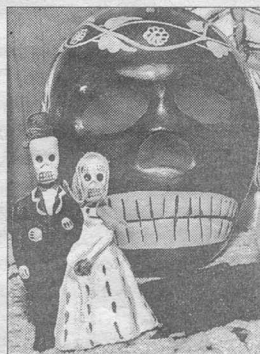




SHOP CRAWL BY ROSALIND CUMMINGS-YEATES

As Chicago's largest Latino neighborhood, the southwest side's Pilsen vibrates with history and character. Colorful murals cover half the buildings and there's even bronzed circles of

- the Aztec calendar decorating sidewalks. A step into the many family-owned shops brings a friendly "bueno" as well as a truly cultural experience.



LEFT: Owners Lorena Almanza (left) and Sugeiri Martinez peer through a bamboo curtain at Mestiza. **ABOVE:** The shop offers plenty of trinkets to celebrate Day of the Dead. | TOM CRUZE~

SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

CENTRO BOTANICO GUADALUPANO

1550 W. 19th St.
(312) 226-0106

Botanico Guadalupano serves up over 300 varieties of herbs and remedies. The 17-year-old, family-run business provides 2-oz. bags of herbal mixes (\$6) for arthritis, rheumatism, insomnia and a host of common ailments. Eucalyptus, Brazil bark, yerba buena, cascara sagrada and valerian are just a handful of the bulk herbs for sale. Veladoras or candles dedicated to specific saints or desires, also make up a significant portion of the shop.

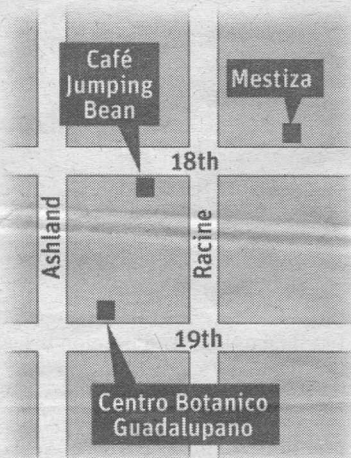
According to Jose Lopez, who has worked in the botanica since he was a child, the candle for Santa Muerte, a cloaked skeleton resembling the grim reaper, is the most popular seller. He said that the black candle helps with fertility and gives protection to love relationships, while "Tapa Boca," a red candle that pictures a woman with white tape on her mouth, is supposed to stop gossip. Most of the candles are \$1.50. Various religious articles such as crucifixes, rosaries and statues of saints range from \$6 to \$25.

Hours: 9 a.m. -7 p.m. daily.

MESTIZA

1010 W. 18th St.
(312) 563-0132

A modern mix of urban edge and Latin



American flair signifies Mestiza boutique. Its owners, Sugeiri Martínez, 31, and Lorena Almanza, 31, created the quaint gift emporium after sitting in Borders one day. "We were thinking about how cool it would be to have a shop with everything we love; vintage, Latin style and funky themes," she said. Mestiza fills the order with cute red totes splashed with Spanish tarot figures, "La Sirena" (mermaid) and "El Diabólico" (a red devil) for \$12, traditional embroidered Mexican sundresses in Granny Smith apple green for \$55 and hand-woven pink, orange or green rebosos (shawls) from Ecuador for \$22. Mexican wrestling masks in red & black or gold & black are \$18 and dolls from the '70s

Spanish sitcom "Chavo" are \$16.

Of course, anything with cultural icon Frida Kahlo sells and Mestiza stocks a saucy sky blue tee boasting a screen-printed Frida accented with a blue rhinestone tiara for \$22. Interesting vintage pieces also are available, such as a blue satin tunic with magenta and gold embroidery for \$49.95 as well as jewelry, pottery and paintings. The owners host an annual gallery event where they display local artists' work and they will debut a new T-shirt line next month. "We live in Pilsen and a lot of people's houses look like our store; '70s vintage mixed with traditional Latin pieces," said Martínez.

Hours: 11:30 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday-Saturday, 11:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. on Sunday.

CAFE JUMPING BEAN

1439 W. 18th St.
(312) 445-0019

A neighborhood institution for 13 years, this cozy cafe supplies its signature white satin mocha (\$2.75) or a licuado in mango, banana or strawberry (\$2.75) on round tables covered with colorful paintings. Art also lines the walls, so you can enjoy a heaping platter of a black bean burger with pasta (\$4.75) as you browse or watch the chess players at neighboring tables.

Hours: 6 a.m. -10 p.m. Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. Saturday-Sunday.