

*Texas Monthly*, February 2004

***Where to Eat Now 2004***

**Instead of dishing on restaurants of all vintages, as in the past, this installment of our annual smorgasbord tells you what you really want to know: What are the best new restaurants in Texas?**

By Patricia Sharpe

IT'S SEVEN O'CLOCK. DO YOU KNOW where you want to eat tonight? For the past two years this annual restaurant roundup has aimed to help you answer that burning question. In the 2002 and 2003 editions, my goal was to be all-inclusive, so I covered places of every cuisine, price range, and vintage. But in the end, I found that people were really interested in just one thing: What's new? So this time around I focused on ten new Texas restaurants that I think are the most exciting of the year, plus another eleven where—though they're not in the same league as the top ten—I'm quite happy to dine. How did I decide what to include? I started with a list of several dozen candidates and ate my way through it. What did I look for? Delicious food, of course.

Atmosphere counted for a lot too (I perk right up when I feel welcome and comfortable). As for service, honestly, I'm not that fussy—unless I'm kept waiting for the credit-card receipt, which drives me crazy.

The final list—admittedly subjective and personal—includes those places that, whatever their cuisine or decor or price range, made me want to go back on my own dime. But before I get to the winners, let me give you a couple of definitions: "New" means a restaurant that opened between the end of December 2002, when I finished reporting last year's story, and November 1, 2003, or that acquired a new owner, new chef, and new name during that period (which ruled out a few worthy newcomers, including Austin's Zoot—you should have changed the name, guys). And "Texas" means homegrown (which eliminated McCormick and Schmick's in Dallas and Houston and Roaring Fork in Austin).

That said, there's still plenty to sink your teeth into. Here are my ten favorites, plus a city-by-city look at the runners-up. Put on your best bib and tucker and give them a try.