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Table Talk: Dining at former gas stations

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It's totally counterintuitive to romanticize eating in a gas station or repair shop. But that's exactly what **Rusty Taco** does – to the point of installing new, rolling bay doors at the former Mobil station turned Just Brakes on Greenville at University.

"It's not intuitive, and that makes it fun," says general manager **Nickie Molaire**.

Architect [William Baker](#) helped Molaire and owner **Rusty Fenton** re-imagine the brand-new spot as a gas-station-nostalgia taco bar. So the bay doors work. The colors are from the original Mobil design. It's tricked out with stuff from Grainger Industrial Supply. And the fluorescent lights above the pump island (now patio seating) have been restored to their original glow.

Rusty Taco isn't the only outfit to create a restaurant from the ruins of an old garage or service station. It's become positively trendy. And once you get past the cheap-shot puns – *talk about a greasy spoon* – there's something more as to why.

"We loved the bones, the structure of the building," says **Bolsa** co-owner **Christopher Zielke**, whose restaurant on Davis used to be the Settles Garage. "We loved the idea of taking something old and making it new again."

His team got a little help. Landlord **David Spence**, who goes around rehabbing old buildings in and around the Bishop Arts area, had already cleaned up the shell. The original bay doors stayed put and became part of the facade.

Lots about these automotive relics make them appealing to restaurateurs. "A restaurant typically looks for visibility," Zielke says, "and they were built for high visibility ... so motorists could see them from far away." They tend to have space around them, which solves the parking headache, adds architect Baker, and you couldn't afford to build a free-standing taco stand today.

Baker also helped pull **Ellerbe Fine Foods** from the ruins of a gas station in Fort Worth. "We weren't playing up the automotive past," he says. "It was more of a backdrop. ... A lot of the original structure shows through."

"Diners can sit under the skylight where the guys fixed cars," says Ellerbe co-owner [Richard King](#). (Think about it: When it was built in the 1920s, daylight was the best light.)

Larry Settles, whose dad built Settles Garage in 1947, sold the place to Spence a few years ago. Its reincarnation as Bolsa thrills him. "It's fantastic," he says. "It feels like home to me." Talk about eating up

car-shop nostalgia.

Juicy bites

•**Rusty Taco** (see accompanying story) opened earlier this week. Chef **Cary Boudreau**, most recently at [Trader Vic's](#), wraps house-made corn tortillas around fillings such as tempura-battered fish and chipotle crema, slow-roasted brisket, and chicken simmered in ranchero sauce.

4802 Greenville Ave. (at University), Dallas. 214-613-0508. www.therustytaco.com.

•Former [Rosewood Mansion on Turtle Creek](#) executive chef **John Tesar**, who started his own restaurant last year in The Woodlands, is back in Dallas. After parting ways with his namesake spot, he has signed on as culinary director for DRG Concepts, which owns **Dallas Fish Market**, **Dallas Chop House**, **Go Fish Ocean Club** and **Fish Express**. His duties include working on new concepts with corporate chef **Anupam "AJ" Joglekar**. The smart money is on his own new concept.

•**Agave Azul Mexican Kitchen and Tequila Bar**, which stocks more than 200 tequilas, has opened an outpost in Flower Mound. Same menu in the restaurant and bar as the Carrollton original.

1141 Flower Mound Road, Flower Mound. 817-602-6435. www.theagaveazul.com.

•**Geisha House**, which opened last year at the Gables Villa Rosa, has closed.

Kim Pierce is a Dallas freelance writer.