

That old Pyles elegance



STAR-TELEGRAM/RON JENKINS

Stephan Pyles' new Dallas restaurant features this Chilean sea bass with fava bean-arugula stew and aji marisol rouille for \$28.

By JUNE NAYLOR
SPECIAL TO THE STAR-TELEGRAM

He may wield a power unparalleled in Texas cuisine, but Stephan Pyles doesn't rush things. The chef who put Dallas dining on the national map waited five years between leaving his last creations, including the renowned Star Canyon, and opening a new restaurant of his own.

FIRST LOOK REPORT

Initial impressions
of hot new spots

And on Tuesday, opening night at his eponymous new hot spot in the Dallas Arts District, the soft-spoken trend-setter kept the reservations to just 75, although he can seat more than twice that number at once.

This kind of savvy paid off: The mood was anything but the frenzy you'd expect at the city's most anticipated opening in at least a decade. Although Pyles stayed in motion, he never hurried. Instead, he strolled around with an easy smile, greeting friends at booths, tables and at the bar, roaming through the glassed-in kitchen

Dallas' cuisine king returns with a serene room and food pros who know how it's done

to help a dozen chefs expedite dishes, or standing near a pile of ice at the raw bar, arranging a guest's platter of chilled shellfish and mollusks.

Likewise, the serving staff exhibited the relaxed demeanor of people who have drifted into comfortable rhythms from years of working together: More than half of this staff has stayed with Pyles a long time, some going back to the Routh Street days in the 1980s.

The new room is a study in calm warmth. In renovating the ground floor of a 1960s insurance building, Pyles revealed rust-colored bricks that give the space a rustic earthiness. By adding ridged sandstone walls and accents like a curtain of copper chips, a circular booth and "sunset" LED lighting, the restaurateur and his designers have effected an exceedingly comfortable place that you settle into as you would a ski lodge.

There's a sense of coming home again, too, for those who've enjoyed

Pyles' food over the years. Calling his new menu offerings New Millennium Southwestern Cuisine, Pyles builds upon his repertoire from Mexico, New Mexico and Texas by adding South American, African and Asian elements.

Versions of old favorites include his bone-in cowboy rib-eye with red-chile onion rings and the long-popular roasted garlic custard-tamale tart. Some dishes here are also on the menu Pyles created for Ama Lur at the Gaylord Texan Resort in Grapevine, including his duck confit empanada, ceviches trio, coriander-cured rack of lamb with Ecuadorian potato cake, and boneless barbecued short rib.

New treats I sampled are likely to be big hits: The tuna escabeche came with feather-light calamari in panko breading with a drizzle of blood orange aioli; and seared foie gras took on what Pyles calls his "Tacu Tacu" treatment, a Peruvian specialty incorporating stewed lentils with rice and

Stephan Pyles

1807 Ross Ave.
Dallas
(214) 580-7000
Southwestern
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Details: Open for dinner 6-11 p.m. daily. Tapas/ceviche bar open 5 p.m.-1 a.m. Monday-Saturday. Lunch service to be added in 2006. Full bar; major credit cards accepted; smoke-free; wheelchair-accessible.

grilled banana. Friends spotted on opening night raved about Pyles' new pulled, spit-roasted pig in a cardamom-tinged apple and a plate of steamed salmon over crabmeat paella.

Appetizers average about \$10-\$18; entrees are \$25-\$35. Desserts are \$10.

Even when the crowds reach capacity over the next weeks, no one will be turned away. Pyles extends his welcoming ways by offering a long community table at the center of his restaurant, facing the jewel-box kitchen. Pull up a chair and order; chances are, you'll settle in and feel right at home.

June Naylor, (817) 390-7818
june@junenaylor.com