

# WHERE TO EAT NOW 2010

by Patricia Sharpe

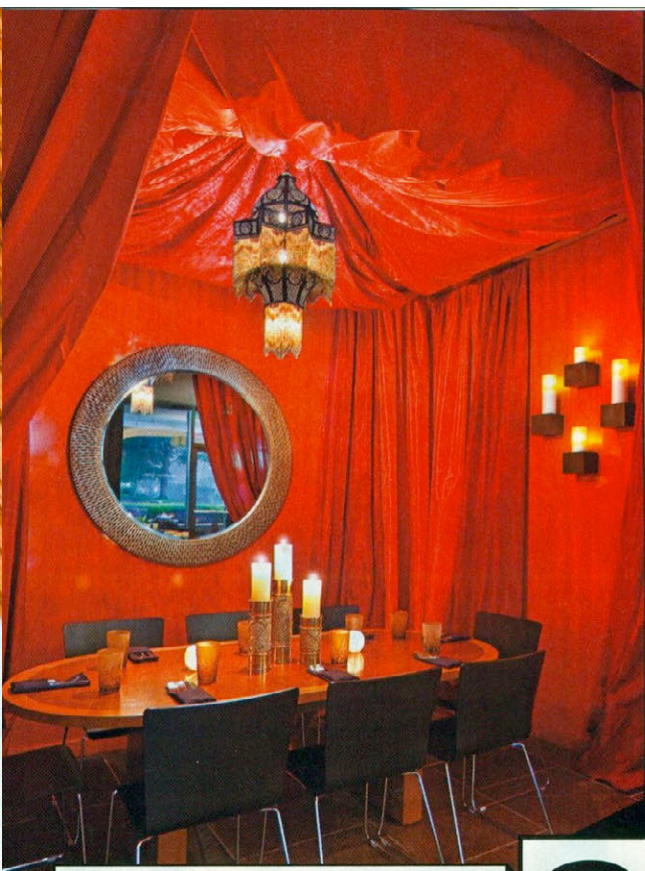
I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS THE UNSETTLED ECONOMY, CLIMATE CHANGE, THE SATURN-URANUS OPPOSITION, OR WHAT, but the past year's new restaurants were a confounding mix of high highs and low lows. To start with the good tidings, five of Texas' star chefs launched new operations this year. Equally promising, four relative newcomers are causing a stir. And proving that Texas continues to grow as a player on the national food scene, two renowned out-of-state chefs—Wolfgang Puck being one—established beachheads here. • That said, my gut feeling (we restaurant critics tend to rely on that a lot) is that last year was pretty hit-and-miss. Yes, I had fantastic dishes, but I also encountered some that were outstandingly mediocre, occasionally at the same restaurant during the same meal. Likewise, menus could be all over the map. A few were highly focused, many more were eclectic, and some were just plain random (I mean, pulled-pork sandwiches and duck breast marinated in Galliano liqueur on the same bill of fare?). It was as if chefs were trying a little of everything, desperate to find dishes that would sell, never mind the logic. • So much for generalities—let's cut to the chase. To be eligible for this story, a restaurant must have officially opened between November 1, 2008, and November 1, 2009 (with a three-week grace period at the front end). We consider only restaurants that are new, under which rubric we also count establishments that have changed their name, moved to a new location, and are generally shaking things up. Second or third locations of Texas-based restaurants don't count, although we do permit the first Texas location of an out-of-state enterprise. But all this talk about restaurants must be making you hungry. It's time to see where you might want to make reservations this weekend.







Mussels in escabeche, Samar, Dallas



## SAMAR BY STEPHAN PYLES

Dallas

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TALK ABOUT WHIPLASH: THE SETTING IS A MONOLITHIC Dallas skyscraper; the menu is a sensuous stroll through an international food bazaar where you can grab small bites from Spain, India, and the Middle East. With a couple nods to the exotic, like Moroccan hanging lamps and a crimson-draped alcove next to the bar, Dallas chef Stephan Pyles has opened a dining venue aimed at the theater and museum crowds. If you have an hour before curtain time, you might start with a dish inspired by India, like a tiger prawn with spiced pear chutney sided by a quick-fry of salty, papery julienned okra (think slim green potato chips). Your second course could be Spanish-style mussels cooked in a briny, citrusy broth mellowed with swoon-worthy additions of cream, sherry, and pear. For dessert, finish with a hypnotic Syrian dessert of pistachio-and-rose-water ice cream incorporating the velvety, pungent resin of the mastic tree. Have a Turkish coffee if there's time, then head for the show.