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Best New Restaurant 2014: Grit & Grace

It's a double win for the downtown restaurant, which also takes home our Delicious Design award.

BY VALENTINA -- PHOTOS BY LAURA PETRILLA

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Although Grit & Grace is but one of the top-notch restaurants that opened here in 2013, it sets itself apart with imaginative cuisine and a polished interior. "Grit & Grace pushes opposites to the extreme to bring you the most unique and balanced dining experience Pittsburgh has to offer," summarizes the menu.

Executive Chef Brian Pekarck and Richard Stern, also owners of Spoon and BRGR, present Grit & Grace, which offers food that is "now," says Pekarck. "There has also been a really interesting trend of blending street food and upscale cuisine," he adds. "In addition, there's been a movement toward a more global cuisine where you can mix and match different influences."



The eatery's diverse menu provides a stimulating mix of flavors, textures and accents. Pekarcik playfully samples from various cuisines to create one interesting dish after another; each creation is remarkably cohesive. The bar menu is equally inventive, perfectly complementing the food. The scorpion is shareable, made in a single sharing bowl; the mai tai, featuring housemade ginger beer, comes in a retro tiki glass.

"In light of how many great restaurants emerged this year, I am truly humbled that we won Best New Restaurant," says Pekarcik. "Our success is about our amazing team, where everyone believed in the concept and philosophy. It has been a true collaboration of many people including Heather Perkins, our general manager; Nicole Battle, our restaurant manager; Curtis Gamble, our chef de cuisine from Chicago; and Stephen Brown, our sous chef, as well as many other people."



Grit & Grace also is the recipient of our 2014 Delicious Design award. Fukui Architects of Pittsburgh worked on the space, completely reformulating the interior. "We needed to begin by addressing the 'bones' of the

restaurant," says owner Felix Fukui. "We wanted to open up the space by revamping various components, such as relocating the bar, removing the wing walls and creating proper ceiling heights so that from the street customers could see the magical place inside." Although Fukui's firm has designed some larger spaces — including Tamari in the North Hills — he says his goal always is to break down restaurant spaces into small conversational areas.



Wooden panels and slats constructed by Pittsburgh Specialty Cabinet Co. are particularly elegant aspects of the Grit & Grace interior. They are used to create various curved and rectilinear features, including sensual, curved elements that span from the ceiling to the walls, as well as bar shelves and shadow boxes housing decorative objects. The carefully placed, sophisticated lighting fixtures cinch this restaurant's character as a chic place to be. "The best projects are always borne from good collaboration," says Fukui, "and we had a lot of great ideas from our design team and from [owners] Brian and Rick."