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The Taco Truck rolls into Savor at King of Prussia Mall

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UPPER MERION >> With the engaging vibe of an especially cheerful mobile taqueria, The Taco Truck has found a permanent indoor parking space at King of Prussia Mall.

It's been an adventurous and relatively speedy ride for founding owners Jason Scott and Chris Viola, from the streets of Hoboken to the Savor food court, and CEO Scott appeared to be savoring the fruits of his inspiration to bring authentic, sustainably responsible Mexican street food to the East Coast.

Glancing around at his eye-catching quick-service setup nicely situated at the top of the escalator, Scott said the opening day crowd last weekend was extremely encouraging.

"This was a great stepping stone for us into the Philadelphia market and it probably wouldn't have been on our radar if Simon Property Group hadn't approached us about locating here," Scott said of The Taco Truck's first Pennsylvania location. "Simon had been to our location in Princeton and approached us about coming here. Once I had found out about the other tenants they were bringing in I felt it would be a really good fit for us. Until they built the connector between the two malls we didn't really see a space that made sense for us here. We had even looked at a few other malls and we always shied away from that. But," he added, "I like that this is not a traditional food court and that we had the opportunity to create our own environment, because we want people to get the full taco truck experience, with our own seating, so that we can come out into the dining area and talk to customers and ask about their experience and refilling their drinks."

Echoing the pop up taco truck experience is a wraparound style kitchen and a slightly higher counter that simulates placing your order at a food truck window.

The friendly staff will guide you through menu options that may be unfamiliar to your palate, like the wildly popular Pescado taco (crispy catfish, red cabbage, Pico de gallo, tartar and chipotle salsa in a flour tortilla; \$5) and Aguacate taco (crispy avocado, black beans, sesame seeds, pickled onion, tortillas fritas, chipotle salsa; \$5).

Other favorites that are resonating with King of Prussia Mall visitors are the torta Mexican-style sandwiches (\$8.75), such as Barbacoa (braised beef, chipotle salsa) and Polo (grilled chicken), as well as the Al Pastor burrito (marinated pork, onion, cilantro, pineapple, fresh green salsa; \$9.50).

Passionate about the taqueria street fare they'd sampled during their travels throughout Mexico, Scott and Viola rolled out their taco truck in Hoboken back in 2009, with recipes handcrafted by consulting chefs in Mexico.

Their genuine tacos and tortas (burritos came much later, via customer demand) were such a hit that the budding entrepreneurs opened a storefront in Hoboken the following year.

"I think we always knew we'd make the transition from truck to brick and mortar," Scott recalled.

Before long, they were launching a kiosk on Manhattan's High Line and additional restaurants in Princeton, Boston and Morristown.

Comparisons to the big chain places may be inevitable but not necessarily valid, Scott allowed.

"I think people make the Chipotle and Qdoba comparison, but I think we're more of a chef-driven menu and our real focus is authenticity," he said. "For us, not offering burritos was a point of differentiation, but we heard from our guests over and over 'why don't you have burritos?' So we added them. I really loved the authentic flavors that I was finding in Mexico that I didn't see represented on the East Coast. There were great little hole-in-the-wall taquerias in Jersey but nobody had really brought it to the mainstream or made it more approachable for a broader demographic."

With the King of Prussia venue on solid ground, expect The Taco Truck to continue its evolution in the Keystone state.

"We are really looking at downtown Philadelphia," Scott said. "Looking at real estate and finding locations where people haven't really been exposed to authentic Mexican food has really been exciting for me."

The Taco Truck at King of Prussia Mall is open Monday through Friday, 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. and Sunday, 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.