

The Moment

WOMEN'S FASHION MEN'S FASHION DESIGN FOOD TRAVEL

FOOD October 23, 2009, 11:46 AM

Now Serving | Travertine's Grilled Quail

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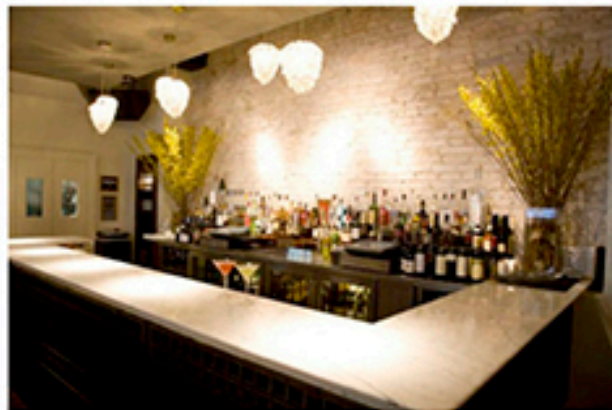
The dining room at Travertine, Danae Cappelletto's new restaurant.

It doesn't take much to get New York food writers excited about a new restaurant. They swarm around it as if it were some sort of gladiator event, to either hail the winner or laugh as the lions eat it alive. But the games feed the excitement — and the anticipation.

Travertine, the NoLiTa restaurant named for the tufo used to build the greatest of gladiator stadiums, was [long anticipated](#). Conceived more than two years ago, it finally found a home last year at 19 Kenmare Street. But that was just the beginning.

Did Danae Cappelletto, the successful Australian restaurateur behind it, know that the space was cursed? Tenants who cycled through after the century-old Little Charlie's Clam Bar closed in 2007 have included Ivan Kane and the Forty Deuce, Chris Eddy and his noodle house, and Compas, a Mexican live-poetry house/restaurant.

News of Cappelletto's (successful) liquor-license battle was followed by news of her chef, Manuel Treviño, whose resume includes Le Cirque 2000, Babbo and Dos Caminos. Memo, as he's known, also happens to be a bit of a celebrity chef: he's the guy who manned the pasta station while Bill Buford stepped on his feet in "Heat." Treviño is also the August photo on the latest "Top Chef" calendar. (He was a contestant on Season 4.)



Travertine's rather hard-won bar.

Cappelletto then hired Nancy Nienberg (Wunderground) and Damon Liss to redesign the space and drive out the ghosts of 19 Kenmare's past. They gave it a warm charm, with crystal chandeliers, dark wood and vintage leather.

When it came to opening, Travertine cried wolf. All of the above helps explain why New Yorkers were hungry for the restaurant's eventual opening on September 29. (Eater.com's Lockhart Steele listed it as his most-looked-forward-to opening here on [The Moment](#).)

The biggest hurdles are yet to come. There will be the expected kinks to iron out, and then the crowds — including the critics — to impress. But the food speaks for itself. There is a reason Treviño has had a successful career. His Mediterranean food is simple yet elegant, and he is said to have a way with pastas, which currently include pappardelle with rabbit ragu, gnocchi with braised pork shoulder, squid-ink spaghetti alla chitarra with a blue crab sauce. His pig's-head terrine has already been praised.

Last Wednesday, Treviño spent some time showing me how to make his grilled Vermont quail entrée, which is served with mushroom caponata, polenta and fig jam. Below is the recipe. I adapted it for the home cook: instead of sautéing each of the caponata ingredients separately, as Treviño does, I combine this step. The fig jam, though delicious, can be replaced with store-bought or eliminated. The great thing about learning to make this dish is that each part can stand alone. But together, they are delicious.

Let the games begin.

