

GOOD FOOD

CHEF LEARNS TO CHANGE HATS, COLORS

Jeramie Robison juggles behind stoves in two restaurants

By GREG MORAGO
FOOD EDITOR

FOLKS in the restaurant business are used to wearing multiple hats. It comes with the territory.

But one of the most striking hat-changing switcheroos belongs to Jeramie Robison, who toggles daily between the upscale Cinq (the rechristened and newly hipsterized dining room in the stately La Colombe d'Or Hotel) and Zimm's Little Deck, a clever new smashup of bistro/ice house/po' boy shop. His dual role of chef at both kitchens requires him to ease back and forth between white tablecloth fare such as seared scallops with celery root puree at Cinq and casual Big Easy grub such as gumbo and oyster shooters at Zimm's.

If managing the menus and food at such different operations is giving Robison any upstairs/downstairs jitters, he's not showing it. In fact, the 27-year-old chef seems to be thriving on the pressure.

How does he do it? "Adapt like a lizard," said the amiable, soft-spoken and disarmingly polite chef. "You just change your colors."



NICK de la TORRE : STAFF

LET'S HEAR IT FOR THE BOY: Zimm's Little Deck's Casablanca rich boy sandwich is stuffed with leg of lamb.

Robison said he realizes that this type of opportunity — to create new menus at a Houston classic while also opening a cool new store — doesn't come a chef's way that often.

"I'm grabbing the reins and running with it. It's my shot."

That shot has come courtesy of brothers Dan and Mark Zimmerman, who tapped Robison to help them rebrand the La Colombe d'Or dining room as the hotel is marking its 30th anniversary. The brothers, sons of hotelier and restaurateur Steve

Zimmerman, also asked Robison to do double duty as chef of their first venture, Zimm's Little Deck, a charming new restaurant they've dubbed a "fancy icehouse and seafood bar." The long narrow room dominated by a generous bar and open kitchen is an inviting neighborhood spot where diners can savor a plate of char-grilled oysters and a bottle of chardonnay or a fried crawfish po' boy washed down with Chimay or Saint Arnold on tap.

"We want it to be a place

where people can come and just have a nice meal," said Mark Zimmerman, whose new place is a petanque ball's throw from mother Becky's Zimm's Martini & Wine Bar and the family's La Colombe d'Or.

Petanque? The brothers have made a petanque court that runs the length of Zimm's in case anyone wants to play the European game that is somewhat like Italian bocce.

The Petanque court is novel, but so is the menu. In addition to familiar po' boys (called poor boys on the menu), Zimm's also offers "rich boys," luxurious takes on the Louisiana sandwich. The "Bonaparte" is filled with grilled Merguez sausage, Madras onions and cumin-flavored aioli; the "Petite Lafitte" features fried oysters, sautéed beef tenderloin and red wine reduction; and "Casablanca" sports slow-roasted Moroccan leg of lamb with arugula and harissa aioli. In addition to a daily selection of oysters on the half shell, the chilled seafood offerings include crab claws, boiled



NICK de la TORRE : STAFF

CHEF JERAMIE ROBISON
ZIMM'S LITTLE DECK

601 Richmond
713-527-8328
zimmsslittledeck.com
Open Sundays-Thursdays from 10 a.m. to midnight; Fridays-Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 2 a.m.

CINQ AT LA COLOMBE D'OR

3410 Montrose Blvd.
713-524-7999
Open Mondays-Fridays from 11:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m. to close nightly.

shrimp, ceviche and shrimp remoulade.

Robison's culinary résumé includes Mansion on Turtle Creek in Dallas, Fishtail by David Burke in New York and Tesars in the Woodlands. The Zimmermans snagged Robison for an interview in May just as he was headed out of town to move to Austin after Tesars shuttered. "I had the U-Haul packed. If they had called an hour later . . ." Robison said.

Timing, clearly, is everything.

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BRETT COOMER : STAFF

JUST A TASTE: The duck tasting plate is shown at Cinq restaurant at La Colombe d'Or.



BRETT COOMER : STAFF

SCRUMPTIOUS: Braised short rib foie gras and luna ravioli with Parmesan monte at Cinq.