



o, Central 214 is not a brand-new restaurant, but in so many ways, it really is. There's a new chef (Graham Dodds), a new menu (with a F2T dedication that borders on fetish), attentive service (GM Fran Kelffer is a magician) and, coming in May, a whole new look for the restaurant and adjoining bar.

"We're throwing it all out and starting over," is how one of the servers described the plans for the May renovation.

"Everything will be different, including the name," echoed Dodds.

Gone are all the fried, calorie-laden foods of former 214 chef Blythe Beck's reign. In their place, salads loaded with super foods like kale, apples, shaved celery root, watermelon radishes, raw artichokes, amaranth (!) and pine nuts.

Dodds says he's using mostly locally sourced ingredients from a cadre of about 20 farmers and ranchers in the area. I wasn't surprised to see Tassione Farms, Homestead Heritage or the Texas Honeybee Guild listed among his purveyors (Dodds is also a bee keeper), but when he brought out an oven-roasted goat brisket, I blinked. Far from the gamey, muttoney meat I've eaten in Scotland, Ireland and England, this was surprisingly mild, moist and lean. Like lamb with an attitude.

"I rub it with paprika, then roast it for 16 hours in a very low oven," Dodds told me. "It's not on the menu yet, but it will be soon."

Among the standouts during a recent dinner: dinosaur kale with watermelon radish and shaved raw artichokes, with a zing of balsamic and a toss of salty ricotta salata. (Best kale I've ever tasted.) Tiny morsels of flash-fried sweetbreads served with a light beurre blanc and shavings of lime zest. A thick filet of boldly seasoned Louisiana redfish sauced with brown butter, capers and lemon segments.

“Damn, this guy can cook,” I overheard a diner at a nearby table say.

Yep, he sure can.

Tucked away in the back corner of the Palomar Hotel, you'll never know you're eating in a hotel restaurant.

(and don't skip the churros or maple cream "poudine chomeur" for dessert.)