

DALLAS

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THE RESTAURANT ISSUE 2012

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& the Most Sizzling Fêtes!

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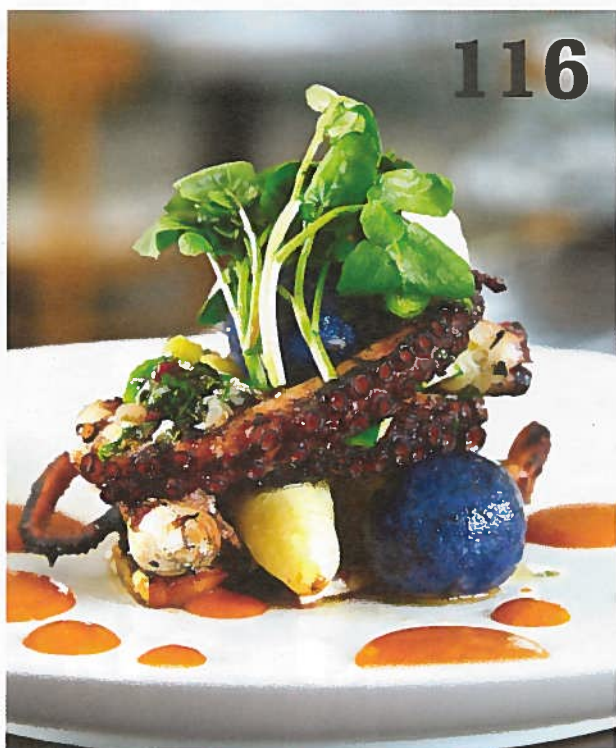
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ON THE COVER

Photography: Justin Clemons

Fresh summer greens by Matt McCallister, who will open FT33 in the Design District in the fall.



GETTING THE DRIFTWOOD Grilled octopus with marble potato confit, manzanilla olives, watercress, pickled onions and smoked tomato vinaigrette. Top right: Texas peach and blueberry buckle

Sea Worthy

A new Oak Cliff eatery swims against the tide.
| By Mark Stuert | Photography by Jill Broussard |

When you open the door to Driftwood, the first thing that slams your nostrils is not the scent of weathered wood or memory-summoning whiffs of smoke. It's the heady funk of wharf, the kind that fumigates your snout while you wolf down a steaming cardboard serving boat of squid with a plastic fork near San Francisco's Pier 39. The marine essence isn't exactly unpleasant, but it is jarring.

Driftwood is everything you wouldn't expect from a Dallas seafood restaurant. It's innovative. The Ahi tuna crudo in yuzu-infused olive oil is topped with a

scoop of avocado ice cream, which serves as a distinctly delicate and rich palate cleanser. It's refreshing.

Driftwood is tiny. No dish on the menu is over 25 bucks. The servers wear plaid. Cream and aquamarine play off of hanging driftwood sculptures with elements absconded from White Rock Lake and other local waterways.

And Driftwood's meat ain't red. Dallas has a hard time shaking steak. That's why most Dallas seafood restaurants are little more than a school of token fins and claws swimming in a steakhouse tidepool: dark grainy woods, bloated wine lists, white cloth-topped tables, prices that crater your Visa card and a healthy selection of steer loins to save the locals from panic fits.



Driftwood

642 W. Davis St.
214.942.2530
driftwood-dallas.com
Tue.-Sat. 5PM-Midnight

Full Monty Cowboys

Naked Cowboy Oysters with Champagne bubbles and Rio Red grapefruit mignonette take traditional herding to another dimension.

Seawall

Starfish. Sand dollars. Sea urchins. Conch. Clams. A collage of seashells covers the upper wall corner near the front door of the restaurant. Driftwood owner Jonn Baudoin acquired the shells by the bucketful from a Design District antique store before unleashing the screws and glue.

Fire Pit

Armed with a fireplace, Driftwood's enclosed patio features ductwork that blasts a stream of cool to fight the Dallas torrid season.

Driftwood meat. But rabbit is decadent, and rumor Hell, if you may as well

Driftwood approach to seafood eatery unique," he but do an at restaurants

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Chargrill Firmer. Heat suction cups marble potato surrounded b creating a rich

But Driftwood app: hickory-s chunks of hot fraiche, lemon it in terrine ja cubes of clarifi is so addictive, tower of rustic t

Driftwood and punchy, w

SURF-TO-TABLE

Clockwise from top left: Duo of rabbit with root vegetables and natural jus; a driftwood sculpture created by the owner is a focal point of décor; octopus carpaccio with fava bean vinaigrette; grilled Gulf shrimp with speckled butter beans and lobster froth

Driftwood will have none of this. Sure, it has meat. But it will never be what you expect. Duo of rabbit is hare loins swaddled in Nueske bacon. There's decadent, oven-roasted bone marrow with peekytoe crab, and rumors of beef tongue ravioli with halibut cheeks. Hell, if you're going to do a twisted surf and turf, you may as well put the tongue where it belongs.

Driftwood founder Jonn Baudoin says his offbeat approach to seafood was inspired by the faux-ness of most seafood eateries in Dallas. "I wanted to do something unique," he says. "I wanted to do a seafood restaurant, but do an actual seafood restaurant. Most of the seafood restaurants are mostly steak." Actual seafood this is.

Baudoin has good pedigree. Born in Lafayette, La., he grew up experimenting with family gumbo recipes among other things, though his forte is operations. He was part of the original team that opened Salve!, the vaunted (for a short time) house of authentic Northern Italian fare that featured (for a short time) celebrated chef Sharon Hage. He also did stints at Mi Piaci and Modo Mio. "I can cook really good on my days off," he boasts.

For Driftwood, he sketched out his menu vision and then auditioned chefs to see who could compose the most inspiring riffs from it. Chef Omar Flores, the seasoned executive sous chef at Abacus, got the nod. Flores aims to expand the Dallas sea-foodie mind. "I want to stay away from crab cakes and crusted Gulf tilapia," he says.

That he does. Alaskan king crab ravioli flashes a black gloss as striking as Ferrari paint. Tinted with squid ink, the ravioli are supple, sweet and glossed with a squid ink sauce fortified with cream and butter. He puts octopus carpaccio in a bracing Meyer lemon vinaigrette. Sliced razor thin, these lacy ovals nearly melt off the tongue.

Chargrilled octopus is a different thing altogether. Firmer. Heartier. Gently scorched tentacles (with suction cups in stark relief) are coiled around marble potato, manzanilla olives, and pickled onions surrounded by dots of smoked tomato vinaigrette, creating a rich chorus of clearly articulated flavors.

But Driftwood's most stunning dish is a 10-buck app: hickory-smoked salmon rilletes. Flores starts with chunks of house-smoked salmon, whips it in crème fraîche, lemon, Tabasco, onion and chives, and pots it in terrine jars. He tops the chilled pink paste with cubes of clarified butter to fatten the oomph. The stuff is so addictive, you'll whittle through the accompanying tower of rustic toast before your wineglass can be refilled.

Driftwood has a wine list that is brief, eclectic and punchy, with no bottle breaching the \$100 mark.



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There's a soft Arneis from Piedmont (a natural with simply prepared fish), a pinot blanc from Alsace, a sancerre—even a riesling from Israel's Carmel Winery. Yet the list seems saddled with far too much cabernet and cabernet blends. There's virtually nothing on this menu that cabernet complements and much it insults. If you're going to jettison red meat clichés, why not cut its clichéd juice accompaniment loose, too?

For dessert, there's the smashing Madagascar vanilla crème brûlée and the Texas peach buckle ringed by sour cherry sauce dots and topped with a dollop of olive oil ice cream—a savory contrast to sweet and sour.

Baudoin describes Driftwood as the Hamptons-meets-Oak Cliff. It's highly doubtful the Hamptons would ever bump into Oak Cliff, but the fantasy sure works. ■