



Chef of the Year



STEPHAN PYLES STEPHAN PYLES, DALLAS

TWENTY-TWO YEARS AGO, in the first installment of Esquire's Best New Restaurants in America, we honored Ruth Street Café in Dallas, owing to chef-partner Stephan Pyles's wholly innovative "New Texas Cuisine." In the decades since, Pyles has opened fourteen restaurants here and in other cities, although as time went on he cooked less and less. Eventually he took a five-year traveling sabbatical and has, apparently, returned as eager as ever to man the stoves.

His new 160-seat restaurant, located in the Dallas Arts District, is a beauty, with a central open kitchen, wood-burning oven, and ceviche-and-tapas bar set under a ceiling that subtly changes color the way Texas skies do from sunup through sunset.

Pyles calls his food "New Millennium Southwestern Cuisine," which I happily accept: It's still based on big southwestern flavors, perfumed with mesquite smoke, and laced with plenty of chiles, but it is more global in scope. You should definitely start off with an array of ceviches or tapas here, like a branzino with vanilla-roasted fennel and almond gazpacho. Sweet soft-shell crabs are served with the best of the summer's corn and tomatoes and local mozzarella; spit-roasted suckling pig, with crisp skin and silky fat, is sidled with a peach-filled empanada. And the margaritas are among the best I've had in Texas.

Pyles is not only one of the best of his generation but a chef who still has a lot to teach the current crop of cooks. 1807 Ross Avenue; 214-580-7000; stephanpyles.com.