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Review: Levi Goode steps out from Goode Company with a striking addition to Houston dining

With Credence, the chef and restaurateur expands on his family's legacy with upscale dining inspired by his Texas roots.
Video: Elizabeth Conley Houston Chronicle

By **Bao Ong** , *Restaurant Critic*
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Credence | | Texas-inspired cuisine | 9757 Katy Freeway, Suite 170 | 713-568-2525

Beginning in the 1980s, Goode Company BBQ drew fans with whole ducks smoked in garlic, ginger, fresh rosemary, orange marmalade and honey. By the mid-2010s, despite its sweet-spicy appeal, the dish had grown too costly and vanished from the menu.

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At Levi Goode 's Credence in the Memorial area , money is no longer a barrier. Here, a whole dry-aged duck runs $150, designed for sharing much like the $220 Tre-roasted seafood tower. That showpiece arrives heaped with Alaskan king crab, littleneck clams and Gulf Coast shellTsh, anchoring the menu's "For the Table" section.

The dry-age "sweetwater" whole duck is served tableside at Credence.
Annie Mulligan / Contributor

Each bird arrives from Hudson Valley, N.Y., prized for its rich \avor. The kitchen trims the legs, slowly conTting them to a silky Tnish, while the breast is dry-aged for a week before taking its turn over mesquite and post oak embers . Presented tableside on a mahogany trolley, the duck makes a dramatic entrance. A knife snaps through the lacquered skin, revealing blush-pink meat beneath. The bird is brushed with a sweet tea glaze that balances sugar and vinegar, and it's plated with dirty rice and bitter greens.

The duck is a showstopper, emblematic of Credence's ambition. Owner Levi Goode may be best known for his family's barbecue, Tex-Mex and Gulf Coast restaurants , but here he carves out something different: a restaurant that honors Texas roots while aiming for reTnement. Just over a year in, Credence already makes a compelling case for Goode as not only an heir to a dynasty but also a chef-restaurateur building a legacy of his own.

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Pan de campo with Benton's country ham at Credence
Annie Mulligan/Contributor

The hearth dominates the dining room, its \ames \icking upward beneath soaring 24-foot ceilings. From the rafters of the 12-foot grill, ducks sway alongside Tsh carcasses, leeks, carrots and onions, each ingredient slowly absorbing the kiss of smoke.

Live-Tre cooking isn't novel in Houston, but for Levi Goode it feels instinctual, the way others reach for a stovetop knob. It's a tradition rooted in camping, hunting and Tshing trips, and reinforced by his father, Jim Goode, who founded the family's restaurant empire in 1977 and once competed in chuck wagon cook-offs across Texas and the Southwest

Pan de campo, also called cowboy bread depending on who you ask, brings that heritage into focus. At Credence, the state bread of Texas — the legislature gave it the ofTcial designation in 2005 — resembles a plump \atbread instead of a dense, crumbly dough that's traditionally cooked in a dutch oven or cast iron pan.

Goode offers it two ways. The vegetarian version layers buttery pan de campo with earthy mushrooms and smooth queso, accented by pea tendrils and a touch of chile morita. It's vibrant, balanced and unexpectedly reTned. The alternative, topped with Benton's country ham, leans salty and smoky. Both succeed, but the meatless option allows the bread, and Goode's reverence for tradition, to shine brightest.

Deviled crabs at Credence
Annie Mulligan/Contributor

Another standout dish at Credence is its take on deviled crab, among the best I've tasted in Houston. Beneath a veil of smoky tomato butter lies sweet, tender jumbo blue crab meat so rich I found myself scraping every last crevice of the shell.

To dig deeper into the restaurant's Texas roots, try the parisa. It's a clever, more compelling riff on steak tartare: diced beef cubes, lightly smoked, then folded with aged cheddar, serrano peppers and a cured egg yolk. The dish nods to the German and Czech traditions of Central Texas while delivering something distinctly Goode's own.

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Cornbread gnocchi, left, and pork rib chop schnitzel at Credence.
Annie Mulligan / Contributor

Credence may nod to Texas history, but its setting is anything but rustic. The dining room glows in emerald green, accented with gold and white, its soaring space anchored by a circa 1870s butcher's rack hung with antique cleavers. A martini cart glides through the lounge at the base of the luxury high-rise, reinforcing the sense of polish and spectacle.

That attention to detail extends next door to Sidebar, a speakeasy-style hideaway accessible only by code. The room goes dark and moody, with live music Thursday through Saturday. But the nearly $30 martinis and an underwhelming burger don't measure up to their price tags. The better choice is back inside Credence, where the oyster bar offers sharper value and a more memorable expression of the restaurant's strengths.

Chef Frank Hernandez shaves tru`es on cornbread gnocchi at Credence.
Annie Mulligan/Contributor

From the oyster bar, diners get a close-up of the open kitchen. Joseph Geiskopf led during the restaurant's launch, and today chef Frank Hernandez oversees the line. Watching the cooks work the hearth is part of the appeal. I've seen a loin of tuna seared with precision, then set over creamy white beans sparked with salsa verde. It's a generous plate for one, though better shared if you're saving room for the pork rib chop schnitzel.

The Trst time I tried this dish, it was the size of an entire plate. On another visit, it was sliced to share with a larger party. The breading delivers a crisp, golden crunch that eagerly soaks up caper brown butter. On its own, it could anchor a meal, especially alongside heirloom blue crab fried rice or hearth-roasted cabbage glossed in lemon-chile butter.

Still, no meal at Credence feels complete without dessert. I've returned again and again to the buttermilk soft serve, its cloudlike texture laced with a subtle tang. Roasted blueberries, blistered brie\y by Tre, add just enough sweetness. It's a deceptively simple Tnale, one I'd argue outshines the Brazos Bottom Texas Pecan Pie, the Goode Company's signature best-seller and a cherished family recipe from Goode's grandmother, an immigrant from Mexico.

The pie may be rooted in Texas lore, but the soft serve signals Goode forging a new chapter that rivals, and perhaps surpasses, the past.

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Bao Ong is a restaurant critic for the Houston Chronicle.

He moved to Houston in summer 2022 and in his Rrst year as a restaurant

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Managing Editors organization. He previously worked on staU at Eater New York, Bon Appétit and Time Out New York. In addition to Bao's background in journalism, he
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