



DINING

# 2014 The Best in DFW Chefs

By **Leslie Brenner** (mailto:lbrenner@dallasnews.com) | Restaurant Critic

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**O**ne chef is honored for his inventive and beautifully executed spins on Spanish tapas, another for his stunning omakase menu. There's a chef who has been building relationships with farmers for

years in order to bring spectacular produce and meats to the table, and yet another who's something of a genius when it comes to sauces.

These are the Best in DFW chefs of 2014.

There's so much great cooking going on these days in North Texas that it wasn't easy winnowing the field to just 10; I found myself returning more than once to several of the restaurants whose chefs were being considered. Each has been visited at least once in the last six months.

As in years past, creativity, originality, consistency in execution and general excellence are essential for chefs who make the list of honorees, and their menus must be dynamic, evolving with the seasons — though some of these chefs change things up much more frequently.

We are thrilled to present, beginning with Chef of the Year and then listed in alphabetical order by restaurant, The Best in DFW: Chefs of 2014.

Chef of the Year: **Stephan Pyles**



## Stephan Pyles, San Salvaje, Stampede 66

For most chefs, being on the vanguard of the creation of a new genre would be accomplishment enough. Not for Stephan Pyles, without whom it's impossible to speak of Modern Texas cuisine. Less than two years after debuting Stampede 66, where he has exuberantly re-imagined Lone Star cooking, he opened San Salvaje, celebrating — and reinventing — the flavors of Latin America. The sheer imagination and creativity involved are simply breathtaking.

At San Salvaje, Pyles spins brilliant ceviches and elaborately layered Peruvian causas (potato salads). A deliciously stylish take on a Native American humita — a tamale-like dish that dresses up a sweet corn pudding with lobster and avocado — might precede a chicken cazuela that's at once soulful and sophisticated. It's also where you'll find some of the most inventive and beautifully executed desserts in town. Executive chef Alex Astranti and pastry chef Keith Cedotal clearly deserve credit as well.

Meanwhile, Pyles and executive chef Jon Thompson have not only kept things feeling fresh at Stampede 66, but the cooking there has become even more impressive recently. Lately I've been wowed by grilled red snapper that basked in a sauce-like hominy mousse with a surprisingly voluptuous texture, by olive-oil-poached redfish in a magnificent mole verde and by succulent grilled quail accompanied by a superb oxtail-collard greens pie.

But Pyles isn't stopping there; next he's turning his attention back to his flagship restaurant, Stephan Pyles, which he is revamping and moving to new digs in Hall Arts, the mixed-use development being built in the Arts District. Last week it was announced that J Chastain will be the chef, the menu will feature almost exclusively Texas ingredients and Pyles will call the cuisine "elevated Texas cooking." Sounds like an exciting evolution for Modern Texas cuisine.

With his incredible energy, boundless creativity and outstanding leadership — for clearly he has excellent teams helping to execute his visions — chef Pyles continues to be a superstar of the Dallas dining scene.

San Salvaje by Stephan Pyles | 2100 Ross Ave., Dallas | 214-922-9922 | **sansalvaje.com** (<http://sansalvaje.com/>)

Stampede 66 | 1717 McKinney Ave., Dallas | 214-550-6966 | **stampede66.com** (<http://stampede66.com/>)

Stephan Pyles | 1807 Ross Ave., Dallas | 214-580-7000 | **stephanpyles.com** (<http://stephanpylesrestaurant.com/>)



*Crab arepa with South Texas grapefruit at San Salvaje (top), sweet corn humita, lobster and avocado at San Salvaje (bottom left) and pork barbecue confit, creamed cabbage, grilled pears, pumpkin spice barbecue sauce at Stampede 66 (bottom right)*

Photos: Stephen Pyles by Allison Slomowitz/Special Contributor, sweet corn humita by Vernon Bryant/The Dallas Morning News, pork BBQ confit by Lara Solt/The Dallas Morning News

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Scott Gottlich, Bijoux