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By Mike Hiller

Radar Range: Chef Andre Natera's Cooking at Fairmont Pyramid Will Knock Your Socks Off



Andre Natera works with the Texas Honeybee Guild to maintain the rooftop beehive



Chefs Andre Natera, Sarah Snow, Paul Peddle

I didn't think it could be done, but with his new Spring menu, chef **Andre Natera** and his executive sous chef, **Paul Peddle**, have restored the luster of the **Pyramid's** once-hallowed dining experience.

Once one of Dallas' dining jewels, it's been years since luminaries such as **Avner Samuel**, **Dean Fearing**, **Chris Ward** and **Jean La Fonte** helmed the Pyramid's kitchen. In recent years, the Pyramid had become an also-ran on the Dallas dining scene. Now, with barely a year under his belt as the top toque, Andre Natera has turned the place on its ear.

"Like a lot of chefs, I use local and seasonal ingredients every chance I get," Natera told me while touring his herb garden on the hotel's terrace, from which Natera sources all his herbs. "But there's more to good cooking than just using good ingredients"

Natera clearly understands and knows how—and when—to apply classic French technique. His traditional, cognac-spiked country terrine rivals Brian Luscher's as the best in Dallas. And there's no better demi-glace in town than the deeply rich version Natera ladles around his roasted lamb with baby carrots, cippolini onions, morrels and tomatoes. He pan sears impeccably fresh cod a golden brown then gilds it with a simple beurre blanc, a briny punch of capers, and a dollop of tomato jam that's both sweet and

tart. He bathes his housemade pork dumplings in a honey-colored chicken stock enriched with notes of lemongrass, star anise and roasted garlic.

Yet unlike old-school French cuisine, the half-dozen dishes I sampled were gossamer. No heavy sauces. No Thermidor. Just clean, bright, simple flavors combined in interesting ways, as with an off-the-menu pasta dish that featured spinach agnolotti (filled with morel and chanterelle mushrooms and mascarpone) tossed with a few kernels of roasted corn— a kind of weirdly brilliant twist on *huitlacoche*.

Every item on Pyramid’s new Spring menu is identifiable and familiar, yet taken together, each ingredient makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

There’s no guessing what you’re eating,” is how Natera put it, which is a hallmark of a style of cooking I’ve been seeing lately, which I’ve termed Modern Regional cuisine.

In his “watermelon brulee,” for example, each component —the ripe cubes of lightly caramelized watermelon, the Brazos Valley feta, the garden-grown mint and honey-sweetened vinaigrette— integrates seamlessly into the whole.

And Natera—a member of the **World Master Chef’s Society**—is as committed to teaching his brigade as he is impressing his diners.

“The chefs coming out of school today all want to cook Modernist Cuisine, but they are a little shaky on the basics,” Natera said. “I want to make sure that when chefs leave my kitchen, they have mastered all the basics of classical cooking and that they know enough to go out on their own and help turn Dallas into a real food destination because they can cook.”

And with **Mike Nichols** running the front of the house, sommelier **Hunter Hammett** (who brilliantly pairs Natera’s food with unexpected—and inexpensive—jewels from Lebanon and Greece), and pastry chef **Maggie Huff** now on board, the Pyramid is worthy of your attention.



Pan seared cod with caper butter, summer veggies and tomato jam



Really good spinach agnolotti, a special one recent night



bruleed watermelon salad



pork dumplings in lemongrass broth



*Andre Natera
on the
Fairmont's
terrace, beside
the rooftop
garden*



*The Pyramid raises all its own
herbs in the rooftop
garden*

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