



## George Has Got It

Veteran caterers George and Katie Brown bring decadent dining back to the old Riviera space. *By Nancy Nichols*

**G**EORGE AND KATIE BROWN ARE either the most insane or the most talented people in the restaurant business. The husband-and-wife team, after operating a successful catering company for five years, started a family and open a ritzy new restaurant at the same time.

The result? Triplets and a tony restaurant featuring upper-echelon American dishes. Oh, and did I mention they still have the catering business? As a retired caterer, I can only imagine what the next few months will be like for the Brown bunch.

But thanks to a loyal staff (and a slew of baby sitters), the Browns have kept it together, and, in the process, they've added another high-profile, chef-driven restaurant to the evolving Dallas dining landscape. And it couldn't happen at a better location.

George is in the space on Inwood Road near Lovers Lane that housed Riviera, where Franco Bertolasi and a group of courageous young chefs made a splash in big-deal Dallas dining. George and Katie Brown are intent on continuing that tradition.

The once-cozy French Provincial dining room has been stripped down and whitewashed—a stark minimalist interior that screams LA. The furniture is white wood upholstered with white high-tech rubber. Flowing white gauze curtains surround semiprivate banquettes made of cream-colored ostrich leather. Flashes of bright pink, red, orange, and blue painted on contemporary canvases catch your eye. Modern materials such as terrazzo, marble,

aluminum, and frosted glass round out the très chic décor.

The menu is equally minimalist—short and concise. Chef George, who cut his teeth in the kitchens of the Mansion on Turtle Creek, Melrose Hotel, and Seventeen Seventeen, embraces the current trend of focusing on local and fresh ingredients. He's a laid-back guy who likes to have fun with food, and he isn't afraid to experiment with trendy touches without getting too complex.

Like the to-die-for French fries drizzled with white truffle oil and tossed with a healthy dose of *fleur de sel*. Or the three beet salad (red, candy stripe, and golden) with ricotta salata doused with Minus 8 vinegar, a high-end variety produced like ice wine, where the grapes are harvested and pressed when frozen to create a sweeter, more concentrated juice. Far more complex than balsamic, Minus 8's oak flavor contrasted nicely with the salad components without overpowering the Chateau de la Matroye, Chassagne Montrache, Burgundy we chose to accompany our meal.

Other starters we tried included a farm-raised, masa-crusted cat-



**BY GEORGE:** The Browns (above) show off the minimalist design of their restaurant; mini sweet treats like an almond-lemon *pithiviers* (left) are the perfect size.

## TASTE

fish taco with a creamed corn sauce highlighted with red pepper, sour cream, and pico de gallo and a plate of various heirloom tomatoes with French feta, shaved celery, and kalamata olives. Watch your back, Dean Fearing.

Side dishes are seductive, and if you're not careful when ordering, it's possible to overwhelm your taste buds with too many flavors. On our first visit, we immediately fell for Brie scalloped potatoes and Brown's version of Peking duck. Sampled independently, they were both good, although the duck was on the dry side. But the diversity of the two dishes collided disastrously in the mouth. The second time around, we were pickier in our pairing—the mac and cheese made with mimolette, apple bacon, and chives was a perfect accompaniment to a roasted organic chicken and pearl onions.

Chef Brown rotates an average of seven entrées and appetizers a night. Hopefully you'll be lucky enough to find beef short ribs on the menu. Braised for three hours in veal stock and red wine, the tender beef is served without the bone and with a butternut squash purée and braised mustard greens scented with bacon and garlic. The same goes for the cilantro-marinated, bacon-wrapped quail spiked with jalapeño and served with warm corn pudding.

Katie is the family pastry chef, but she is currently folding more diapers than whipped cream. In her place, chef Karen O'Conner is doing a fine job filling more than tarts. Like a warm *pithiviers* stuffed with an almond-lemon cream and a pear galette. The price and the portions are just right—about four bites for six bucks.

The list of approximately 60 boutique wines is California-friendly, but it didn't keep an avid anything-but-California dining partner happy. The Burgundy we discovered on our first visit was MIA when we returned. As soon as I expressed disappointment, our waiter left the dining room, searched the cellar, and appeared like a proud hunter with an unsold bottle in his hand.

The Browns have put their hearts and souls—not to mention their own money—into this massive undertaking. Their goal “to be a big York Street” is ambitious, especially as they attempt to juggle the responsibilities of raising a big family. If they can hang on, Mom and Dad will have plenty of cheap labor in about 16 years. 7709 Inwood Rd. 214-366-9100. \$\$\$.