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Tropical Life

FIRST LOOK

This 'Top Chef' winner's new South Beach restaurant has foodies salivating

BY SARA LISS
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"Stubborn Seed is the result of pairing unrelenting passion with an unapologetic approach," touts the website for "Top Chef" winner Jeremy Ford's new solo project, one of the most anticipated openings of the fall season.

That's a lot of dramatic language, but the place has a lot of hype to live up to: Ford is one of the city's culinary stars. He left the lux Matador Room by Jean-Georges for a chance to shine on his own.

Plus, the restaurant is being bankrolled by the prestigious Grove Bay Hospitality Group, an outfit known for buttressing other local chefs with talent (Glass and Vine, Stiltville). Does it live up to the hype?

THE SPACE

The former Tiramisu space has been warmed up with dark woods, neo-industrial metal fixtures, toffee-colored chairs and pendant lighting, making the 74-seat space feel intimate and contemporary. A picture window frames the well-lit and bustling kitchen, giving diners an uninterrupted view of the chefs in action.

YOU'LL COME HERE WITH

A date who is into food and cocktails that may require tweezers to prepare. But there's



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plenty for the less-initiated epicureans to love, as well. Most dishes toggle between a look-at-me artistry and others simply go for the gut.

BE PREPARED TO EAT

Some of the most imaginative food in the city. The tasting menu consisting of eight courses (and priced at \$85) gives a great overview of the menu. But those with less stamina can opt for a la carte dishes priced at \$6-\$28 for starters and \$26-\$42 for mains.

Dinner starts with homemade bread topped with fennel pollen and served with a garbanzo chili dip. Then it's on to bites of "Hol-

low Potato" topped with caviar, paprika crème fraîche and salmon roe served on a white tree trunk pedestal.

A Hawaiian Kajiki fish is served with a spicy buttermilk dressing, sea grapes and Asian pear, while a vegetarian-friendly warm celery root comes with a "crackling" maitake mushroom and mustard froth. The smoked foie gras is presented dramatically with a glass dome cover, containing smoke and accompanied by Homestead boniato tortellini, marcona almond and spiced quince.

Larger courses include a Maine lobster in green curry and caramelized cauliflower and the Umami Short Rib, nestled in carrot puree and carrot foam along with trumpet mushrooms.

Pastry chef Dallas Wyne (formerly of Ariete) keeps the culinary fireworks going with dishes like the Corn Pavlova — corn custard topped with white meringue — and the Croustillant, a chocolate layer cake.

BOTTOM LINE

The cooking here is precious, lusty, ultramodern, rustic and above all ambitious; a welcome addition to the Miami dining scene.

First Look offers a preview of new area restaurants and is not intended to be an anonymous, critical review.