

PaperCITY

Big-Flavor Texas Food: A New Houston Restaurant Vows to Get Back to the Grub That Built the State

BY LAURANN CLARIDGE
PHOTOGRAPHY JULIE SOEFER
07.01.16



Lee Ellis, the retail and restaurant impresario with an uncanny knack for putting the cool into his every concept, has made some significant career changes. The co-founder of F.E.E.D. TX restaurant group has left to form Cherry Pie Hospitality with partner/chef Jim Mills. The duo, tapped by the Silicon Valley investor who bankrolled Bradley Ogden's three short-lived Houston concepts, has been charged with the task of reinventing each space.

<http://www.papercitymag.com/culture/new-houston-restaurant-state-fare-big-flavor-texas-food-lee-ellis/>

Currently, Cherry Pie is concentrating on State Fare, a restaurant that Ellis says exemplifies the kind of big-flavor food he and Mills grew up eating in Texas (Houston and Beaumont, respectively). Housed where Ogden's Pour Society once resided, in Gateway, a Memorial retail development off Gessner, State Fare has a bevy of talents — behind the bar (Laurie Harvey), in the kitchen (exec chef Bill McKinley and pastry wiz Susan Molzan) and managing the place (Rob Harvey).

Besides serving lunch, dinner and brunch on weekends, this is also the place to hang out after work and grab a communal table or big booth with lots of friends and dive into hearty snacks and boozy libations.

Don't miss the bean-free Jimmy's Texas Red Beef Chili Frito Pie, a complex stew of hand-cut beef devoid of the generic chili powder taste; instead, they roast, toast, and purée chile peppers to give their dish a complexity and depth of heat that only gets better as it simmers (\$9).

Feeling virtuous? The shrimp cocktail (\$17) can stand in for a light meal for one (especially if you add the lump crab for \$5). Of course, soups are the telltale sign of a talented cook. Layered Sabine Pass Gumbo pays homage not to the New Orleans-style stew, but to the Southeast Texas one; no oysters, but it packs plenty of chicken, sausage and seafood — including whole crab — into every spoonful (\$15). Sous chef Armando Ramirez recalls the tortilla soup of his Oaxacan childhood, which is composed of crisp tortilla strips atop smoked chicken, avocado and cheese, doused with a steaming guajillo chile broth poured tableside.

Move on to the mighty burgers and sandwiches, or opt for Ray's delicate cornmeal-dipped fried catfish with hushpuppies and slaw (\$18) or the smoked double pork chop glazed with root beer (\$27) alongside mashed potatoes and bacon-y green beans.