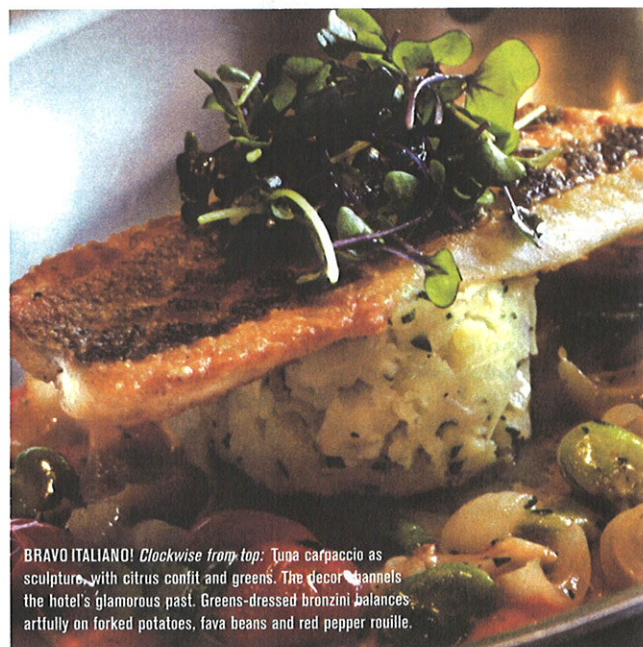


the legendary Lion's Den bar, a one-time media and political hangout where inhibition was prohibited, will be saddened to know that no vestiges remain. The floor plan has been opened to make room for a considerably larger dining room. Bolla Bar, the cocktail lounge, has been lightened and brightened and, unlike the Lion's Den, is easy to find from the lobby. The atmosphere impacts like a well-constructed martini, visually stimulating to enhance anticipation of that first icy sip that quickly soothes and relaxes. Service impresses in much the same way. At first rather formal, service can transform seamlessly to be as friendly and accommodating as a diner desires.

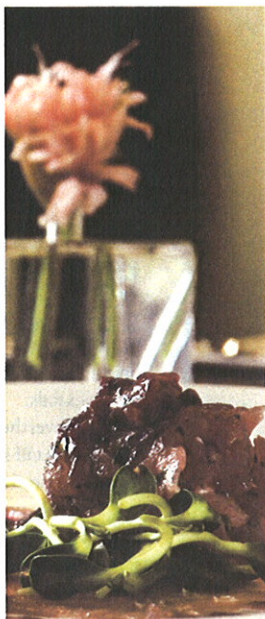
Restaurant guests will likely wonder about the "THE" in shades of red that dominates the wall behind the chef's table. It is a nod to the four decades ago fix of a burned out sign that transformed the property from "Hotel Stoneleigh" to "The Stoneleigh."

An evening at that chef's table would no doubt be a culinary exploration through the mind of David Bull. No matter where seated, menu options include a la carte, a \$55 choice of three courses, as well as six- and nine-course tasting menus (\$75 and \$95, respectively). Wine

**TRADITIONALISTS BE ADVISED. BULL'S 'MODERN ITALIAN' ISN'T YO MAMA'S (OR HIS GRANDMOTHER'S) ITALIAN.**



**BRAVO ITALIANO!** Clockwise from top: Tuna carpaccio as sculpture, with citrus confit and greens. The decor channels the hotel's glamorous past. Greens-dressed bronzini balances artfully on forked potatoes, fava beans and red pepper rouille.



**BOLLA AT THE STONELEIGH HOTEL AND SPA** 2927 MAPLE AVE., 214.871.7111, WWW.STONELEIGHHOTEL.COM; BREAKFAST 7AM-10:30AM, LUNCH 11AM-2:30PM (BRUNCH ON SATURDAY AND SUNDAY), DINNER 6PM-10PM SUNDAY-THURSDAY, 6PM-11PM FRIDAY-SATURDAY **DON'T MISS:** BALSAMIC ICE CREAM WITH DRIED STRAWBERRY **CHECK OUT:** BOLLA BAR WITH THE GLAMOROUS RED BANQUETTE; MAKE SURE YOUR NAILS ARE PAINTED AND YOU'VE GOT BETTE DAVIS EYES **ABOUT THE NAME:** THE OFFICIAL HOTEL VERSION IS THAT THE ITALIAN WORD *BOLLA* TRANSLATES TO "BULL" AS IN THE CHEF'S LAST NAME. ALAS, ACCEPTED SOURCES FOR ITALIAN TRANSLATIONS DEFINE IT AS "BUBBLE." *TORO* IS THE MORE ACCEPTED ITALIAN TRANSLATION FOR "BULL," ALTHOUGH AS SOME BLOGGERS NOTED LAST FALL WHEN THE BOLLA BUZZ GOT FRENZIED, THE WORD ALSO HAS ITALIAN MEANING AS PAPAL BULL, MEANING AN OFFICIAL DECREE, ESPECIALLY ONE FROM THE POPE. PERHAPS THE NAME MEANS BOLLA DEFINES "MODERN ITALIAN" CUISINE. **RATING: ★★★★★**

What the stars mean: 1 = fair, some noteworthy qualities; 2 = good, above average; 3 = very good, well above norm; 4 = excellent, among the area's best; 5 = world-class, extraordinary in every detail. Reviews are based on multiple visits. Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambiance and service.



pairings are optional and cost a \$20 add-on but are well-advised, as Bull's kitchen fantasies invite a match with every dish.

Wine pairing for dishes such as the amazing tuna carpaccio accented with a sugar cure, citrus confit, a touch of balsamic and springy sprouts can be tricky. The combination challenges and surprises, while another dish of potato gnocchi with shards of tender beef short ribs (slow-cooked for 24 hours) is a much simpler match with an earthy Italian red.

Desserts are perhaps the most ethnically Italian part of the menu with an ever-changing assortment of house-made gelatos such as an engaging espresso with orange flavor combination. Balsamic ice cream ingeniously garnished with a dried strawberry reinvents the classic fresh strawberry and vinegar combination. Mini cannoli with blackberries and blackberry gelato has quickly and justifiably become a Bolla signature.

Bull's Bolla offers a challenging and inspired menu under his design and the daily direction of chef de cuisine Curtis Cooke. Indeed Bolla represents a very contemporary turn on Italian cuisine, interpreting traditional ingredients with cutting edge style and techniques.

The hotel's reincarnation reestablishes The Stoneleigh as a serious option for high profile visitors, a fine nod to its history. Bull lives up to his reputation and places Italian cuisine in Dallas on a new plane making it an obligatory destination for adventurous and curious culinary consumers. ■