

CULINARY SENIORITY

Texas celebrity chef sets the table for Georgetown's hottest restaurant in unlikely setting

By Brianna Caleri Dec 9, 2022 | 9:01 am



Chef Stephan Pyles is launching Alma, an independent restaurant, at The Hacienda at Georgetown early in 2023. *Rendering courtesy of Alma*

It’ll be a little hard to explain in the group chat: yes, it’s a hot, new restaurant, and yes, it’s at the senior living center. But according to chef Stephan Pyles (whose 12 James Beard Award nominations say he can open [a restaurant](#) wherever he wants), it’s just a regular restaurant. Well, maybe a little nicer.

More specifically, this is his answer to the truckstop café he was “raised in.” That was in Big Spring, Texas, out by Midland, and while that location and very niche restaurant genre is a point of pride, Pyles is transcending it, not unlike the common perception of retirement home dining.

“It was the last thing that I wanted to do — it was the last thing my parents wanted me to do — was to get into food,” says Pyles. “So I got a degree in music, and then took a trip to France, and fell in love with food after college. This, in essence, is returning This is what my truckstop café would have been like if I weren't 10, if I had more taste, and if I had money. It's going to be a real Texas experience.”

Pyles mentions the phrase, “Dance with the one that brung you,” twice, referring to his [Southwestern roots](#). He didn’t connect it to the restaurant’s locale, but it’s not far-fetched to consider Texan seniors the progenitors of the culture the chef is hoping to redevelop. While he maintains that the senior living center, Hacienda, is just where the restaurant happens to be, press releases draw an immediate connection to the “loneliness epidemic” that disproportionately affects seniors. Further, Pyles has worked on a [similar project](#) in the past few years, at Dallas’ Ventana by Buckner community.

The difference is the clientele. While Pyles spent the Ventana project advising daily, residents-only dining options, Alma at The Hacienda at Georgetown is more akin to any city restaurant on the ground floor of an apartment building: connected, but independent. There will be some programming for residents including cooking classes, wine dinners, and food festivals, but ultimately, this is a regular night out for anyone who enters. That means it might get a little crowded, which is actually a great organic outcome for a less-isolated community.

“Honestly, I think that's a perk,” says Pyles, weighing the possibility that reservations may become scarce as word gets out about the restaurant to people around Austin and beyond. “There probably will be a time at some point it might be hard to get into, and [the residents will] have to just walk in from the back door. VIP treatment.”

The Hacienda, set to open in early 2023, is spread over 13 acres, with 231 accommodations from independent to assisted living. Marketing takes an urban, luxury slant, and a video of building progress so far shows a sprawling compound that looks like many downtown Austin residences, without the vertical crowding.

Pyles is widely credited as the father of Southwestern cuisine, and this being his return to his roots, there won’t be a better place to get to know the influential chef. He promises the “menu and the style and ambiance” are all deeply aligned with his culinary identity “decades in the making.” Ingredients for the familiar menu — with tacos, pizzas, ceviches, sharables, barbecue, and more — will largely be locally sourced, and the food will embody the surrounding region of Texas.

“I’m calling it Hill Country soul food, which to me is sort of just the next evolution for modern Texas,” Pyles says.

Alma is set to open in late January or early February of 2023. More information is available at [haciendageorgetown.com](#).