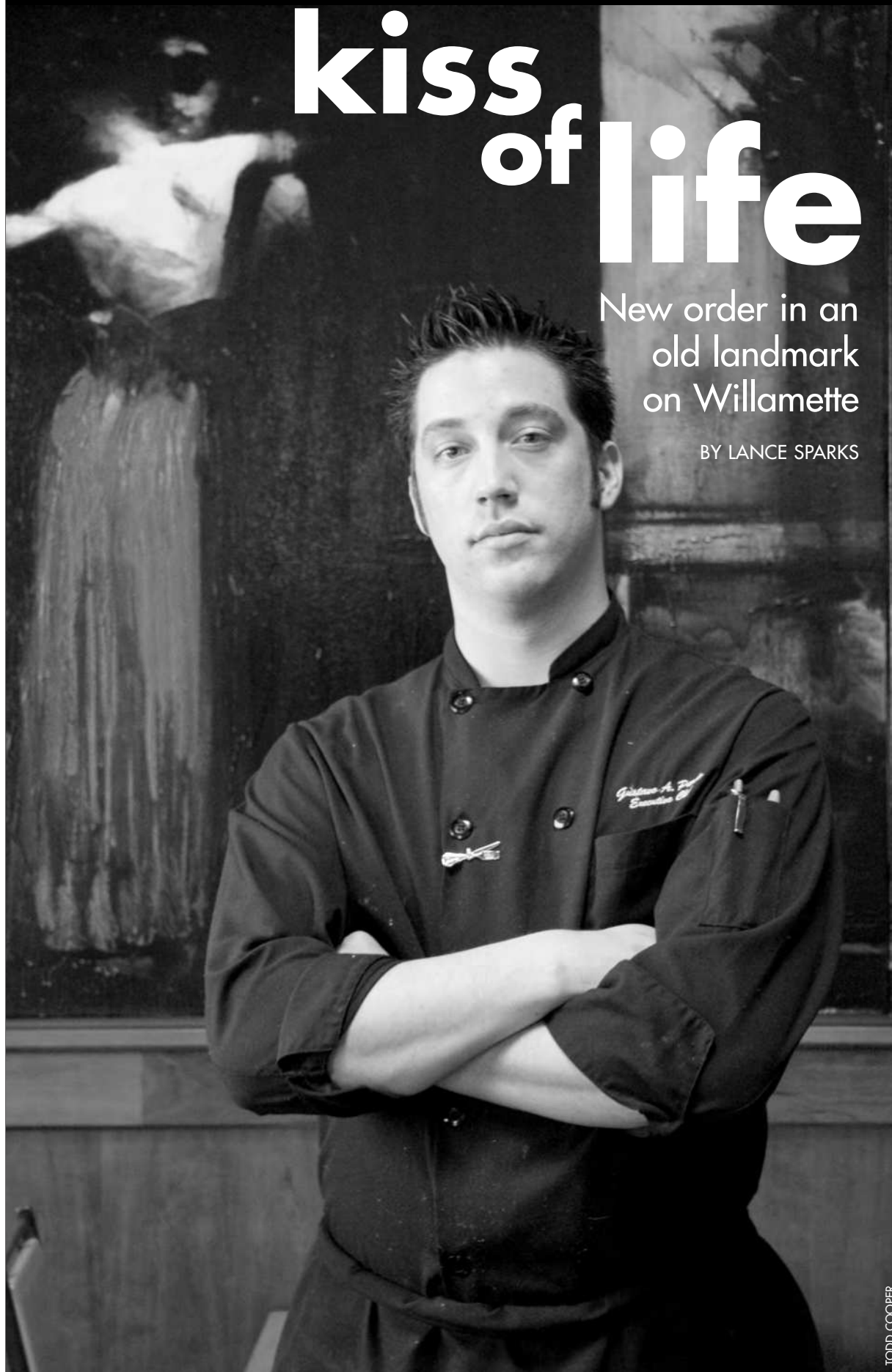


# kiss of life

New order in an  
old landmark  
on Willamette

BY LANCE SPARKS



TODD COOPER

**C**an a restaurant reincarnate itself and absolve the sins of its previous life? Can it rise again from the ashes of its own — figuratively speaking — self-immolation? Seems like recent events at Triomphe/Bel Ami/Midtown soon might offer a case study for such intriguing queries.

Fact is, restaurant guests are harsh and hasty judges: One bad experience — a mediocre meal, snarky service — and they're gone, rarely to return. Worse, they'll often rush to tell seven friends about their terrible treatment. Repeat such reports only a few times and the word spreads like brushfire. The restaurant declines and soon dies. Sometimes the demise is so grim that a reputation lingers around a place for years.

Just a few years ago, after gutting a cherished landmark (the old L&L Market on Willamette), the then-owners of Triomphe invested lavishly in remodeling the space, aiming at a kind of hospitality mall: coffeehouse, bakery, fine-dining restaurant with nice touches of décor and an ambitious menu. Then almost immediately began a series of nasty conflicts, first a squabble over parking that nearly led to a fence between Triomphe and the venerable Newman's Fish Market next door. Shoppers at Newman's had their cars towed from the Triomphe lot. Resentments built up. Worse yet, diners began bad-rapping: dull food, snitty service, grumpy management, oppressive atmosphere. Soon, there were plenty of open parking places, no need for a fence.

About six months ago, Roscoe Devine — a widely respected businessman with a deep affection for good food and good wine — bought out the previous ownership and began to transform Triomphe into Midtown Market. Devine brought in new management with deep restaurant experience (manager Jeff Paserotti), made space for a lively wine shop (Midtown Wines with Tim Shimmel), hired a skilled service staff (headed by Rachel Largent), added a deli and, most importantly, found a talented young chef with a passion for food. Enter Chef Gustavo Adolfo Pardo III.

We met on a balmy winter's day at Oakway Starbucks, the weather so warm we could sit comfortably outdoors, the air sweet despite Coburg traffic. Chef Pardo is young, not yet 25. He wore jeans, a white T-shirt, funky kicks, his black hair spiky. His dark eyes are lively and animated; he smiles quickly and easily. Right now, his life is sweet. He and his "soon-to-be fiancée" have bought a house and have been shopping for rings. A lot of their happiness and confidence centers on the successful rebirth of the restaurant where he plies his art, Triomphe reborn as Bel Ami.

Gustavo Adolfo Pardo III will be the first to admit that it's been a long, strange trip to get to here from there. *There* began in Beverly Hills, Calif., but Gustavo was only two months old when his family moved to Mexico City; Gustavo Adolfo Pardo II was an urbane native of the city and wanted to return home. Gustavo Third spent his first six years growing



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