

Star-Telegram
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go!

Here he comes!
Here comes
'Speed Racer,' this
weekend. **Page 5**

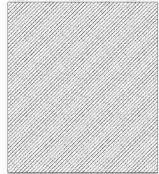
12 more summer movies
that'll have you burning
rubber to get to theaters.
Pages 28-32

Va-va-vroom!

MUSIC
+ Singer Alicia Keys bares her
neo-soul at Nokia. **Page 17**

DINING
Italian beautifully accented
at Stoneleigh's **Bolla**. **Page 34**

WARNER BROS.



Bella Bolla

Stoneleigh is chic setting for chef David Bull's elegant dishes

By JUNE NAYLOR

Special to the Star-Telegram

The only thing better than getting news of the Stoneleigh Hotel's massive renovation was hearing that a superstar chef would come with the package. A \$36 million renovation did wonders for this elegant 1923 showplace; it was only appropriate that the hotel would bring the likes of David Bull to present food of a suitable caliber.

Named a James Beard Award finalist last year and one of 10 best new chefs in the nation in 2003, Bull comes to Dallas after a lauded tenure at the Driskill Hotel in Austin.

With such a pedigree, diners' expectations are lofty, and I found myself holding Bull to a higher standard when sitting down to one of his dinners at Bolla recently. Whereas I found a lot to love on his dazzling new Italian menu, I was surprised to encounter a few disappointing — and just plain odd — items.

Particularly impressive is the fact that the menu offers plenty of options for trying Bull's creativity. You can choose dishes priced a la carte, or you can go for one of the tasting menus. The three-course deal is \$55, and the six-course is \$75, or \$95 with wine pairings. My dining partner had six courses, and I had three; the kitchen paced us, bringing my friend two mini-servings for each of my courses and giving us ample opportunity to share our myriad dishes.

Among starters, the tiny timbale of beef tartare, topped with crispy shallot curls and decorated with asparagus tips in a tart lemon aioli, bore a satiny texture. Heirloom-tomato salad with buffalo mozzarella was simple and lovely, but another appetizer, the hamachi crudo — a cool strip of sashimi-grade raw yellowtail, seemed less fresh than it should have been.

Second-course offerings fared about the same. The sea scallop with sauteed spinach in brown butter with pine nuts and speck, or smoky ham bits, put together a rewarding flavor. The shredded rabbit with mashed cannellini beans and micro-herbs, however, was indistinguishable, verging on mushy.

The strangest dish was among the second courses: Pork belly diavolo seems an insult to one of my favorite, and most indulgent, delicacies. Yes, this version of bacon is fatty, but ever so flavorful — but Bull feels compelled to mask its virtues in a layer of acidic tomato sauce, accompanied by a bizarre side treatment of sweet, cold mozzarella gelato, to unhappy results.

Things looked up in the latter course, beginning with the bronzini, a fish that reminds me of a cross between trout and snapper. Presented in a long, somewhat narrow strip, it was roasted and crispy on its exterior, with the white flesh inside juicy. Served with fava beans

and a red bell pepper rouille, or creamy provencale sauce, this was simply pleasing.

Osso buco presented tender veal in a parsley crust with a bold bordelaise, and the rack of lamb benefited from an inspired brown butter treatment punctuated with sweet roasted figs.

Wine pairings are chosen from the by-the-glass offerings (\$8-\$20), while though not numerous are certainly more interesting than those on most lists around town. A lovely, less-common chardonnay choice, for example, is Antinori's Bramito del Cervo (\$11), an ideal complement to the bronzini dish, while another Italian selection, the Vernaccia di San Gimignano (\$13) was a perfect red to bring out deeper elements in the osso buco.

Our server was aptly attentive and well-intentioned, but she stumbled on a few dish pronunciations and descriptions and was less wine-savvy than you'd hope at a restaurant of this stature. That said, she juggled several demanding tables on a busy evening with great poise.

We'll definitely return to Bolla, which offers a series of sexy, romantic dining rooms that make you feel good the moment you sit down. The bar is fabulously chic, as well. I look forward to coming back for a Bolla Lemonade, made with Patron Silver tequila, fresh lemonade, jalapeños and cucumber, as well as a sampling of Bull's summer-time menu options.

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Bolla

2927 Maple Ave.
Dallas
800-921-8498
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Hours: 11 a.m.- 1 a.m.
Monday-Thursday;
11 a.m.-2 a.m. Friday-
Saturday; 11 a.m.-
midnight Sunday

Cuisine: upscale Italian

Essentials: major
credit cards; full bar;
smoke-free; wheel-
chair-accessible.

Entree cost: \$22-\$36

Signature dishes:
bronzini with fava
beans; rack of lamb
with parsley crust

Recommended for:
Gourmands seeking
star-fueled food.

Good to know: Tasting
menus offered in
three- and six-courses;
bar menu available;
best for grown-ups

Bolla chef David Bull serves bronzini with fava beans, forked potatoes and red bell pepper rouille.

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