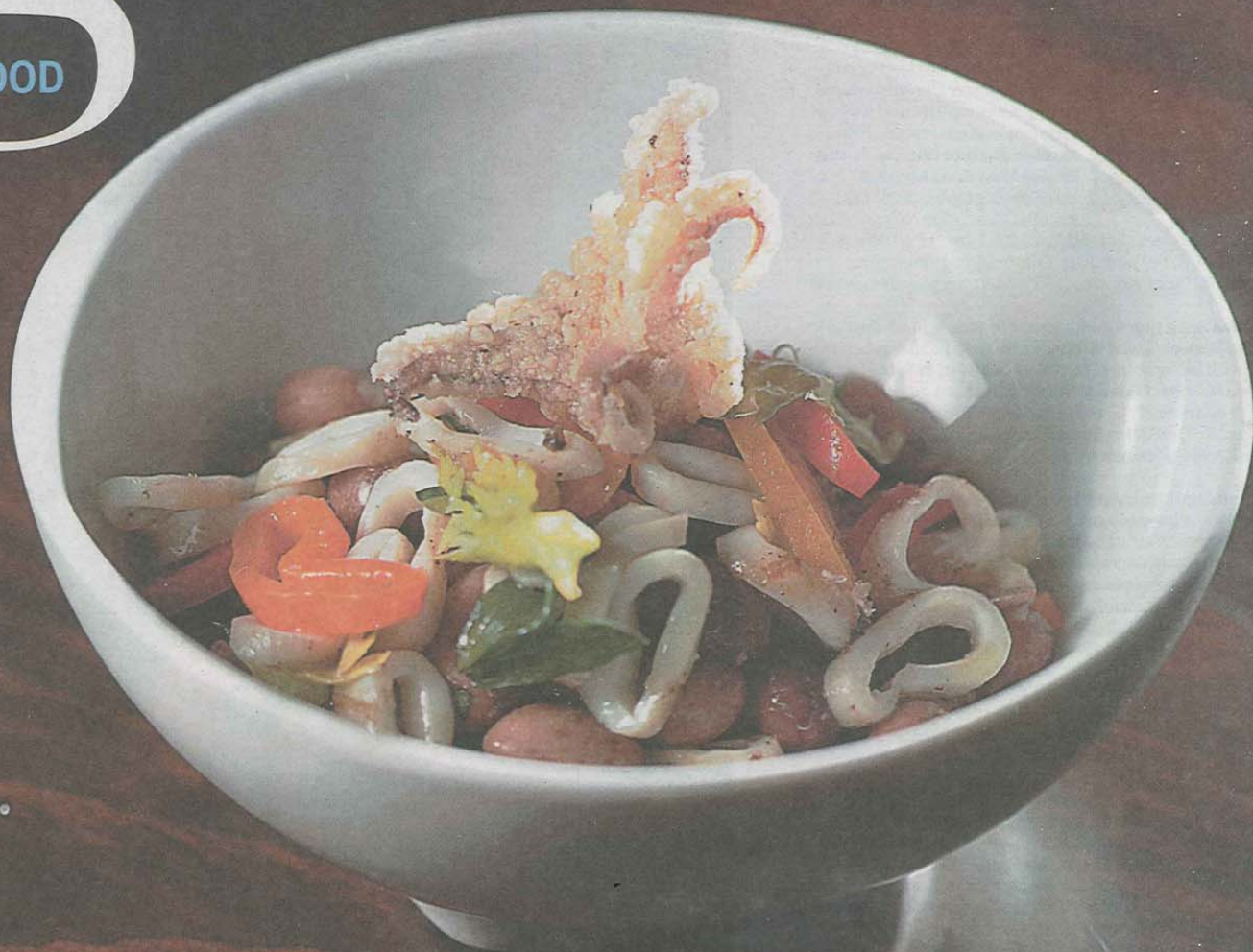


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FOOD

JODY ADAMS



OPENS WITH A FLOURISH

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ONE MIGHT BET ON STOCK



IN TRADE

Signs would suggest that Jody Adams's new restaurant has what it takes to be a continuing success BY DEVRA FIRST | GLOBE STAFF

cover story | dining out

WHEN JODY ADAMS began working as a line cook at Seasons in the Bostonian Hotel, it was 1983. The notion of celebrity chefs barely existed. Had you told her she might one day be considered one, she might have stopped working just long enough to laugh.

Today, Adams has appeared on the Bravo show "Top Chef Masters," won prestigious awards, and written a cookbook. Some celebrity chefs seem in it for the celebrity. Adams is not among them. She hasn't spread herself thin with multiple establishments or tried to establish a presence in other cities. Since 1994, she has faithfully run Rialto in Cambridge's Charles Hotel, maintaining a high level of food and hospitality. In the summer months, the chef herself might be spotted selecting tomatoes at the adjacent farmers' market.

Thus it was news when Adams announced she would open a second restaurant, teaming with partners Eric Papa-christos and former Rialto general manager Sean Griffing. Trade opened in the middle of October, on the Greenway in downtown Boston. Where Rialto is subdued and elegant, even occasionally somnolent, Trade is stylish, filled with energy, and incredibly loud. Adams has gone from a whisper to a scream. Mobbed at lunch and dinner, the new place has been an instant hit. But it's the backbone of humility Adams brings to the proceedings — the sense that, beyond the buzz, the point remains a high level of food and hospitality — that makes Trade likely to be a continuing success.

Executive chef Andrew Hebert, formerly of Rialto, runs the kitchen; he and Adams collaborate on a menu inspired by travel. Flavors are mainly Mediterranean, with Asian touches. This avoids the boring same-same of many Boston restaurants. To be sure, the ever-present squid appetizer, beet salad, flatbreads, and short rib main course are present and accounted for. But preparation and presentation set them apart.

Particularly distinguished are the small plates, each bearing a few bright bites. Pomegranate-glazed eggplant with capers, olives, and pine nuts is sweet, salty, and earthy. For a similar idea with Thai flavors, avocado comes dressed in a chutney of green mango, tamarind, and peanuts. The first time I sample the dish, each taste

comes in just the right proportion, and the effect is gustatory fireworks. The second time, it's merely tasty. A few degrees make a big difference.

Fried oysters are an inspired pairing with buckwheat waffles, maple syrup, and sour cream — a homier version of blini and caviar, the dish would be perfect with a glass of bubbly. A cool ceviche of Nantucket bay scallops gets a blast of flavor from kaffir lime salt. And that omnipresent squid appetizer is one of Trade's best dishes: grilled rings and fried tentacles are tossed with mouthwatering sweet-sour

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TRADE

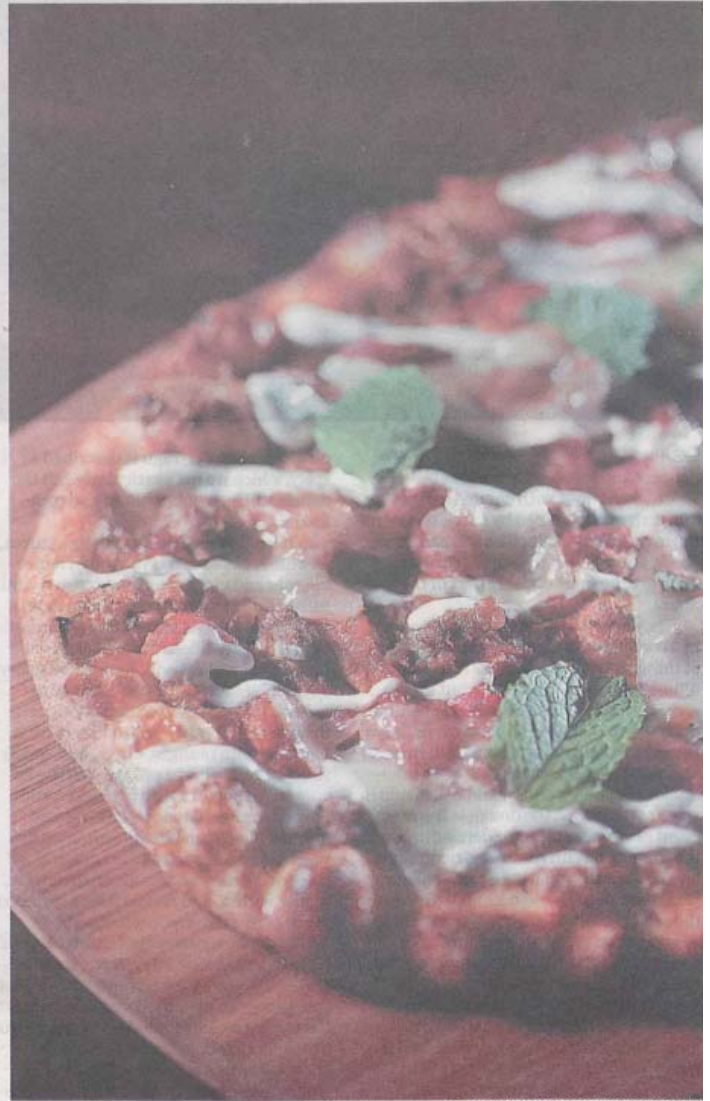
★★★

540 Atlantic Ave., Boston. 617-451-1234. www.trade-boston.com. All major credit cards accepted. Wheelchair accessible.

Prices Small plates \$8-\$15. Flatbreads \$11-\$16. Entrees \$16-\$31. Desserts \$8-\$9.
Hours Dinner Sun 5:30-9 p.m. (bar menu until 10), Mon-Thu 5:30-10 p.m. (bar menu until 11), Fri-Sat 5:30-11 p.m. (bar menu until midnight). Lunch Mon-Fri 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. (afternoon menu until 5:30).

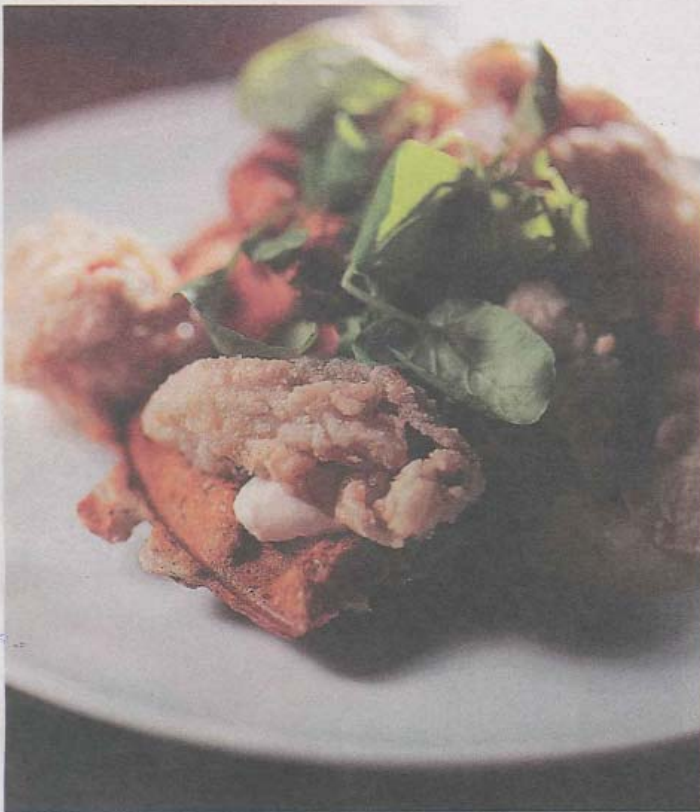
Noise level Very loud.

May we suggest Squid with borlotti beans, pomegranate-glazed eggplant, rosemary and ricotta salata flatbread, lamb sausage flatbread, whole roast fish, Brussels sprouts.



PHOTOS BY YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Opposite: pan-fried Brussels sprouts served with a romesco sauce of roasted peppers and nuts. Above: a lamb sausage flatbread.



Continued from preceding page

peppers and just-tender borlotti beans.

Chicken confit with curried carrots, a dull dish overwhelmed by curry, is now off the menu. They can't all be winners. But, really, almost all of the small plates are. They are the most exciting part of the menu.

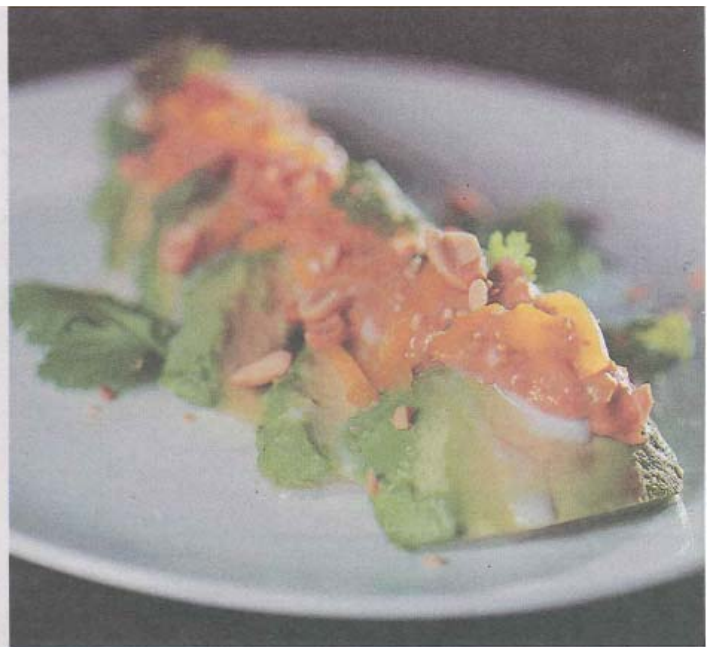
They are also the most expensive part, in a cost-per-bite analysis, and if this sort of thing puts you off, look to Trade's more-filling flatbreads. The restaurant makes great use of the Wood Stone oven behind the bar ("the Cadillac of pizza ovens," says Hebert), blasting everything from these to pasta dishes to littleneck clams. The flatbreads are chewy, crusty, and blackened in spots at the edges; the dough is the main event or supporting actor depending on the toppings. With rosemary, ricotta salata, and sea salt, you have a minimalist's pizza, wonderfully elemental (if pushing the salt envelope slightly). The crust is just as good as an underpinning for lamb sausage, eggplant, roasted peppers, manchego cheese, mint, and drizzles of garlic-yogurt. A flatbread topped with mushrooms, figs, gorgonzola, sage pesto, and walnuts is too busy, however, and the musty flavor of sage dominates.

Lamb appears again in a ragu atop rigatoni with provolone. The pasta attains crispness and chew in the hot-as-Hades oven — almost too much so, as it borders

on toughness. The ragu is described as spicy, which it's not particularly, but the dish is still hearty, bubbling, and comforting.

There are more delicate main courses, as well. A whole fish is rubbed in lemongrass and ginger chutney, roasted, and finished with pesto that contains mint, cilantro, and basil, wonderfully fragrant. Grilled lobster doesn't fare as well — it tastes like smoke, acrid, tough, and generally unpleasant; there's not enough artichoke flavor in the accompanying artichoke aioli. Tender braised short rib is matched with oranges, olives, and earthy sunchokes, a vibrant palette. But the flavors fail to pop in a dish of chicken with burned orange, dates, pistachios, and quinoa. Plates can be supplemented by vegetable sides, such as the addictive pan-fried Brussels sprouts, crisp outside, tender within, and served with a romesco sauce of roasted peppers and nuts.

For dessert, pastry chef Sarah Cravedi's baked Alaskas look impressive, their meringue exteriors toasted nutty brown. But the pomegranate-lemon sorbet within is too icy; ice cream would be a better foil for the shell. Ginger ice cream with chili-chocolate sauce and pistachios is a less-compelling presentation with more-satisfying flavors. A budino made with Taza chocolate is enhanced by savory accents — sea salt, rosemary, and hazelnut wafers.



PHOTOS BY YOON S. BYUN/GLOBE STAFF

Clockwise from above left: fried oysters with buckwheat waffles, maple syrup, and sour cream; avocado in a chutney of mango, tamarind, and peanuts; squid with sweet-sour peppers and borlotti beans.

Trade has a booming bar scene, and the place is even louder and busier than usual after work, when the business crowd floods in. Bartending can be uneven: One night the Man With No Name (tequila, grapefruit, agave, soda, and lime) is a balanced, more-elegant cousin to the margarita, but the proportions are off in a Kingston Negroni, made with rum instead of gin. The wine list is divided into New World and Old World selections, with the bulk of bottles in the \$40s and \$50s, and a few exceeding the \$100 mark. (It may once have been possible to scry a restaurant's desired audience — business or pleasure — in the balance of wine list price points. Not so in financially humbled 2012.)

The glass list includes two keg wines from the Gotham Project. The riesling is

particularly delightful, fresh and crisp. We try it at the recommendation of a server, who is well schooled in the food and drink here. In the dining area of the restaurant, we encounter friendly, good-humored, and knowledgeable service. This isn't always the case at the door. On more than one occasion, we are met with a lackadaisical attitude.

Systems here are still being refined. Because Trade is often so crowded, one sometimes winds up having to wait for a reserved table, and the food is better on some visits than others. It's as if a high-pitched whistle sounded when the place opened its doors, summoning restaurant-goers as a pack. The attractions are clear: The space is beautiful, open and airy, with huge windows, whitewashed brick, and a firmament of twinkling glass pendant lights suspended above the marble bar. When the crowds are under control, eating here feels celebratory. At peak times, the scene is more hectic than some may find pleasant — particularly those interested in audible conversation.

Trade is often spoken of in the same breath as Legal Harborside, Temazcal, and other new restaurants on the South Boston waterfront. But it's on the other side of the channel, near South Station and the Financial District (and across from the former Occupy Boston site, which for a time gave pangs to 99 percenters heading in for tiny \$11 portions of clams). Geographically and spiritually, it's closer to RADIUS than to Liberty Wharf. For business lunches and post-work outings, Trade is already a standby. A celebrity chef can pull in patrons. It takes hard work and great food to keep them.

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