



FOOD DRINK REVIEW

BY MARGIE JACINTO
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRI GLANGER



LEFT: The 20-seat communal table boasts a perfect view of the glass-enclosed kitchen. ABOVE: Chile-Braised Pork "Osso Bucco" with Pumpkin Polenta and Braised Winter Greens

NEW YEAR'S REVOLUTION *Stephan Pyles does it again with his New Millennium Southwestern Cuisine*

Whoever said, "Never trust a skinny chef," has never met Stephan Pyles. The mild mannered culinary master may appear to be on the South Beach Diet, but Pyles is living proof that the age-old aphorism is (to refute it with another adage) to be taken with a grain of salt. The Big Spring-born Texan is a celebrity in his own right. His Star Canyon and AquaKnox in the '90s put Big D on the dining map, and his innovative concepts helped Hotel ZaZa's Dragonfly truly get its wings. The list of accolades goes on, but at long last, the highly anticipated opening of his namesake restaurant has garnered the attention of critics, contemporaries, loyal Pyles patrons, and well...those who just want to know what lies beyond those glass doors.

Pull into the driveway, hand over your keys and already you're immediately whisked into the Pyles experience. A wooden walkway lined with illuminated hurricanes and indigenous plants creates the feeling that you're in a resort in Scottsdale, and up ahead, the glass exterior puts the restaurant's interior into plain sight. But upon entering, you realize that you are not here to tee-off, with the stocked bar on the left and sprawling dining room to the right. In the center of the horizontal floor plan, a long table intended for a dining trend that hasn't quite hit Dallas yet—communal dining—sits adjacent to the tapas-ceviche bar, both boasting a clear view of restaurant's focal point, the 1,500-square-foot, glass-enclosed kitchen.

Contemporary works from local artists hang from brick walls, and furnishings are composed of dark woods with a cherry finish. The main dining room is smooth and continuous, from the curved booths along the right wall to the lack of partitions, save for a cascading panel of hammered copper squares suspended from the ceiling. Downtempo beats softly play in the background, adding a sensual energy to the new venue.

Given, Stephan Pyles has only been open for a little over a month, it seems that Pyles and his culinary dream team, Executive Chef Dan Landsberg and Pastry Chef Katherine Clapner were thoroughly prepared come game time. Small touches, such as the appetizing Serrano pepper blue corn muffin and rustic Italian roll, tempt your appetite even before you make your selections from the menu.

In the past, Pyles has been credited with shaping Texas dining as we know it, not to mention he's been touted as a founding father of Southwestern cuisine. Now with his name literally on the line, he has created a new gastronomic genre, which he calls "New Millennium Southwestern Cuisine." According to Pyles, "It's a multi-cultural mix and a more broad sense of style of cooking than I have done the past. It's a composite of my experiences and my travels..."

He takes flavors from Texas, South America, CONTINUED...

CONTINUED... Spain, the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Appetizers like the Tamale Tart with Roast Garlic Custard and Jumbo Lump Crabmeat; and Seared Foie Gras "Tacu Tacu" with Lentils and Bananas give you an inkling that you're in for something completely different. The savory tart, made with a light, melt-in-your mouth flan and generous portions of fresh crab was served warm. The sweetness of the crab was highlighted by the tart's smoky tomato sauce. Those who want something more intense should try the foie gras. Yet another texture trip, the Hudson Valley fatty liver is seared and dissolves slowly in your mouth. Underneath you'll find a crispy plantain chip and "tacu tacu," a Peruvian-style patty of lentils, rice and sweet sherry. The indulgent starter is also topped with a caramelized banana—another South American influence—balancing the saltiness of the foie gras.

Circling the globe over to North Africa, Pyles has created a Micro Arugula Salad with Tunisian Phyllo Turnover. Organic micro greens, roasted red and golden beets and a minute quail egg accompany the flaky pastry filled with potatoes. Other salads include Stephan's Original Southwestern Caesar Salad with Jalapeño Croutons and Reggiano Parmigiano "Chicharon," and Garden Greens with Really Good Olive Oil, Balsamic Vinegar and Fleur de Sel (gourmet sea salt).

Main courses are comprised of the usual—seafood, beef, pork and chicken—but ingredient combinations are far from predictable. The Spanish staple, Paella, is given a Mexican twist when fresh salmon is wrapped with the aromatic Hoja Santa leaf. Another soon-to-be favorite is the Chile-Braised Pork "Osso Bucco" with Pumpkin Polenta and Braised Winter Greens. The rack of lamb is also worth mentioning. Tender, moist and juicy, the Colorado lamb is first cured with coriander and a variety of spices prior to being grilled over hickory. The result is wonderful, with spices bringing out the lamb's flavor and the hickory adding a smoky essence. Served cranberry mojo—a sweet, subtly tangy (thanks to the addition of Spanish vinegar) sauce with a touch of heat from the Habanero pepper—the fruity mixture was a nice change from the usual mint. The entrée comes with Ecuadorian potato cake as well, and this side tastes good enough to eat on its own. Aside from the mashed potato, the cake contains cream cheese, olives, cilantro and breadcrumbs, and then lightly sautéed. Entrées are elegantly presented from ingredient to garnish, down to the last drizzle of sauce against the striking Wedgwood dinner ware.

THE SPANISH STAPLE, PAELLA, IS GIVEN A MEXICAN TWIST WHEN FRESH SALMON IS WRAPPED WITH THE AROMATIC HOJA SANTA LEAF

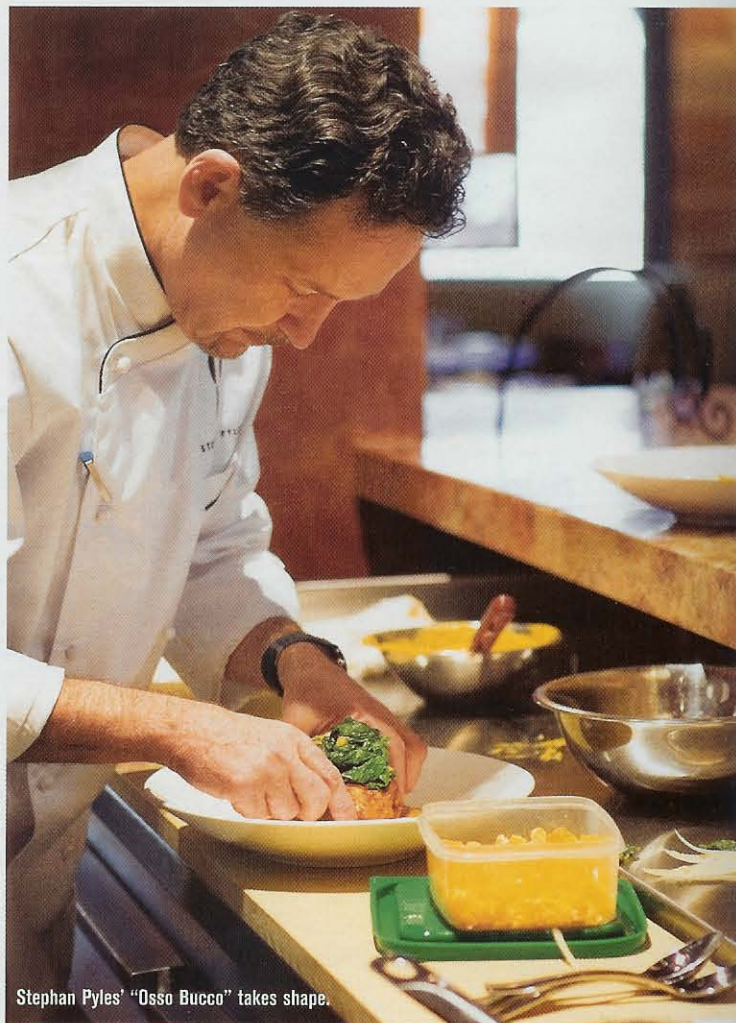
But as much as these choices look almost too good to eat, it would be a sin not to take a bite. Especially when it comes to dessert. Katherine Clapner, a Star Canyon veteran, brings it on with her enticing sweets. Panna Cotta with Coconut-Vanilla Sauce and Mango Tuile is one option: The firm cream is mild on its own, though once taken with the coconut-vanilla sauce and crunchy rolled mango tuile, you'll revel in its creamy sweetness. On the other hand, the Warm Flourless Venezuelan Chocolate Cake with Gianduja Foam and Pisco-Orange Ice Cream is incredibly decadent. Topped with slices of blood orange, the velvety cake marries well with the homemade, South American brandy-infused ice cream. The Taffy Apple and Tamarind Tostada with Frai du Bois and Tamarillo Ice Cream is my personal favorite. A work of art, layers of densely sliced apple

alternate with a crunchy pastry—making it one tart treat. A mound of finely spun sugar sits on top of the dessert. Its sweetness is offset by the ice cream made with Tamarillo, a fruit native to the Andes of Peru as well as grown in New Zealand.

With Stephan Pyles' doors finally open, Dallas can expect a whirlwind of attention from all directions. Not that this should detract interest from other worthy dining venues, but instead, bring in an even greater audience to Big D's dining scene. For Pyles' latest baby, a combination of Old Dallas, hip Dallasites, national and international gourmets placing their bets to see if his ever-evolving creativity is in fact still on the upswing should make their appearances...and of course, the occasional celebrity diner we'd all love to spot will probably drop by. Whether all of this will come into play, only time will tell. The celebrity sighting is covered though, all it takes it one star to bring in the red carpet veterans, and lucky for us, Pyles himself plans on making an appearance most nights of the week.

STEPHAN PYLES 1807 ROSS AVE., 214.580.7000 **HOURS:** 6-11PM DAILY; LUNCH SERVICE SCHEDULED TO BEGIN THIS MONTH. **PARKING:** COMPLIMENTARY VALET. **WHAT'S OUTSIDE:** AL FRESCO DINING WITH HOT VIEWS FROM THE GROUND UP. **LONE DINERS:** DEFINITELY WELCOMED. TAKE A SEAT AT THE TAPAS-CEVICHE TABLE OR GIVE COMMUNAL DINING A TRY. **BUZZ WORDS:** LIQUID CHEF. THAT WOULD BE CATERINA MILTENBERGER. GET HER TO MAKE YOU A PIÑA DIABLO. **GET GLOWING:** COMPUTERIZED LIGHTING GIVES NEW MEANING TO MOOD LIGHTING. **RATING:** ★★★★★

What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.



Stephan Pyles' "Osso Bucco" takes shape.