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Restaurant group plants its flag in Houston with True Food

By Greg Morago

When the Phoenix-based Fox Restaurant Concepts decided to enter the Houston market, it didn't just dip its toes in the waters of the city's dynamic dining scene, it jumped in. And on Tuesday the company is ready to make a splash with the grand opening of True Food Kitchen, a grand space for a fresh, healthy foods restaurant, the first tenant to open in Phase 2 of BLVD Place at 1700 Post Oak.

Not only is True Food Kitchen big - 4,500-square-foot space with nearly 150 seats inside and 60 on the patio - its razzle dazzle scale suggests Fox Restaurant Concept's designs on Houston. The company is readying the fall opening of North Italia (one of more than a dozen restaurant concepts in its portfolio) adjacent to True Food. Owner Sam Fox also said the company is actively looking for real estate in Houston to plant a second True Food and possibly another of its concepts.

"We felt Texas - in particular, Houston - is a great market," he said. "We like the activity, the people, the food scene. It's one of the No. 1 dining-out cities in the country. It's a perfect recipe for everything that we're doing."

Fox also said he thinks Houston is hungry for True Food, a restaurant that's been described as "good-for-you food without an in-your-face health message." The menu was developed in partnership with best-selling author and healthy living guru Dr. Andrew



Vegetable crudite served at True Food Kitchen, opening at Phase 2 of BLVD Place.

Weil. Called "honest food that tastes really good," the restaurant's menu offers dishes based on Weil's anti-inflammatory diet, featuring a wide selection of vegan, vegetarian and gluten-free options.

Serving lunch, dinner and weekend brunch, True Food offers items such as kale and avocado dip; edamame dumplings, vegetable crudite with tzatziki and black olive dips, Thai green papaya salad; "inside-out" quinoa burger; shiitake and tofu lettuce cups; red chile shrimp with sesame noodles; chicken tandoori kebabs; panang curry with brown rice; miso-glazed black cod with bok choy; grilled salmon with arugula, watercress, corn and tomato; and spaghetti squash casserole.

The restaurant also is known for its

menu of juices including Kale-Aid (kale, apple, cucumber, celery, lemon and ginger), Medicine Man (sea buckthorn, pomegranate, blueberry, cranberry and black tea), and Hangover Rx (Coconut water, pineapple, vanilla and orange juice). But not everything is on the healthy straight-and-narrow: an inviting bar serves beer, wine and cocktails.

Michael Sullivan, director of culinary standards for True Food, said everything in the restaurant is made in house. The large open kitchen and glass-fronted plating stations promotes the idea of transparency and honesty about the food being served. "We do it all in front of you. There's nothing going on in the back," he said.

Sullivan said Houston's True Food (the company's ninth store) will do



Michael Sullivan, True Food's director of culinary standards, says the restaurant will focus on fresh, locally and regionally sourced ingredients.

well, Sullivan said, because consumers will appreciate the restaurant's commitment to fresh, locally and regionally sourced ingredients; "they want to know about their food and what's in it and where it's coming from."

There also might be an appreciation for the company's eco-conscious policies. Chairs are made from recycled plastic bottles, the floor is reclaimed wood, and the ceiling is clad in wood from old barns.

Fox, oft-nominated by the James Beard Foundation for the nation's outstanding restaurateur, is known for his Midas touch with restaurant concepts. His portfolio includes multi-unit concepts such as Sauce Pizza & Wine, Zinburger Wine & Burger Bar, Culinary Dropout, and Blanco Tacos & Tequila.



Hangover RX is a beverage made of coconut water, pineapple, vanilla and orange juice.



Kale-Aid, made with kale, apple, cucumber, celery, lemon and ginger, left, is shown with Root & Remedy, made with beet, carrots, ginger, turmeric and honey lemonade.