 9 inches by 12 inches, and I would go a step further and have it laminated. This way, it will last longer and look more professional. As for the menu style, I suggest we go with a tri-fold menu (see Figure 1).



Figure 1

This style gives us only five pages (excluding the cover) as opposed to the seven pages of the current menu, but this is not a problem. For one thing, I would recommend making the Lunch Specials page a removable insert that you would place inside the menu at lunchtime only. For another thing, with the larger page size and a little bit of organizational work, we could easily combine some of the sections into fewer pages.

Organization

Before I discuss organization, I want to applaud your use of simple borders to separate and define menu sections. Studies have shown borders to be helpful in keeping menus neat and organized. That being said, there is a bit of inconsistency throughout the menu in how those sections are arranged on the page. I don't think any single page is necessarily wrong, but it will be more effective to use similar organizational strategies on each page to maintain consistency.

Of the pages on the menu now, the one I think should serve as our model is the page with "Plancha Mixtas" and "Jalisco Dinners." The two main aspects of this page that I like are that the sections are centered on the page and that the items are listed in two columns. Using only one column would not use the available space well, while three or more columns can start to look like a newspaper classifieds section.

It will be easier to show you my ideas for organization rather than tell, so please refer to Figure 2 and Figure 3 below.

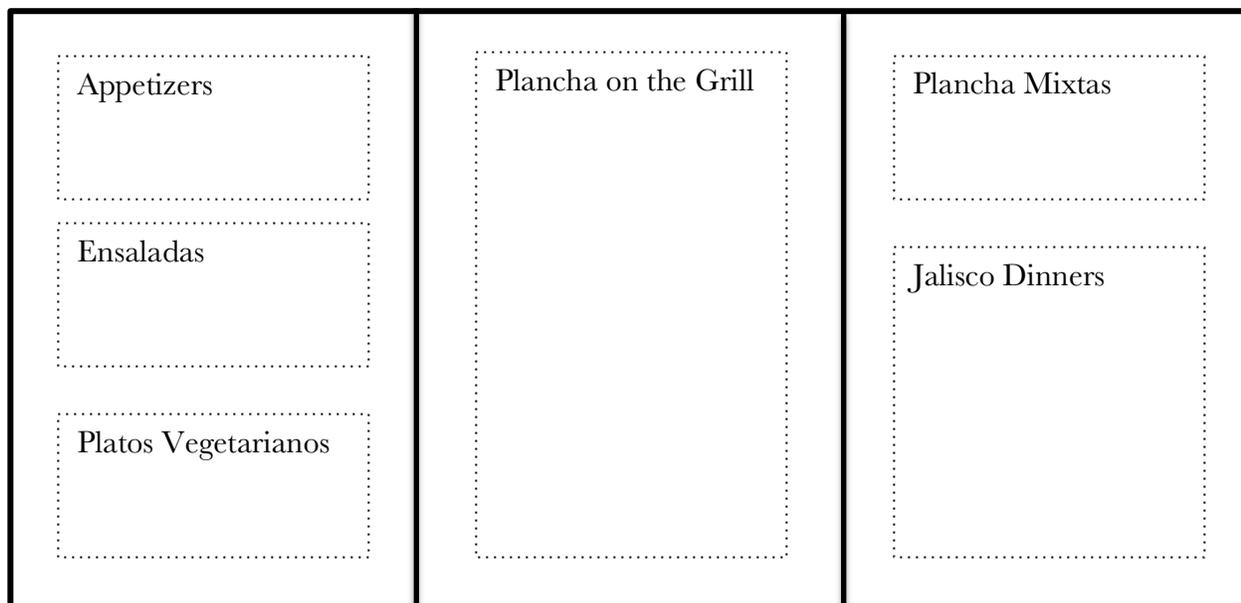


Figure 2
Inside Panels

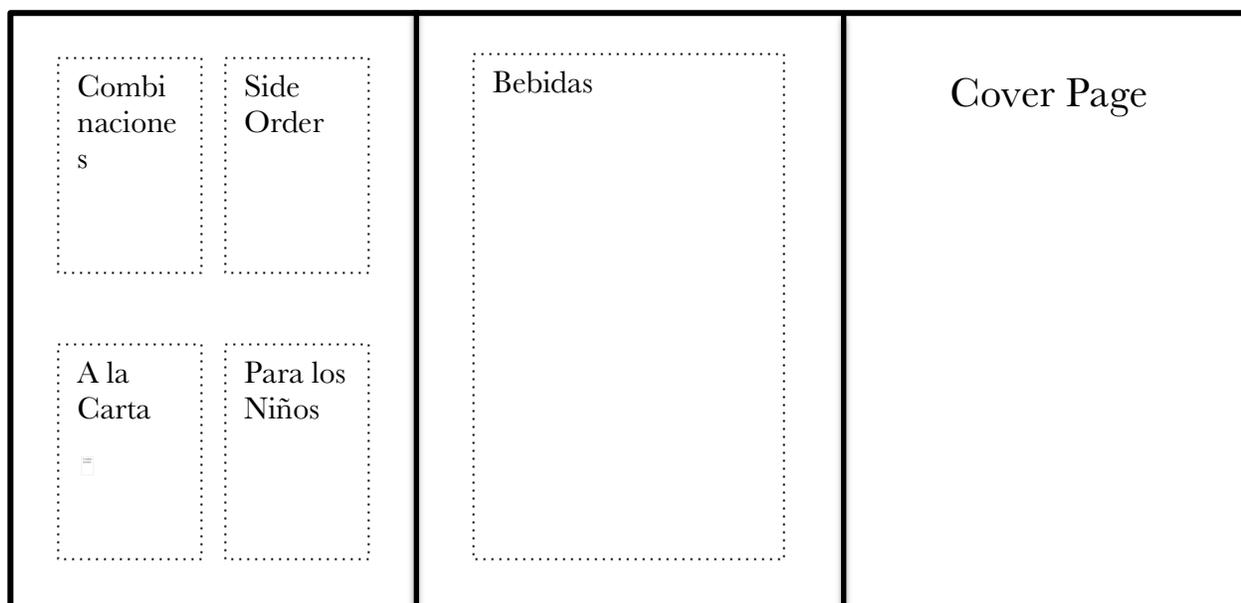


Figure 3
Outside Panels

You may notice that I didn't account for the "Description of Mexican Dishes" section. I think it will be more efficient to put this section on a table tent rather than on the menu itself.

Images

Images can be very useful in making a menu interesting. My main concern with the images in the current menu is that many of them appear to have been taken from the Internet instead of being photos of the foods prepared at your restaurant. I believe it will be an even more effective use of images if we take photos at your restaurant instead. Doing this will also allow you to have captions with menu item names, which tells customers “This is exactly what you’re getting!” This technique is also another effective way to draw attention to daily specials or high-profit items.

These are the recommendations I have so far. Our original contract being now expired, if you would like to continue to enlist my services on your menu, we can set up an appointment to discuss a new contract. I have enjoyed working with you on this project, Mr. Zambrano!

Sincerely,
Benjamin H. Morgan