

Noooo Reservations

WEDNESDAY, 22 JULY 2009 08:10 CHOW, BABY



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You don't generally think of Fort Worth as a city focused on **immediate gratification**, a place like New York or New Orleans where your every sensual need can be met **on demand** on just about any street corner. But to Chow, Baby, "sensual need" means food, of course, and the great thing about our town is that you're rarely forced to decide days in advance **exactly when you'll be hungry** and for exactly what cuisine.

(The exception: **Restaurant Week**, www.krld.com, this year beginning Aug. 17. To maintain its anonymity Chow, Baby has reserved under "Bud Kennedy," so pick a different nom de diner.) On any **weekday or weeknight** - which is when Chow, Baby, as a professional eater, usually "works" - you can waltz right into our best steakhouse or upscale-cowboy-cuisine joint or fancy Italian patio and be seated pretty much instantly. No reservation required.

It's not just Zen-ish **living-in-the-moment**; it's also a logic thing. How is Chow, Baby supposed to know on Monday afternoon that it will desire **airline chicken**, a dish it'd never even heard of, on Wednesday night at 8 p.m. sharp? That's crazy talk. But **Ellerbe Fine Foods** (1501 W. Magnolia Ave.), the newest addition to Fort Worth's best and only Restaurant Row, is already **so freaking popular** that sans reservation, it's at least a 45-minute wait. On a *weeknight*. Also Ellerbe doesn't have a bar for time-passing - it's a casual-elegant-minimalist re-do of a **former gas station** - but luckily **Benito's** and its tasty **margaritas (extremely large, \$8.75)** are right across the street. So yes, it was 45 minutes of spontaneously ordered Cuervo that started Chow, Baby down giddy road, but it was Ellerbe's **Chef Molly McCook** who wholly intoxicated Chow, Baby with her **simple yet stunning** modern-Southern cuisine based on fresh, seasonal, sustainable, as-local-as-possible ingredients.



The food is fine at Ellerbe.

Seemed a little frou-frou at first to have **ingredient provenances** listed on the menu like they were fine wine, but already with our starters we were getting into the spirit: "Man, these roasted **Littlejohn Farms peppers** and grilled **Scott Farms eggplant** are a perfect foil for the sautéed **Anna Marie shrimp!**" (\$13.) And "Boy, this **Bella Vista truffle oil** really makes this **roasted cauliflower soup** pop!" (\$7.) Regrettably for description purposes, right about this point in the meal the Cuervo and the headiness of the food began to affect Chow, Baby's notetaking, resulting in a marked decrease in precision word-engineering and a huge increase in vulgar words like "totally" and "awesome." Thus: The **Chef's Choice steak** that night, a 10-ounce ribeye (\$31) that was not too impressive when brought out (thinnish, not crispy-edged), turned out to be **totally awesome**, amazingly flavorful and tender, perfectly paired with "Sicilian candy" (whole roasted garlic from B&G Gardens) and herbed french fries. The unfortunately named **airline chicken** (\$18), so-called because part of the wing is left on, was **juicy-grilled awesomeness** on a pool of creamy mascarpone polenta. Whiskey-sauced **bread pudding** (\$7) was awesomely slightly gooey. Service, in the personage of can't-stump-him **Frank**, was professional, personable, and overall **rockin' awesome**. Chow, Baby, a poster child for the TiVo "Get It Precisely at the Instant You Want It" generation, would be willing, nay eager, to (gasp) **make a reservation** for its next thousand meals at Ellerbe. The food is that **freaking awesome**.

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