



The excitement's on the plate.

An heirloom carrot salad celebrates the humble root vegetable.

Mona Reeder/Staff Photographer

At the Pyramid, André Natera's inspired cooking takes center stage

By **LESLIE BRENNER**
Restaurant Critic
lbrenner@dallasnews.com

Twenty years ago in New York, for a profile I was writing of David Bouley, one of that city's most revered chefs, I got to spend some time in the kitchen of his restaurant, Bouley. I watched as the chef passed from station to station inspecting the work his line cooks were performing. One cook was meticulously coaxing the skin off a tomato. Bouley stopped before him, displeased. "You're not *talking* to the tomato," he said.

I'm pretty sure André Natera, executive chef at the Pyramid Restaurant, talks to his tomatoes — and to his beets and carrots and scallops and duck and lamb. Otherwise, how would he know so surely and well what each ingredient

wants, and how to let each express its essence?

Natera's baby-beet salad is a case in point. With flavor that's at once intense and gentle, halved, perfectly cooked golden and red baby beets anchor a plate that's like a painting. A stripe of beet purée heightened with a dash of balsamic vinegar and strips of shaved raw beet show the other flavors a beet can express. Bits of firm local blue cheese add just the right sharp, rich counterpoint; toasted hazelnuts add earthy crunch.

How to celebrate the humble carrot? Natera tosses ribbons of orange and yellow heirloom varieties with a lovely tangle of frisée and arugula in a pitch-perfect roasted-onion vinaigrette and strews fried

capers about the plate. Nestled next to the salad, a quartet of adorable sushilike rolls swap shaved carrot for seaweed and fresh, local goat cheese for rice. Clever, unusual, pretty and delicious, the salad makes a wonderful starter.

So does a dish of fragile gyoza wrappers filled with foie gras; they're steamed and set in a bit of gingery chicken broth scented with lemon grass, Thai basil and cilantro. Bite into one, and you get a voluptuous explosion of flavor. The Asian accent of the sauce is completely unexpected with the foie, and sort of brilliant.

I love the texture of a briquette of sweetbreads set atop a ragout of maitake, beech and shiitake mushrooms with

