

# Dallasites Who Miss Legendary Chef Stephan Pyles, Get Ready to Take a Road Trip

The Seeker is now open in Stephenville and it has many of the chef's signature dishes, including his lobster tamale pie

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In 2020, chef Stephan Pyles [closed down his final Dallas restaurant](#) and announced he was [retiring from restaurant ownership](#). It was the end of an era for the city to lose the day-to-day menu from one of the fathers of Southwest cuisine and mentor to so many of the working chefs now at some of DFW's best restaurants. Now, some of the greatest hits of his menus from Flauna and Flora Street Cafe are back in an unlikely location: [a little motel restaurant in Stephenville](#), a small town southwest of Fort Worth, at [the Seeker](#) inside the [Interstate Inn](#).

Eater Dallas caught up with him to find out how the project happened, what's on the menu, and what he's learning about

Texas.

## **Eater: How did you get involved in this project?**

**Stephen Pyles:** When they said Stephenville, my first thought was, 'Okay, that's a town even smaller than Big Spring, my hometown, and I'm not sure I would want to do that.' I came down to look at the project and talked to [one of] the owner[s], Lisa Lennox, and picked her brain. It's a great concept. I did my research on Stephenville, which is they say is the [cowboy capital of the world](#), and these cowboys have money [laughs]. They love good whiskey and steaks, so I thought my kind of food would fit there. [This restaurant] is an element that doesn't exist in Stephenville yet but would fit into the mold of what people want here and what Texas food is. I also love the idea of taking these old roadside motels and turning them into something fun that's mid-century and post-modern. The fact that it has a destination restaurant is really cool and something I haven't done. I thought, 'This could work.' And I think it's going to.

## **What are some examples from the menu of classic Stephan Pyles dishes?**

Certainly the bone-in cowboy ribeye, which is one of my signatures, with the red chile onion rings. I also thought it is time to push the limits a little bit, so I am going to do the [lobster tamale pie](#) I was doing at Flora Street Cafe with the

isomalt top. We're making our own nixtamal, so I think we're the only restaurant around grinding our own corn to make the tortillas, tamales, and the little dumpling for the tamale pie.

At this point, after all these god knows how many years — 40-something? — I've got enough of a repertoire that I don't have to completely recreate things. I don't want Stephenville thinking there's this big Dallas chef coming in to show us what the restaurant business is *really* like, or how to eat. We've made great effort to find local purveyors, farmers, dairy and cheese makers, wood suppliers — everything. We've made it unique to Stephenville in that sense because in Dallas we wouldn't have all these local suppliers.

### **What challenges have you faced?**

I did a concept down in Georgetown a few years ago and it was just pulling teeth to get staff. I thought that would be the case here, but there is a market down here [of people]. They're kind of inexperienced, obviously, but there's a big supply of them and they are excited to be involved in anything unusual, unique, refined. We have a remarkable staff.

**This sounds familiar. In 2023, I went to [Mineral Wells to talk to chef David Bull](#) about what he's doing at the Crazy Water Hotel and eventually the Baker Hotel. He was**

**working on a lot of local sourcing for ingredients and faced staffing challenges.**

Aha, to take you to a connection, my executive chef was working at the Crazy Water for Bull — it was a friendly departure. This part of the state is interesting. It's taken me all these years, but I'm finally getting to know all of Texas. I grew up in West Texas and got to know it, then went to school in Commerce and got to know all the little East Texas towns. This part of Texas, it's all the same people in [Granbury](#) and [Mineral Wells](#) — that's your market. I was concerned about who is going to come from Dallas to eat dinner and then drive home an hour and 40 minutes, but it is Fort Worth and this surrounding area. It's popping.

**Going back to your local sourcing, tell me about what has your attention?**

[Stuart Veldhuizen](#) is a remarkable cheese producer that I can't believe hasn't been more in the limelight. It's an incredible cottage industry, old-school that feels like an old cheesemaker in Europe. We're using its Old Redneck Cheddar for our mac and cheese. These small purveyors aren't used to doing a lot of commercial business, its more farm to home kitchen so we're having to work with them in that regard.

Pork belly huarache with espresso, maple, and radish salpicón.

*Kevin Marple*

Watermelon rind pickles

*Kevin Marple*

Another is the [Mill-King Dairy](#), it does the most amazing milk that you can get unpasteurized. Of course you can't sell that, but it is such a better content — I've never had such good dairy as this place. We use it in a lot of things, like the batter for our fried chicken. Here's the thing: its just good to drink. I'm going to do a dish with warm cookies and milk on ice to highlight it.

**You have a long dessert list, were they so good you couldn't cut?**

Five desserts is about what I do, and they're all signature dishes. We have a grand dessert with everything on it so you can start with that and work your way back.

*The Seeker is now open at 809 E. Road in Stephenville, Texas.*

*This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.*

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