

HOUSTON

[THE RESTAURANT ISSUE 2010]

Our Annual Faves and Raves

Designer Donuts! Sexed-Up Sushi!

Philippe Schmit: Call It a Comeback?

Weekend Update: Vegas for Foodies

Tony Vallone's New Young Gun

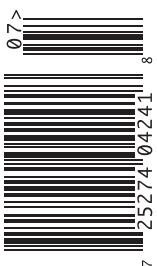
& the Whole Enchilada!

THE DISH! THE 125

COOLEST RESTAURANTS, CHEFS & EATS IN H-TOWN!

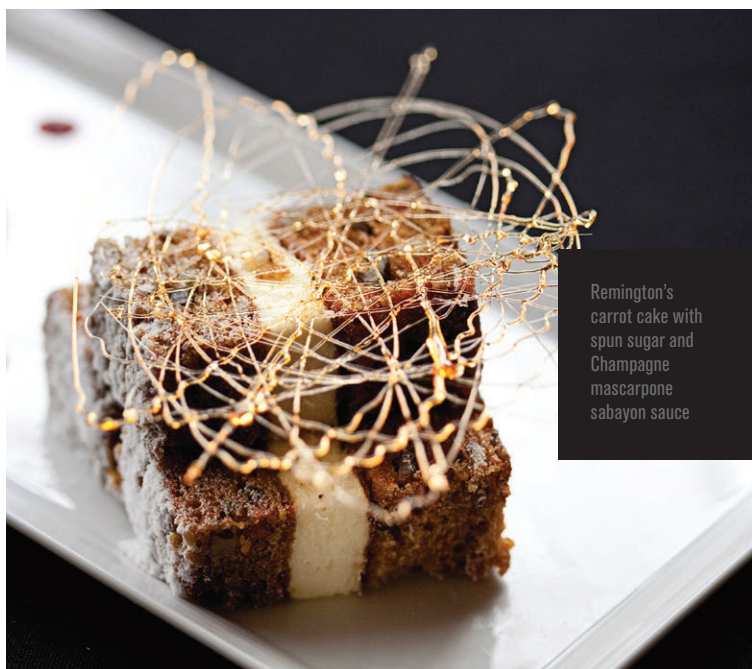


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Remington's carrot cake with spun sugar and Champagne mascarpone sabayon sauce

HOT LIST

Changing Rooms

Check in ... er, out ... what's new at six of Houston's hippest hotel restaurants.

1. Voice The Downtown resto is now a more informal, bar-friendly concept with new communal seating—following the recent departure of chef Michael Kramer, who's now doing menus at The Tasting Room Wine Cafés around town. Under new chef Greg Lowry, late of now-defunct Rockwood Room, grub options include the Voice Box, a tasting platter featuring items like shrimp *a la plancha* and Kobe burgers. 220 Main St., in the Hotel Icon, 832.667.4470

2. Valentino The still-new red-hued loungey spot is transitioning into summer with less “labor intensive” cocktails, exec chef Cunninghame West says. The new Sicilian Necktie martini pairs well with a new tapas menu including pistachio-crust lamb—and an expanded list of cuttlefish and Mediterranean tapas in the adjoining Vin Bar. 2525 W. Loop S., in the Hotel Derek, 713.850.9200

3. Monarch New dinner items are available in the lounge and restaurant at ever-sexy Hotel ZaZa, like crab-topped and truffle-scented gazpacho, halibut

with chipotle *buerre blanc* and pork tenderloin with bacon and apple cider jus. Wednesday night's Half Z's means 50 percent off bites till late. 5701 Main St., in the Hotel ZaZa, 713.527.1800

4. Ristorante Cavour The Tuscan-style Hotel Granduca's newly installed Renato De Pirro offers a taste of his Italian homeland. The chef, fresh from a Vegas stint, has incorporated family recipes into the menu, like gnocchi and veal tenderloin Milanese with a bone-marrow demi-glace. 1080 Uptown Park, in the Hotel Granduca, 713.418.1104

5. Quattro Maurizio Ferrarese joins Quattro this month from the kitchen in the Four Seasons in Florence. Expect him to revamp the authentic Italian menu, which recently switched from fussy large dishes to chic enoteca-style small plates—like ricotta and egg raviolo with crispy sage—to reflect the hotel's more modern reno. The new “wine library” has more than 50 wines by the glass, mostly Italian. 1300 Lamar St., in the Four Seasons, 713.276.4700

6. The Remington John Signorelli's new menu reaches across the U.S. The smoked-duck Cobb salad with heirloom tomatoes and blue cheese hails from the Northeast, while roasted beets and brie are sourced from Georgia. Texas-tilting specialties include the *sous vide*-style Bryan Farms chicken with Yukon potatoes seared in duck fat. 1919 Briar Oaks Ln., in the St. Regis, 713.403.2631

Enchiladas, the Sequel

There's nothing wrong with your basic cheese and beef enchiladas. But nowadays many of H-Town's classic Tex-Mex spots are dishing out fab twists. **Guadalajara Del Centro** (1201 San Jacinto St., 713.650.0101) serves savory spinach and chicken enchiladas topped with sweet roasted corn salsa. Richer is **Escalante's** (4053 Westheimer Rd., 713.623.4200) Mariscos: two wild-caught shrimp and crabmeat stuffed enchiladas swathed in creamy *queso blanco*. Meanwhile, **Armandos** (2630 Westheimer Rd., 713.520.1738) is serving up both rib-eye and crab varieties, as **Maria Selma's** (1617 Richmond Ave., 713.528.4920) Poblanas are rolled with chicken, rice, sesame seeds, crumbled farmer's cheese and dark mole sauce. Pig out on pork? **Sylvia's Enchilada Kitchen's** (6401 Woodway Dr., 713.334.7295) hot hot hot Hildalgo, with tender grilled pork carnitas, spicy red tomato salsa and sliced avocado, is just one of her 17 varieties. Talk about the whole enchilada!

Trend: Spinning Tapas

Spanish-style tapas have been the “next big trend” in American restaurants since the '70s, kicking off the “small plate” phenomenon now found in virtually every flavor profile. But the Spaniards did it first and, some say, still do it best. In Houston, crowds are congregating on the leafy Euro-feeling patio at year-old **Tintos Spanish Restaurant and Wine Bar** (2015 W. Gray St., 713.522.1330) for shrimp in white wine-garlic sauce, and squid-ink rice with crispy calamari. Another newbie, a colorful space with a modern-rustic vibe, **Andalucia Restaurant and Bar** (1201 San Jacinto St., 832.319.6673), does a fine job of expanding the odd piece of sausage or grilled octopus into full-fledged dishes, just like the terrific paella. And the wise arrive early or wrestle for a table at wine-savvy **Oporto** (3833 Richmond Ave., 713.621.1114) to get their *manos* on a melty prosciutto-cheese-and-fig panini or the Mozambique-style *peri-peri* shrimp.

NEW: BIG RED WHAT!?

Hipsters swarm new just-off-Wash **BRC Gastropub** for strawberry white-wine mojitos and exec chef Jeff Axline's whimsical comfort fare. Menu hits du jour are the mini-crab-cake sliders, bacon-wrapped local peaches stuffed with blue cheese, and the “chili con queso”—meaty mac and cheese topped with Doritos. Love the egg-baskets-turned-light-fixtures atop the communal table (where strangers plonk down when the line's out the door), the unisex bathroom, and the funny, acronymic, rooster-referencing name (Big Red Cock). “All done in fun,” says co-owner Lee Ellis. 519 Shepherd Dr., 713.861.2233