

Want Stephan Pyles to Open a Restaurant With You? First He Needs to Catch a Vibe

Catch one of DFW's most notable chefs and a preview of the Seeker at the Fort Worth Food and Wine Festival

[Courtney E. Smith](#) Mar 13, 2024, 9:55am CDT



Stephen Pyles

Stephan Pyles has forever cemented his place in the Metroplex's food scene as one of the local chefs of legend. So when the announcement came that he was developing the menu for the Seeker, the restaurant inside roadside motel, the [Interstate Inn](#), in Stephenville, a little town an hour south of Fort Worth, we had to know more. Like... why?

Pyles will be at the Fort Worth Food and Wine Festival for its 10th anniversary at the main event on Friday, April 5, serving a dish highlighting what he'll be doing at the Seeker. [Tickets are available now](#). Eater Dallas found out what he'll be serving at the FWFWF, and what to expect from the Seeker — and why he got involved with the unlikely project. The Seeker is projected to open in the summer of 2024.

Eater Dallas: What is the dish you're bringing to the FWFWF?

Stephan Pyles: It's called a llapingachos — an Ecuadorian potato cake. I discovered it years ago on one of my culinary trips to South America. The Andes mountains are where the potato originated, and they have this whole rainbow of [colors] and textures of potatoes that we don't. They use a particular potato for this — it's what they do with stale potatoes. They mash it and mix it, typically green olives and cheese. We're doing feta, which is close to an Ecuadorian cheese they use, bread crumbs, and it gets sauteed. On top of it, I'm doing crab salad that will be like a ceviche, and I may even bind it with a bit of mayonnaise because that's very Mexican-South American.

How did you land on this dish? Is it indicative of the menu at the Seeker?

It absolutely is. When you're preparing [food] for, I think it

will be in the 700s to a thousand, that automatically [directs you]. This one has the most bang for the buck; I've done it before, and I like tripping people up with the word llapingacho.

You've done so many of these events throughout your career. What makes a good dish for a big event like this?

It's what you can do most expeditiously and get the most deliciousness from. These can be done ahead, heated, and kept warm while you're making the salad to order. There's always that element that is made to order, but it's not this incredibly complex dish you'll have a line for. You take all of that into consideration, and the time of year — it's getting [to be] spring, and it would be nice to do something lighter with crab meat.

What made the Seeker the right fit for you? Why this restaurant at this time in this location?

When I take consultancies these days, I have to have a good vibe with the owners. When I had my first meeting with Lisa Lennox and her sister Cathy, who is involved in the project, [along with] a host of architects, designers, and marketing people, I knew that what she lacked in experience, she made up for in enthusiasm. It has all the markings of great quality that I insist on, and it sounded fun. That she's buying these roadside motels and bringing them back to their original

glory — well, she's making them better than they ever were. It's an exciting project. If I had picked five cities in Texas to do a restaurant in, I'm not sure Stephenville would have been [on the list]. But after checking it out and seeing the potential that we have for additional business — there will be a room in the back where we can do cooking classes and weddings. I think it's an exciting time for Stephenville, and a good time for us to grow with it.

You've frequently opened restaurants well outside of Dallas and Fort Worth. Why?

I have enjoyed the secondary markets. I figured out, with having restaurants for so many years in Dallas, you had your base of local, devoted fans. And on the weekends you had, I call them feeder cities. Those are places like Texarkana, Tulsa, Shreveport, Tyler, and Longview. They would come for the weekend, shop at Neiman's, [stay at the Mansion](#), and eat at my restaurants. I've always known that there is a big market in secondary places. To me, it's interesting to tap into those. And it's something new. I'm always looking for something new at this point in my career.

Tell me about the Seeker?

I've done different cuisines, but we have a saying in Texas: "Dance with the one that brung you." I find most success in what I've come to be known for, which is Southwestern.

Modern Texas. Modern Tex-Mex. It has 112 different names. When I do a restaurant it's typically a combination of my greatest hits and something that ties in the local area. I like to get the local farmers involved and do something that you couldn't do somewhere else. They are looking for local honeys and produce for a local crudite, which the owners requested. I thought we'd do it with three dips, like a moutabel and a labneh. My menus always have an influence of Turkey or Lebanon or something — I love that food.

Looking around the local dining scene, what do you like?

I see a lot of imports, and that doesn't thrill me, but they're good restaurants, and Dallas needs them for vibrancy. I had the most remarkable meal of the year — I can say that. We're in March [*laughs*] — it was the Indian food at [Sanjh](#). It was as good as anything I've had in New York. I am going back. I wish it were in Oak Lawn and not Las Colinas.

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

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