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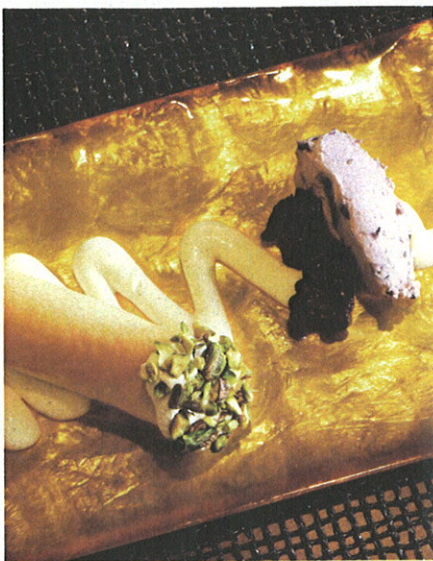
MODERN LUXURY DALLAS 2828 ROUTH ST SUITE 350 DALLAS TX 75201

JUNE 2008 \$5.95



FOOD DRINK REVIEW

BY DOTTY GRIFFITH
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID LYLES



THE SPOT Above: The chef's table sits pretty under nostalgic lettering. Left: Mini cannoli with blackberry gelato and creme fraiche.

BELLA BOLLA! *Chef David Bull's new restaurant at The Stoneleigh completes the renaissance of hotel, spa and table*

What do Maria Callas, Elvis Presley, Andy Warhol and Stevie Ray Vaughan have in common? Besides the obvious fact that they are dearly departed, they all favored the Stoneleigh Hotel with their company. They were among the many celebrities who guested in the good old days beginning in 1923 until the Oak Lawn landmark closed for a 14-month renovation in late 2006. While completion of the entire project was highly anticipated, no single element was any more eagerly awaited than the hotel restaurant christened Bolla.

David Bull, who earned his national stars and bars at The Driskill, the even more historic hotel in Austin, is the concept and executive chef. A protégé of Dean Fearing during his Mansion on Turtle Creek tenure, Bull's kitchen creds are well-established with a variety of honors, including a 2007 James Beard Best Chef Southwest nomination and recognition as one of *Food and Wine* magazine's Best New Chefs 2003.

A dish such as skate wing with tomato risotto, asparagus and an astonishing mouthful of flavor Bull calls "Parmesan broth" illustrates the chef's imagination and technical skills. While not perfectly textured, the barely too-soft risotto was subtly tomatoey, like cossetting bisque. Tasted alongside the firm, sweet fish and the grassy asparagus, the sum of the

parts took on new life with the broth accent. The clear consommé is pure Parm essence without the bother of chewing. It is primarily an olfactory experience that also coats the mouth and provides a platform of umami (the fifth taste) to boost all the other elements.

Bolla and The Stoneleigh opened in March with Bull debuting his "modern Italian" cuisine. The chef's bio notes his Italian heritage and his early memories of cooking at his grandparents' upstate New York restaurant. Traditionalists be advised. Bull's "modern Italian" isn't yo mama's (or his grandmother's) Italian cuisine. It is at once deconstructed and spare yet strategically festooned with opulence.

Bravo! And double bravo to Bull's charming obsession with brown butter. It shows up in unexpected ways: figs oozing brown butter as a side car to third course rack of lamb with a crinkly, garlicky Milanese-style crumb coating. Even more intriguing, a small mound of brown butter solids served with a second course of scallop with spinach, speck (Italian bacon) and a sprinkling of pine nuts. Often milk solids are strained from brown butter and discarded. Leave it to Bull to take the opposite approach and make it work. He is a master of the intense mouthful.

Those who fondly remember the Old World -style dining room and