

## Old Buildings are Good Business

As existing buildings represent around 98% of urban building stock, there is an imperative to address their performance, rather than simply focus on new build projects. It makes good business sense to give heritage buildings a new lease on life by adapting them to serve today's commercial demands.

Some of Houston's hottest restaurants are located in vintage structures. More and more cutting-edge eateries offer the latest culinary trends from behind the doors of delightful bungalows in the Heights or American Foursquares in Montrose. Upcoming restaurant transformations include the Tower Theater, a Midtown Art Deco icon, and its close neighbor, the classic Spanish Colonial-style building which once housed Felix Restaurant.

A sampling of popular watering holes housed in heritage buildings includes:

- **Feast**, 219 Westheimer Rd. Owned and operated by Richard Knight and James and Megan Silk, Feast is tucked into a restored wood-framed two-story house built at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on what is now lower Westheimer. The trio specializes in European-style meat dishes, particularly pork. Look for the sign of the pig.
- **Ocean's**, 819 W. Alabama St. Mexico City restaurateur Jorge Alvarez renovated this 1930s Tudor Revival Montrose house, which was most recently Bistro Vino, and, according to *Houston Modern Luxury* magazine, perhaps an ex-brothel at sometime in the past. Brother and chef Isaac Alvarez specializes in various types of ceviche and cuisine from Mexico's coastal areas.
- **Zelko Bistro**, 705 E. 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Chef Jamie Zelko, previously of the famed Bistro Lancaster, opened her own eatery in a cheerful little restored 1920s Heights bungalow. Specializes in locally-raised or caught, innovative cuisine



- **Uchi**, 904 Westheimer Rd. According to the real estate blog *Swamplot*, Tyson Cole, owner of the phenomenally successful Uchi in Austin, will open his Houston location in the rambling, white stucco edifice that housed Felix restaurant, Houston's late but still beloved Tex-Mex emporium. Slated for completion in late 2011, Austin restaurant designer Michael Hsu, who is responsible for Cole's two Austin restaurants as well as Sushi Raku in Houston, will design the renovation.



- **(To be named)**, 1201 Westheimer Rd. Also according to *Swamplot*, we're happy to report that the duo behind the wildly popular Reef, Little Bigs and Stella Sola, Bryan Caswell and Bill Floyd, will team with former *Houston Press* restaurant critic Robb Walsh to open an as-yet-un-named Tex-Mex establishment in January, 2011, in the old Tower Theatre. "We are both from Houston," Floyd says, "and are concerned about the situation with the River Oaks and Alabama theatres. We thought about trying to locate in either one of those but parking was scarce. The Tower has a great Midtown location and plenty of parking, plus we get the side benefit of saving a landmark building."

