

## RETAIL HUB

### TOP CHEFS

# 12 Houston-area restaurants, chefs make 2018 James Beard Award semifinalist list

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The James Beard Foundation has announced the semifinalists for its 28th annual awards, and several Houston-area chefs and restaurants earned a spot.

In total, 12 local eateries – or their chefs or restaurateurs – were named semifinalists across seven categories for James Beard Awards, according to a press release. Chef Hugo Ortega, who won the Best Chef in the Southwest category last year, and his concepts had a strong showing this year.

Here's who made the semifinalist list:

- ▶ **Xochi** for Best New Restaurant. Chef Hugo Ortega and his wife, restaurateur Tracy Vaught, opened the concept on the ground floor of the Marriott Marquis on Jan. 30, 2017.
- ▶ **Hugo's** for Outstanding Service. Ortega's Mexican restaurant opened in 2002 and has won numerous awards, per its website.
- ▶ **Tracy Vaught** of H Town Restaurant Group for Outstanding Restaurateur. Vaught and Ortega own Hugo's, Caracol, Xochi, Backstreet Café and Origen. She was a 2017 HBJ Women Who Means Business honoree. This is the third year she has been a semifinalist in this category.

**Hugo Ortega and his wife and business partner, Tracy Vaught. Two of their concepts — Xochi and Hugo's — along with Vaught herself made the semifinalist list for the 2018 James Beard Awards.**



ERIC KAYNE/HBJ

- ▶ **Anvil Bar & Refuge** for Outstanding Bar Program. Bobby Heugel's bar has won numerous accolades and has been named a semifinalist in the James Beard Awards since 2013.
- ▶ **Pappas Bros. Steakhouse** for Outstanding Wine Program. The Pappas family has three locations of this concept. It's the only Houston restaurant ever to have received Wine Spectator's Grand Award — the highest accolade in the magazine's annual Restaurant Awards.
- ▶ **Jillian Bartolome** of Aqui for Outstanding Pastry Chef. The restaurant is led by controversial chef and 2012 James Beard Award-winner Paul Qui. Aqui opened in August.
- ▶ **Martha De Leon** of Pax Americana for Rising Star Chef of the Year. She was promoted from chef de cuisine to executive chef in February 2017 after Adam Dorris left the concept. Dorris was part of the team that opened the restaurant in 2014.

Additionally, chefs from five local concepts were nominated for the Best Chef Southwest category including:

- ▶ **Ross Coleman** and **James Haywood** of Kitchen 713. Located at 4601 Washington Ave. #130.
- ▶ **Anita Jaisinghani** of Pondicheri. Located at 2800 Kirby Drive, Suite B132.
- ▶ **Ronnie Killen** of Killen's Steakhouse. Located at 6425 W. Broadway St. in Pearland.
- ▶ **Trong Nguyen** of Crawfish & Noodles. Located at 11360 Bellaire Blvd #990.
- ▶ **Ryan Pera** of Coltivare. Located at 3320 White Oak Drive.

Semifinalists were selected from over 20,000 online submissions for 21 different categories, per the release. The finalists will be named on March 14, and winners will be announced at the James Beard Foundation Awards Gala in Chicago on May 7.

The James Beard Awards were first given out in 1990. The James Beard Foundation is a New York-based nonprofit founded in 1986 in honor of James Beard, a cookbook author, television personality and teacher.

### MOLTO BUONO

## Luxe Italian furniture store opens in West Ave

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Casa, a high-end Italian furnishings and finishes design store, opened on Feb. 17 at West Avenue.

The store, which is the brainchild of Jerry Hooker and Jacob Sudhoff, inked a 9,170-square-foot lease in the mixed-use development, according to a spokesperson. Around 6,000 square feet of the space was formerly occupied by Nara Sushi & Korean Kitchen, which closed in January 2015.

Brett Madden, a national retail leasing consultant with Gables Residential, represented the landlord and Sudhoff represented Casa in the lease, according to a spokesperson. West Ave's retail occupancy is now at around 90 percent, according to Madden.

A building permit associated with the build out of Casa was filed with the city of Houston

by Scott and Reid General Contractors and indicates construction costs were \$315,000.

The store will be open to the public but cater to developers, builders, designers, architects, hoteliers and homeowners, according to press materials.

The store will feature products from Italian brands, many of which have never been in Houston, such as Giorgetti, Poltrona Frau, Listone Giordano, Rimadesio, Elam Kitchens by Tisetanta, Viabizzuno and Tacchini.

Sudhoff is CEO and founder of Houston-based Sudhoff Cos. and Hooker is a principal and architect at Mirador Group. The duo is also behind Giorgetti Houston, the first luxury branded condo project in the Bayou City.

The condos, named after the 120-year-old Italian furniture maker Giorgetti, are set to break ground in March at 2701 Steel St. in the Upper Kirby area.



**Jerry Hooker, left, with Jacob Sudhoff with a chair made by Italian furniture maker Giorgetti.**

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