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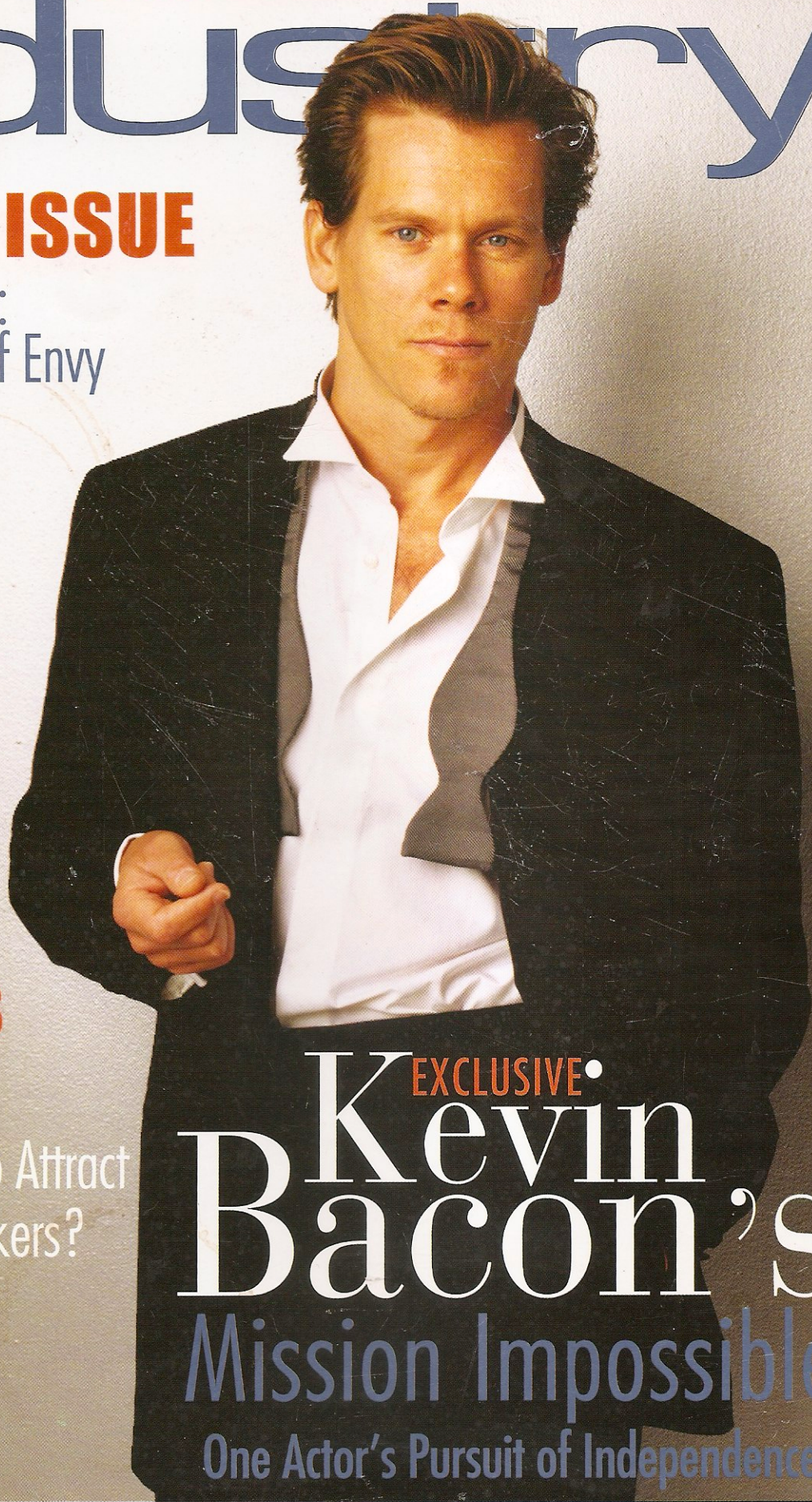
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Ta Taste of Magic

Mezze Captures the Ambiance of a Big City Restaurant, But Retains the Intimacy of a Small City Bistro

By Georgina Hernandez-Escobar



Down the famous Cincinnati Avenue strip and squeezed between two popular local bars is a little oasis, a true mirage that appears and stands out thanks to its unique structure, strange name and interesting synergy of local-meets-big-market eatery.

Mezze (pronounced meh-zay) is known for its eclectic, enchanting and familial energy. It features a bistro type-atmosphere with a specialized menu and personalized attention that reflects the uniqueness of its owner and two sibling chefs.

The spot that used to host the coffeehouse Dolce Vita since 1993 was (it seemed) transformed overnight, as if by magic, into a completely different place. Upon entering, it's tough not to be charmed by the warmth of the rustic décor (check out the terrific lamps hanging from every area of the room). Not quite a bar, not quite a full restaurant, this establishment truly captures the ambiance of the big city yet retains small city personal attention.

Owner Gustavo Zepeda knows exactly how to merge the big city/friendly city feel. Zepeda is quick to greet his guests. His courteous voice and attentive eyes seemed to merge into one as this gentleman shared the story of his little oasis.

Zepeda was a UTEP graduate, and resided in San Francisco for some time before returning to El Paso. Upon his return and after leaving the world of sales, he began to brainstorm.

At the time, a coffeehouse seemed prosperous and exciting, and the building of a business plan quickly followed. But after thirteen years, Zepeda decided that a transformation was needed. He wanted to start with a clean slate, and envisioned a place where the theme and food were cutting edge and quality driven. It was exactly these visions on exploring a new frontier that attracted chef Luis-Armando Adauto to the project.

Originally from El Paso, Adauto graduated from the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco and worked in casinos in Reno as well as in one of Chicago's "Top 10 best kept secrets" restaurants.

And Adauto isn't the only genius in the kitchen in his family, either. Sister Julie Adauto is the establishment's pastry chef and recipient of the Central Region Pastry Chef of the Year ACF award and ACF 2005 Bronze National Award Winner. Aside from her award winning desserts, this jovial and affable


chef studied microbiology, but always loved baking. She followed the footsteps of her brother, and studied at the same culinary institute in San Francisco. She sweetly smiles over at her brother as she sums up her experience with, "I always loved baking...He started playing around with food at nine," then shrugs her shoulders in a this-was-what-we-always-dreamed-of sort of way.

For Luis-Armando, the key to making Mezze's menu meet the creative insight of Zepeda was to focus on ingredients. He began to research what everyone else was doing and made it a point to stay away from it.

The use of unique ingredients is obvious by looking at the menu, where pomegranate, jicama and chayote are everywhere. Their signature Mezze dish is the hummus and roasted vegetable. The freshness of the ingredients, combined with smooth balsamic vinaigrette and the mouthwatering hummus make this dish one of my favorites.

Another interesting dish is the portabella pizza. The first bite offers a delicate balance of the sausage richness with the velvety texture and gentle flavor of the portabella mushroom bed; all this topped with cheese that creates a taste sensation of utter satisfaction. If you prefer the greens, the jicama chicken salad is a true mark to Adauto's genius. A sensation of flavor and a parade of never before mixed ingredients such as avocado, spinach, jicama, carrots and pomegranate dressing are sure to satisfy any palate.

The magic of Mezze is sure to be a perfect experience for business lunches, romantic getaway dinners and good old-fashioned snacks and drinks with friends. Don't let the Mediterranean architectural skin that makes up Mezze's look fool you. The

delectable variety of appetizers and entrées—from fresh fried calamari to its chile pesto burger and everything in between—is sure to satisfy demanding taste buds as well as the shy palates that prefer subtler ingredients in their meals. Most everyone, regardless of flavor favoritism, can enjoy the desserts by their award-winning pastry chef that include a made-from-scratch Tiramisu and vanilla crème brulee. 

Mezze, 205 Cincinnati Ave. For more information, call 915.351.7797 or visit www.mezzerestaurantelpaso.com.

