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Chef Ross Burtwell

sampling TEXAS

ONE PLATE AT A TIME

Story | JESSICA MEBANE Photography | JENNIFER WHITNEY

Chef Ross Burtwell has single-handedly started a quiet locavore revolution at his Cabernet Grill at the Cotton Gin in Fredericksburg, with the finest local ingredients and wines from all corners of Texas.

Walk up to this weathered lumber-clad building topped with metal roofs and artifacts from an earlier, more rural Texas epoch, and you might think you're about to settle in for just another chicken-fried, sweet-tea meal. But once you step inside and see the floor-to-ceiling wine storage honeycomb and smell the earthy bouquet of complex sauces simmering nearby, suddenly you realize you're not in small-town Texas anymore.

Settle in at a cozy table in the open-beamed dining room and navigate your way through some of the most delectable Texas-inspired menu offerings to be found. Start off with a bright crisp Viognier, from McPherson Cellars in Lubbock. With its semisweet finish, this wine is a nice counterpoint to the spicy yet comforting curried chowder redolent with pheasant, jalapeño sausage and apples. This velvety starter will warm up your palate nicely for the next course, whether it's the sinfully decadent Jumbo Lump Crab Gratin or the piquant Warm Texas Goat Cheese Crock served with olive tapenade, sun-dried tomatoes, roasted garlic and toasted bread rounds.

If you want to step outside the norm, you must try the Spicy Steamed Pork Buns with braised pork belly finished on the grill, served with hoisin mayo, house-made pickles and Sriracha for an unusual yet addictive treat.

But pace yourself, Burtwell has transformed the usual entrée fare with the inclusion of fresh local foodstuffs from sources all over Texas. There's something here for every Lone Star taste profile. So if you need a Tex-Mex fix try the buffalo enchiladas with mango slaw and double bacon black beans. However, it would be a crying shame if you missed out on the Rainbow Trout. Pan-seared to a turn, the spice-and-cornbread

dusted filet is moist and fork-tender and served with a tomato, pecan, bacon and breadcrumb stuffing with lemony undertones. Burtwell adds a fragrant brown butter sauce that elevates the dish to something altogether elegant yet soulful. Commemorate this dish with a wine from Texas Hill Vineyards, full of depth and notes of raspberry.

Dessert is full of whimsical surprises that will bring your evening to a decadent end. The local Clear River Pecan Company supplies fresh ice cream in flavors such as salted caramel and Jack Daniels to accompany many desserts, including the heavenly German Chocolate bread pudding.

Try the Ruby Red Grapefruit Buttermilk Pie, where your grandmother's humble pastry of Sunday suppers long past has been dressed up for the new millennium with light elegant grapefruit flavors. And just for extra panache, the whole thing is presented on a dish coated with a delicate sheen of "polka-dot sauce," a delightful mélange of grapefruit glaze punctuated with pearly dots of white chocolate.

So if this spring finds you hankering for something that truly speaks to your Texas roots or you just want to see where the bluebonnets take you, head to the Texas Hill Country for a sophisticated yet utterly authentic meal at Cabernet Grill. Burtwell and his outstanding staff will make you a believer in Texas viogniers, sangiovese and tempranillo—wines made to enjoy with fresh local fare. In Burtwell's words, "that's how it's supposed to be, don't you think?" ♦

CABERNET GRILL
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COTTONGINLODGING.COM



Curried Pheasant,
Sausage & Apple
Chowder



Pan-seared
Rainbow Trout



Jumbo Lump
Crab Gratin



Grilled Peaches
and Shrimp
with Cream



Warm Texas
Goat Cheese



Bacon Wrapped
Jalapeno Stuffed
Lockhart Quail

RUBY RED GRAPEFRUIT BUTTERMILK PIE

Ingredients

- 1 9-inch pie crust
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 3 eggs
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 2 tablespoons Ruby Red grapefruit juice
- 1 tablespoon Ruby Red grapefruit zest, grated
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- ¼ teaspoon freshly ground nutmeg

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350 F. Use a fork to poke holes in the bottom of the pie crust, about 1/2-inch apart. Pre-bake the crust until light brown. The holes will prevent the dough from rising up and forming bubbles. Beat eggs and sugar in a medium bowl until the mixture turns a light color and is fluffy. Add the flour and mix lightly. Add remaining ingredients and mix well. Pour batter in pre-baked pie shell. Bake for 30 minutes, or until custard is set. Allow pie to rest before serving at room temperature.

Yield: 9-inch pie



Ruby Red
Grapefruit
Buttermilk
Pie