



## Central Texas cuisine raises the steaks

**A host of brilliant chefs in Dallas and Fort Worth are delving to the belly-rumbling roots of the food that makes Texans tick.**

By Luke Waterson

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Dallas Fort Worth? Do not let the shared airport fool you. These two Texan cities, separated by just 30 miles of suburbia in the central north of the state, are as different as chalk and cheese. But Dallas and Fort Worth do have one thing in common: a mushrooming culinary pedigree that is garnering a following far beyond state lines.

Times are a-changing. The era of tasteless Tex-Mex – think soggy tacos overflowing with lacklustre cheese – never really flourished here. If it did exist, far from defining regional cuisine, Tex-Mex was a propagation of the fast food outlets and not at all true to local tradition. But over the last decade – and particularly the last few years – a bunch of brilliant young chefs have finally banished those unfortunate Tex-Mex associations and are pioneering a brand of cuisine that takes such Texas clichés as fast food and barbeque and is breathing new life into them.

## Modern Texas cuisine

While a cursory glance would not reveal North America's sixth-largest metropolitan area to be a hunting ground for fine foods – Dallas, the state's third most populous city, is known to be an oil-rich business centre, while Fort Worth seems like a stuck-in-time cowboy town – in many ways the culinary reinvention should come as no surprise.

Similar things are happening elsewhere in Dallas. Tim Byres, Pyles' former colleague, opened **Chicken Scratch** (and adjoining bar The Foundry in March 2012, just down the road from his stylish motel restaurant **Smoke** on Fort Worth Avenue. The premise is again startlingly simple: Texan fast food served with panache in an original setting. Fried chicken and fries are the culinary focus. But this is pecan-smoked rotisserie chicken and there are hand-made sauces to accompany the fries. And when the dish is accompanied by a quinoa salad, eaten either in the industrial-chic interior or on packing-case seating in one of the open-fronted shipping containers that form the shady garden, the experience is far from typical.

## For More Information Contact:

Green Olive Media, LLC.

361 17<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 1,

Atlanta, Georgia 30363

404-815-9327

[www.greenolivemedia.com](http://www.greenolivemedia.com)

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