

Alma Aims to be the Culinary Soul of Georgetown

Chef Pyles, the “founding father of Southwestern Cuisine” and Texas’ first James Beard Award winner opened his latest restaurant Alma by Stephan Pyles, Spanish for ‘soul,’ in The Hacienda, a luxury senior living facility in Georgetown. It’s also open to the public. We went to check it out and from being greeted at the door by Chef Pyles himself, to the pop rocks bursting off our tongue at the first bite of his signature Hell’s Eggs (created for his very first restaurant), to the passion fissuring from co-Chef de Cuisine Joshua Gianni Farrell as he described each course to us, we were impressed – and embarrassed we nearly skipped on this gem.

Chef Pyles says he opened Alma here because, “Having had experience with another luxury retirement community in Dallas, the owners of the soon-to-be-opened Hacienda in Georgetown reached out to me last year for consultation. When they explained they wanted to offer a restaurant that would be open to the public, as well as to the members, I asked if this had ever been done before. When they said it hadn’t been done in Texas, I felt like I was up for the challenge as I have always loved being a pioneer.”

While Chef Pyles, a fifth-generation Texan, goes back and forth from his home and restaurants in Dallas to Georgetown, Chef Farrell is a familiar face at the restaurant day-to-day. He says, "I helped Chef Pyles open another one of his projects about five years ago. That was our starting point, now he has me in his pocket and I've dropped everything and went back into, 'Yes Chef' mode. I want to give him all the love and attention he deserves as the best mentor on the planet."

The menu is true to Chef Pyles Southwest-style and Chef Farrell adds that it's also heavily-influenced by its location in Hill Country. "I'm really working on the food and relationships with farms to help as many of the farmers as I can," he says, "I want to add things into the menu to help these people and do some cool farm dinners and really represent the people and cuisine of Hill Country."

Regarding the location of the restaurant, Farrell says, "This project is the first of its kind, which is incredible to me. It's a beautiful thing that I get to share my creativity through food and physically nurture people here, it gives new meaning to the term 'regulars' when they're residents. I treat the job like someone coming to my grandmother's house and make sure they leave better than they arrive. To me it's not work, it's also my house, it's my home."

In addition to expecting Alma to be packed for the holidays – with the built-in clientele of residents and the families who

will be visiting them alone – Chef Farrell says, “We have really some fun dinner events coming up.”

Whether for an event or just to dine, Alma’s worth a visit – and make sure not to miss the BBQ Wagyu Brisket Pizza, and of course, those deviled eggs. Chef Pyles tells us, “In reviewing my first cookbook for the *New York Times*, food critic Craig Claiborne said, ‘The recipe for Chef Pyles’ Hell’s Eggs alone is worth the price of this book.’ After that, I sold a lot of cookbooks and even more Hell’s Eggs.”

Chef Pyles has created 24 restaurants in 7 cities over the past 32 years and he says, “As long as I can make someone smile, and say, ‘Wow!’ I will continue to open restaurants.”

Check out almahacienda.com for the full menu, hours and to keep up on special dinner events.

Alma by Stephan Pyles

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