

# DINING: WHAT'S NEW



Espresso Float (left) and Flo  
Encrusted Chilean Sea Bass

## CATERING TO THE SENSES *GEORGE'S party-pleasing cuisine moves into a sleek home of its own*

BY RUTH ANN HENSLEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERT ALAN

Two of the happiest couples have found a place to call home—a place to entertain friends and make new ones, a place to dish up the finest and freshest fare, a place that exudes minimalist chic from the floors to the flatware. Locally renowned chefs George and Katie Brown have joined forces with another favorite pairing—food and wine. They co-exist happily at George Restaurant. Although this union is in the honeymoon stages, it has all the appearances of a heavenly liaison.

The Browns have collectively simmered, sautéed and sizzled at dining destinations such as Baby Routh, The Mansion on Turtle Creek and Seventeen Seventeen Restaurant. *Food & Wine* magazine deemed George one of the year's Top Ten Best New Chefs in the Country in 1997. Two years later the Browns traded their keys to the area's best kitchens for keys to their own catering vans and George Catering was born.

The Browns plan to continue their catering division, but Mr. Brown decided the time was ripe to cater to his dream of owning and operating the chef and kitchen-driven restaurant he had envisioned since he was flipping flapjacks at the age of 14 at the International House of Pancakes. (He will still have a hand in the day-to-day catering activities and give final approval for all projects.) Several months ago, the building that housed The Riviera peeled back its lemon yellow skin to reveal an entirely new look. JB Jones and William Baker, of the design firm Jones Baker, melded textures and materials such as creamy ostrich leather, brushed steel and warm wood floors to create a clean and contemporary feel. These elements are placed against a neutral background of textured ivory wall coverings, softly draping sheers and are infused with natural light to produce an atmosphere that is both soothing and exciting. An illuminated arch, encompassing the exterior entry, gives way to a foyer that features a rain-glass wall, contemporary art and a light box suspended from the ceiling that spreads a soft palette of rotating colors throughout the room.

The bar area, which features a 700-plus bottle wine room, has been enlarged but remains intimate and cozy. Sleek pearl-

toned stools line the bar and face the liquor collection, which is framed in brushed steel and illuminated from behind. There is a flexible dining space directly off the bar, surrounded by a curtain, which can accommodate groups of up to 16. This area is ideal for intimate gatherings, parties or business dinners. The bar maintains the elegant minimalist quality found in the dining room with a hip, cushy lounge feel. The bar will be serving specialty drinks and quick, light bites sure to draw the pre- and post-theater crowd. (Be sure to ask about the catfish tacos.) The clean and airy neutral tones that run throughout the entire restaurant serve as a magnificent palette for the main attractions at George—the wine and the food.

Brown himself oversees the menu, which he describes as “What’s fresh today?” His focus on fresh means seeking out farm-fresh ingredients, whether it’s free-range chicken from a ranch in Sonoma, California, or edible flowers from an herb farm in Fairfield, Texas. (Brown has been known to snip fresh herbs from his own backyard on occasion.) All ingredients used in the dishes at George will be utilized at the peak of their respective season, and thus the menu will rotate at least every other week to capture the best that nature has to offer. A cheese tray featuring a daily variety of artisan cheeses, both local and imported, welcomes guests as they enter the dining room. The creamy confections can be sliced on request for light noshing at the bar, as well. This celebration of food and flavors lends to a convivial atmosphere. “We want people to feel welcome and invited,” Brown explains. “We’re here to have fun.”

Brown delivers the simplicity and balance found in the décor to the dinner plate. “I used to be that crazy creative guy using a million different ingredients,” he says. “Now I focus on three to four items. I’m working with food that is fresh and pure—I don’t want to mess that up.” Brown’s philosophy shines through with the flavors and construction of his Rice-Flour Encrusted Chilean Sea Bass (\$28) served in a shallow pool of mirin kaffir butter and crowned with green mango slaw. The sea bass is encircled by a thread of wasabi mayo and looped by a dotted ring of sweet soy. The

in price from \$8–15. “If we haven’t tried it, it won’t be on the list,” Brown says. “We are looking for the ultimate connection of food and wine.”

Another ultimate connection is evident on the dessert menu—small portions and big flavor, proving once again that less is more. The Espresso Float with Vanilla Ice Cream (\$5) is a testament to that philosophy. It’s like a baby rootbeer float with a grownup spin and a caffeine kick. A shot of espresso shares a short, stemmed glass with vanilla bean ice cream, delicate vanilla bean shortbread and a splash of club soda to give it a fun, frothy fizz. A long, svelte chocolate “cigarette” is precariously balanced across the glass and a chocolate brownie splat (a small chocolate cookie) is nestled at its base. Simplicity and moderation are evident with the Lemon Custard (\$6), as well. A small ramekin filled with the juice of fresh lemons are whipped with fresh eggs, sugar and cream to form velvety custard that floats on the tongue. The custard is punctuated with a small batch of lightly sugared blackberries and topped with a dollop of mascarpone cheese.

The themes of balance and simplicity found at George are strong and consistent throughout—from the décor to the desserts. The focus on fresh and flavor is a reflection of the painstaking search for the season’s best offerings and a carefully planned wine list. Salud to the happy couples—George and Katie, food and wine. May they live happily ever after at George. **D**

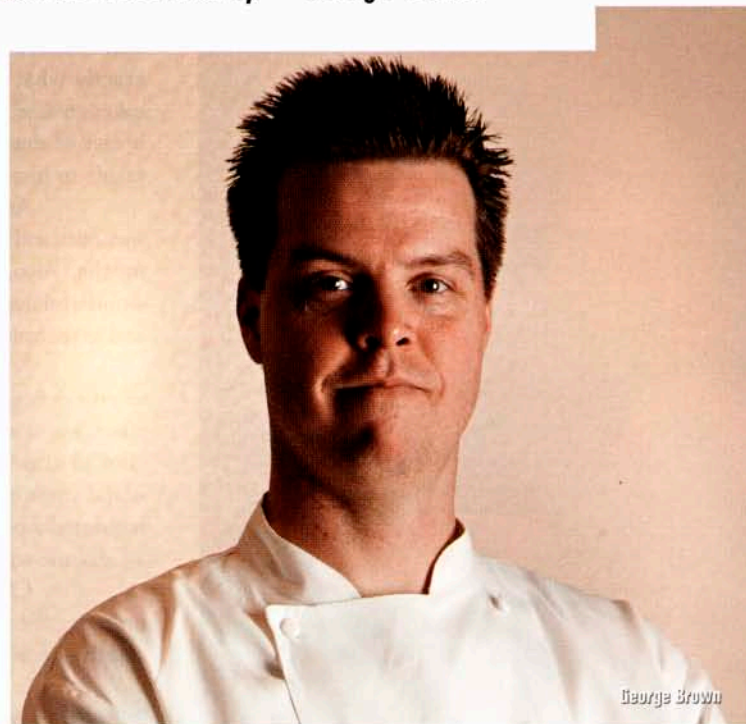
**GEORGE** 7709 Inwood Rd., 214.366.9100 **HOURS:** Tues.-Sat. 5PM to 10PM. **RESERVATIONS:** Recommended. **WHY TO EAT HERE:** It’s “what’s fresh today.” **BY GEORGE:** “Tasting by George,” a pre-set tasting menu of five to six courses, is a must-try for every foodie. Wine pairings are available too. (Average cost is \$50. Plan on \$80 with wine.) **RATING:** ★★☆☆

What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area’s best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer’s overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

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crisp matchstick-sliced peppers and crunchy bean sprouts in the slaw are a sharp contrast to the fork-yielding tenderness of the bass. A pinch of mint in the slaw is a sweet and tangy surprise for the buds and amazingly, sits nicely next to the sage-like essence of the mirin kaffir butter. The deep-fried Shitake mushroom wonton that adorns the dish is a decadent indulgence—but it’s harmlessly small. The Beef Tenderloin Filet and Texas Corn Pudding with Veal Demiglace in Basil Oil (\$31 entrée) puts a whole new spin on the term “corn-fed beef.” A medium-rare filet adorns a custard, corn, garlic, shallot, onion and roasted-jalapeno-pepper concoction sure to please any true Texan and earn some new recruits. The corn is grated from the cob to release a flavorful corn-milk substance. The roasted peppers used in the pudding varies according to freshness and availability. The beef is tender, lean, moist, and prepared to order. But ordering any temperature warmer than medium rare would be an injustice to the chef. (The cow is beyond offense, at this point.) The veal demiglace adds depth and intensity, without overpowering the flavor of the beef. And finally, the basil oil is the herbal ribbon that ties this package together with vibrant color and taste.

Pair these entrees, or whatever is fresh that day, with a bottle of wine from George’s global list. The restaurant’s prevailing “less is more” theme reigns here with a handpicked selection of 50 to 60 wines. Prices range from \$25–125. There will also be about 10 wines available by the glass, ranging



George Brown