



## [Inside My Table #71](#) | Restaurant listings

### 2005's Best New Restaurants

Our annual round-up of the past year's best newcomers is always a challenge to write. We typically do not include chains (although there were a couple exceptions last year), and we shy away from listing places that have moved or simply reinvented themselves (but clearly there are some exceptions this year). Sometimes we miss an under-the-radar winner: We failed to include Rioja Spanish Tapas as one of 2004's best new restaurants, but it has certainly proven itself to be one. Occasionally we tap a restaurant that abruptly fizzles out. One thing is certain, however. A restaurant is never the same entity after six months or a year as it is on opening day.

ANTICA OSTERIA, 2311 Bissonnet at Greenbriar, 713-521-1155. This is an utterly comfortable Italian restaurant for Boomers. The food is not bold or fabulous or even particularly memorable, but the whole package is easy to fall into and very appealing. The former bookstore has been revamped as a candlelit — it's open for dinner only — and cozy venue with dining areas that ramble throughout the old house. Decent wine selection. Noisy and crowded at peak hours. It's from Velio DePlano (previously with Trattoria Da Velio) and Ray Memari. \$\$-\$\$\$

BAMBOO HOUSE, 540 Waugh Dr. bet. West Dallas & Allen Parkway, 713-522-3442. Stephanie Chow's pan-Asian menu may give you pause here: How can one kitchen produce such disparate foods and do them all so well? What we've found is that everything here is just a little bit better than at almost any other Asian restaurant we can name. The dumpling wrappers are thinner and more tender, the vegetables fresher, the meat better quality, the presentations more carefully planned. If there's a criticism to be made it's that the kitchen runs slightly to the sweet side. \$-\$\$.



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BICE RISTORANTE, 5085 Westheimer in Galleria III, 713-622-2423. If Antica Osteria (above) is the comfortable neighborhood Italian restaurant, here's a model from the other side. Located in The Galleria, it's strictly a destination restaurant, and there's nothing comfy or cozy about it. This is the Giorgio Armani of local restaurants — crisp, expansive, confident, understated. The food — Northern Italian pastas, risotto, grilled hunks of meat — is ambitious, occasionally even splendid. Sophisticated service. Portions are small, prices are high. \$\$\$

CLOSED/DOMINIQUE'S, 2900 Briarpark Dr. in the Marriott Westchase, 713-978-7400. New Orleans' misery is our temporary gain. Dominique Macquet, the longtime chef/partner at the Maison Dupuy's Dominique's and one of the Crescent City's many celebrity chefs displaced by Hurricane Katrina, is now cooking, incongruously enough, at this Westside Marriott. Come here for exquisite morsels of baby conch ceviche, blue crab and coconut soup, duck quatre façon (duck four ways), tamarind-glazed lobster and Kobe beef short ribs. Don't delay: Macquet hopes to go home and will not be in Houston indefinitely. \$\$-\$\$\$

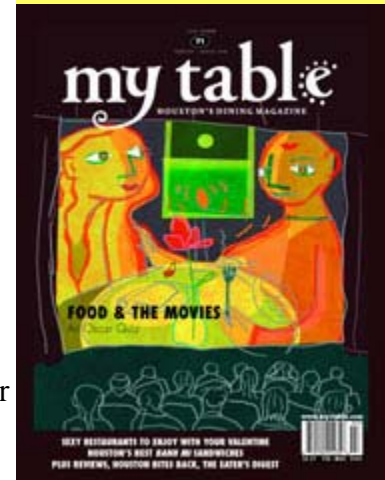
GRAVITAS, 807 Taft Bet. Allen Parkway & West Gray, 713-522-0995. Chef/co-owner Jason Gould had been working over at Aries with Scott Tycer for some time. Now he's partnered with Tycer for this makeover of the old Antone's location. The new look is cool and urbane, with rich dark woodwork. The menu offers bistro favorites from many countries: salt cod brandade, baked cheese spatzle, lamb shank with polenta, steak frites, sausage with sauerkraut, even a pan-fried schnitzel. The adjacent Sidebar throbs with the heat of all the young things who flock here. Early complaints about erratic service seem to have dwindled. \$\$-\$\$\$

KIRAN'S, 4100 Westheimer just east of Mid Lane, 713-960-8472. After several months of tweaking, the much-anticipated Kiran's bowed in. Owner/chef Kiran Verma, who had Ashiana on Briar Forest, took over the inside-the-Loop space that used to be Bombay Palace and has revamped everything. Her new menu is based on the Mughlai dishes of Northern India, which Verma fuses with American and French cuisines. It's a style she promoted at the old location but has now ratcheted up several notches. She brought along her award-winning wine list as well. Don't mistake this for a bargain Indian hole-in-the-wall: There's no weekday buffet. \$\$-\$\$\$

CLOSED/LAIDBACK MANOR, 706 Main St. near Capitol, 713-227-0402. We find this downtown restaurant unsettling. The name and the rocking chair on the logo suggest one thing, but the spare, almost-industrial setting and a menu full of deconstructed dishes, weird foams and "ingredients" in quotation marks do not compute. Chef Randy

## issue

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## Legend

\$Most entrees less than \$12

\$\$Most entrees between \$12-\$20

\$\$\$Most entrees more than \$20

Rucker, who has cooked around town for several big-name chefs, is now on his own, and his youthful affection for experimentation is obvious, if unchecked. We think he's got the goods, but would like to see him focus more on deliciousness and less on fantasy. \$\$-\$\$\$

TONY'S, 3755 Richmond Ave. in Greenway Plaza, 713-622-6778. After 30-plus years on Post Oak. Tony Vallone moved his namesake to where Maxim's once stood, spending a reputed \$5 million on renovations. With its fresher-feeling (if very beige) dining room and shorter menu, it's all been edited and cropped, although the feeling of luxury is still here. The younger crowd is much more casual, a change that is also reflected in the menu. Chef Olivier Ciesielski's menu includes beef filet stuffed with black truffle butter, seafood and wondrous entree salads. Note: Lunch is a bargain, but dinner is as expensive as ever. \$\$\$

#### FAREWELL

##### *2005's Most Significant Closings*

59 DINER, 8125 Katy Freeway  
BAY THAI, 1101 Second St., Seabrook  
BEST CELLARS, 5000 Westheimer  
BIRRAPORETTI'S, 1997 West Gray  
JALAPENOS, 2702 Kirby Dr.  
KIM SON, 7531 Westheimer  
LE PANIER, 7275 Brompton Rd.  
NOCHE CUCINA Y BAR, 2409 Montrose  
OLD SAN FRANCISCO STEAKHOUSE, 8611 Westheimer  
PASQUALE'S ITALIAN BAR & GRILL, 4412 Montrose  
SABA BLUEWATER GRILL, 416 Main

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