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To Live & Dine in Atlanta

by J.Baker, K.Bell, W.Litter, K.McLaughlin, H.Philbrick, L.Salzberg, D.Seit, K.Skinner | [The Atlantian \(the-atlantian\)](#) magazine | June 28, 2011

In honor of the chefs and eateries that exemplify the Southern spirit, we dedicate this issue to the tastes of our city. The following pages are packed with all the insider info on local cuisine—including the newest restos, up and comers, eye candy for foodies and under-the-radar stars—as we pay homage to our gourmards. Whether it be a vibrant plate of sushi, a French classic or chocolate stuffed with artisanal ricotta that piques your palate, our local chefs don't hold back on flavor. When it comes to craving something delicious, you're in the right place. Forks up! Chow down.

Best Restaurant

Since last summer's unveiling of this bocce court-bourbon bar-resto, we've only grown fonder of the Hugh Acheson-Ryan Smith collab. Decked in woody rusticity, this ethereal hideaway is the perfect oasis for a leisurely supper or a slow-sipping get-together. Rooted heartily in the traditions of the South, every farm-to-table concoction is a study in vibrant flavor. Whether you're forking into the savory Riverview pork loin, the roasted pheasant breast with white Russian kale or the joyously delicious soft-poached farm egg, one thing's for certain: As we say down here, Empire State South is the bee's knees. 999 Peachtree St., 404.541.1105, [empirestatesouth.com](#) ([http://empirestatesouth.com](#))

Trifecta

They say three's a charm. And the dynamic trio Todd Mussman, Ryan Turner and Chris Hall would agree. They're the geniuses behind **Local Three**, a temple to local and seasonal cuisine that delivers artisanal libations, intelligent wine offerings and damn tasty food. Who can go wrong with a duck-meatloaf sub "sammich" lacquered in blue cheese, barbecue lamb sliders with cucumber-feta slaw, or a ridiculously rich lobster spaghetti drizzled in uni butter and spring peas? Dessert brings small from-scratch "tastes" of classics we love: s'mores, Snickers bars and moon pies. Addictive sides (candied bacon) and addictive snacks (truffled Parmesan popcorn) pop up all over the menu, so just come hungry. This is food to lust for, and the atmosphere of playful casualness belies the ambitious menu. 3290 Northside Pkwy., 404.968.2700, [localthree.com](#) ([http://localthree.com](#))

Ritz Stuff

A new culinary team at **The Ritz-Carlton Buckhead Café**, led by Chef de Cuisine Todd Richards (of Rolling Bones BBQ, One Flew South and The Ritz-Carlton, Palm Beach) is shaking things up a bit, playing both sides of the field nicely with a menu of traditional and modern offerings, from-scratch cocktails and gorgeous desserts. Modern tastes such as rabbit rillettes with black cherry gelée or Georgia trout with hedgehog-mushroom ragout, black truffle grits and apple cider emulsion please the local while a more traditional pork schnitzel with bacon relish and mac 'n' cheese gratin work for visitors. Playful interruptions—think mini Mason jars with pickled veggies for intermezzo—work beautifully with the seamless, impeccable service that is expected at The Ritz. 3434 Peachtree Road NE, 404.237.2700, [ritzcarlton.com](#) ([http://ritzcarlton.com](#))

Get Raw-dy

You see the lowbrow dozen on menus everywhere or the stuffed bucket during an oyster street fest, but few do raw or steamed seafood in Atlanta like **C&S Seafood & Oyster Bar**. At any given time, rotating on the ice near the packed bar are oysters from Pine Island, N.Y., or White Caps, N.H., a host of Prince Edward Islanders, some top neck clams from Mass. or a few Caraquet, N.B., imports. Behind the glass case next to that, chef Jon Schwenk pulls beautiful slabs of fresh salmon, fatty tuna and meaty seabass to create his delicate, inventive dishes each night. 3240 Cobb Pkwy., Vinings, 770.272.0999, [candsyoysterbar.com](#) ([http://candsyoysterbar.com](#))

So Fly

When you think of Southern culinary destinations, Dahlonega doesn't exactly come to mind... yet. But that's the goal of Steven Hartman, culinary mastermind behind Montaluce Wine Vineyards' acclaimed **Le Vigne** restaurant, a farm-fresh culinary gem in the mountains' fast-growing wine country. It's an endearing all-hands-on-deck scenario: Hartman helps in the vineyards, tends their acre-and-a-half garden and serves trout he catches in the Etowah. Combining two of his loves, he does a reservation-only Catch, Clean and Cook class, a guided fly-fishing trip that ends with the day's catch as lunch on the river. Dahlonega's hopeful role as a Southern dining destination might not be that far off after all. Classes can accommodate two to six people. \$200 per person. 501 Hightower Church Road, Dahlonega, 706.867.4060, [montaluce.com](#) ([http://montaluce.com](#))

Das Ist Gut

You don't mess with fried chicken around these parts. The Southern staple is battered and fried in hot grease, period. Unless... you're Ria Pell of **Sauced**. Her German fried chicken (Springer Mountain white meat schnitzel) with lemon aioli and a tarragon three-bean salad beats mama's any day. 753 Edgewood Ave., 404.688.6554, [saucedatlanta.com](#) ([http://saucedatlanta.com](#))

Doggone It!

Ron Eyester and Jason Chenette have tongues wagging in Morningside. **The Family Dog's** menu is one of the most creative in the ATL. Start with the Angry Elk (adult fruit punch) before gobbling housemade cheetohs or seven-spice duck fat chips. Then, choose among exotic fare like Korean-style duck quesadillas and a seared tuna baguette with teriyaki pickles. Tastebud boredom avoided. 1402 N. Highland Ave., 404.249.0180, [thefamilydogatlanta.com](#) ([http://thefamilydogatlanta.com](#))

Dinner Party

Where do you find one of Atlanta's most influential young chefs when he's not at his hipster gourmand favorites Top Fir and Sound Table? Cooking at a monthly, pop-up supper club. The executive chef of Dinner Party, **Shane Devereux** teams with **Patrick La Bouff** to produce monthly dinners at undisclosed locations, with invitations by email only. Chosen ones are alerted of location and time the day of. Locations have included airplane hangars and artists' lofts. Look for a restaurant in Midtown fall 2012 from this pack. [dinnerpartyatlanta.com](#) ([http://dinnerpartyatlanta.com](#))

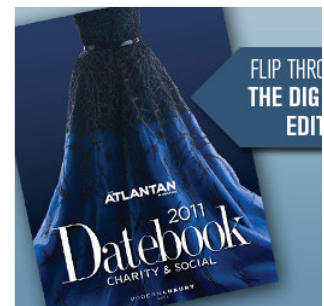
Condiment Craze

Condiments deserve some consideration for best supporting role on Atlanta dishes. These three go far beyond ketchup, mayo and mustard. **FLIP Burger Boutique** ([flipburgerboutique.com](#) ([http://flipburgerboutique.com](#))) masters the

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Events

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Restaurant Eugene Author Diners
[atlantian/events/restaurant-eugene-author-din](#)
Restaurant Eugene - 2277 Peachtree Atlanta, Atlanta, GA

Culinary Fight Night ([the-atlantian/ev](#))
[http://the-atlantian/ev](#)
Park Tavern - 500 10th Street, Atlan

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art with everything from a creamy spicy-buttermilk sriracha to craveable Coca-Cola ketchup and bourbon pecan mayo. Taste an exotic note in **P'cheen's** (pcheen.com (<http://pcheen.com>)) harissa aioli that accompanies pommes frites. **Leon's Full Service** (leonsfullservice.com (<http://leonsfullservice.com>)) offers a buffet of tasty dips with its house fries: madras curry catsup, smoked tomato mayo and bacon and tarragon mayo.

Kitchen Lunatic

Paul Luna is known for dishing revolving-but-always-affordable international cuisine in **Lunacy Black Market**, a downtown restaurant that feels like someone's living room. But Luna has also biked across the country and self-published a children's book (*Luna Needs a Miracle*). Far from the celeb-chef mentality, the man sees no boundaries and no rules, especially when it comes to food. His restaurant is one of our city's most captivating. Go on Sunday afternoons for his all-you-can-eat risotto. 231 Mitchell St., 404.736.6164, lunacyblackmarket.com (<http://lunacyblackmarket.com>)

Full House

A quick chat with **Taqueria del Sol's** James Beard-nominated (yes, that's right!) Executive Chef Eddie Hernandez: **Were you surprised to be nominated for a James Beard Award for "best restaurateur" (along with Mike Klank)?** Yes, I was very surprised. I always assumed the James Beard Awards were for the fine-dining restaurants. It's great to see the foundation acknowledge chefs and restaurateurs across all categories of dining. **Do you remember the first time you had a packed house?** Oh, of course! Our first day open, we were pretty busy. Then, on the second day, we had a line out the door. It's been like that ever since. **What's your favorite thing on the menu?** The veggie taco; it's like the kind of food I used to eat at home in Mexico. My favorite taco of all time is the Waco. I think it's the best taco I've done in the past five years. **What would you say is your philosophy as a restaurateur?** I always want to provide the best possible product for the best possible price. taqueriadelsol.com (<http://taqueriadelsol.com>)

Best Atmosphere

Let's face it, when you go to Paris, you don't go for the people or the sights. You go for the ambiance. Oh, right. And the food. **Bistro Niko** is a whimsical, authentic respite where you can find both. Here is your Parisian escape in the South, and the chance to satisfy a need for a Champs-Élysées bistro rendezvous. Red leather upholstered booths paired with a luminous wood ceiling and globe lighting lend the space a modern, yet Old World flair—something the ingenious dishes (we say "oui" to the pan-roasted duck breast and croque monsieur au saumon) only accentuate. 3344 Peachtree Road NE, 404.261.6456, buckheadrestaurants.com (<http://buckheadrestaurants.com>)

Meat Matters

Carnivores, you've come to the right place. In the past few years, Atlanta has upped the ante on quality meats. Charcuterie programs are all the rage, with **The Iberian Pig** (iberianpigatl.com (<http://iberianpigatl.com>)), **Holeman & Finch** (holeman-finch.com (<http://holeman-finch.com>)) and **Abattoir** (starprovisions.com (<http://starprovisions.com>)) leading the pack with their own unique takes on cured cuisine. Fancy some artisanal sausage? **The Spotted Trotter's** (thespottedtrotter.com (<http://thespottedtrotter.com>)) delectable brandy rabbit boudin is for the adventurous meat-eater. Try not to lick your chops inside **Pine Street Market** (pinestreetmarket.com (<http://pinestreetmarket.com>)). You'll go weak in the knees with your first bite of the spicy Mexican chorizo (fresh garlic, cumin, chipotle chiles and red wine).

Oh Honey, It's Offal

This year's hot menu trends couldn't be further on the ends of the spectrum: Offal and honey showed up on menus all over the ATL. **4th and Swift's** (4thandswift.com (<http://4thandswift.com>)) playful Duck N' Donuts serves up a pitch-perfect combo of foie gras ice cream and candied apples with an elegant honey foam. Enjoy a grilled (not fried) version of chicken liver, topped with a spicy red-onion jam, at **Floataway Café** (starprovisions.com (<http://starprovisions.com>)). A drizzle of honey is the perfect complement to the semisoft Gabriel Coulet Roquefort at **Woodfire Grill** (woodfiregrill.com (<http://woodfiregrill.com>)). Duck liver mousse at **Amuse** (amuseatlanta.com (<http://amuseatlanta.com>)) in Midtown comes with orange and marjoram jam. At **Holeman & Finch** (holeman-finch.com (<http://holeman-finch.com>)), try the veal brains with black butter and toast, or, if you prefer something tamer, go for the pan-fried rabbit livers.

Radical Behavior

Boho pastry chef Taria Camerino of Highland Bakery fame now has her own community-supported space, **Sugar-Coated Radical**, to experiment with the art of dessert. Camarino's classical French training and preternatural understanding of chocolate give birth to glorious bites such as massaman curry-and-white chocolate ganache with toasted coconut. Special multicourse dessert seatings limited to 12 people are offered on Fridays and Saturdays, but save room for her Bakery Sunday, a pastry feast featuring more than 20 creations like Irish cheddar croissants, brioche and persimmon tarts. 680 Drewry St., 404.438.5854, sugarcoatedradical.org (<http://sugarcoatedradical.org>)

Hang Time

Rarely do you see the genius behind an unforgettable meal. Here are three chances for you to chat with the chef while savoring their tasting menus:

An inspired dinner with wine is \$150 per person at the in-kitchen table at **Local Three** (localthree.com (<http://localthree.com>)). Eight courses with wine at the exclusive in-kitchen table is \$150 per person at **Park 75** (fourseasons.com (<http://fourseasons.com>)). Customized lunch prepared from your farmers market picks is \$75 per person at **Terrace** (ellishotel.com/terrace (<http://ellishotel.com/terrace>)).

In Defense of Casual Dining: An Op-Ed

The most spectacular culinary cities in America—New York, San Francisco, Chicago—didn't get their reputations based solely on fine dining. Instead, what makes those destinations so special is you can find remarkable and memorable food everywhere you look: soul spots, ethnic hideaways, inventive gastropubs, mobile carts. But for years, to get a truly memorable meal here in Atlanta, you had to throw down the heavy plastic at **Bacchanalia**, **JOËL** or **Seeger's**, as there simply weren't a lot of middle-of-the-road surprises. As our new lineup of top-tier restaurants (**Miller Union**, **Empire State South**, **Cakes & Ale**) still get James Beard consideration, mind-blowing experiences are happening in totally unexpected settings: **Peter Cheng's** (peterst2.com (<http://peterst2.com>)) fiery Sichuan dishes are the envy of the East Coast, **Antico Pizza Napoletana** (anticopizza.it (<http://anticopizza.it>)) is getting recognized by Naples' Festa Della as the best pizza in America, and **Sublime Doughnuts** (sublimedoughnuts.com (<http://sublimedoughnuts.com>)) and **King of Pops** (kingofpops.net (<http://kingofpops.net>)) are reinventing exactly how good casual treats can be. There has been much debate in the Atlanta food community about the decline of the fine-dining old guard in 2011. But this emergence of clever, casual food isn't just a result of the times; it has elevated our dining scene to be more interesting, international and downright honest. This is who we are. And unlike certain food critics... the scene isn't looking back.

Sugar Sorceress

Dynamo Pricci pastry chef **Jennifer Etchison** has been blowing up on the sweets scene. Last summer she came in first place in the Share Our Strength's Great American Bake Sale. That's when whispers began that she was a chef to look out for. In early spring, Executive Chef Piero Premoli took her to New York for a James Beard Foundation dinner, where the pair's offerings wowed the Yanks. "I did a chocolate gianduja bonet. It's a classic Italian pairing of chocolate and hazelnut, stuffed with artisanal ricotta," says the self-taught Italian pastry prodigy. 500 Pharr Rd., 404.237.2941, buckheadrestaurants.com (<http://buckheadrestaurants.com>)

Good Dirt

Drizzles and puddles of sauce have dried up on plates across the city. Taking their place are dustings, powders and crumbles. Whether as fine as pixie dust or as rugged as gravel, this "dirt" adds texture and visual appeal to dishes



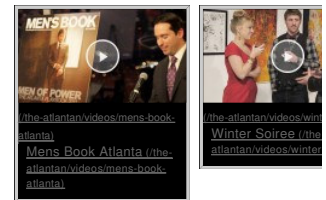
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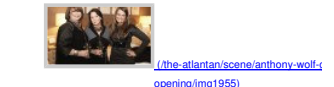
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from amuse-bouche through dessert. The dusting begins at **Atlanta Grill** (ritzcarlton.com (<http://ritzcarlton.com>)) where fennel pollen garnishes the mussels appetizer. Red velvet cake crumbles top several desserts at **Bakeshop** (bakeshopatl.com (<http://bakeshopatl.com>)) and serrano ham powder covers chilled white asparagus with salmon caviar at **Livingston Restaurant + Bar** (livingstonatlanta.com (<http://livingstonatlanta.com>)). Find foie gras powder finishing the pan-roasted scallops with chanterelles at **ONE. midtown kitchen** (onemidtownkitchen.com (<http://onemidtownkitchen.com>)).

Seeing Red

Tomato jelly doughnuts and heirloom-tomato corn dogs. Tempted? From 1 to 5pm, **July 17, JCT. Kitchen & Bar** hosts the **Attack of the Killer Tomato Festival**. Attendees can enjoy tasty tomato-related dishes and drinks made with locally farmed tomatoes by more than 40 of the Southeast's top chefs and mixologists—along with live music by local all-chef band Five Bone Rack. "I've always felt JCT. Kitchen was a great spot for a large, food-driven festival," says chef/owner Ford Fry, who founded the event in 2009 to help local farmers sell more tomatoes and to raise funds for the nonprofit Georgia Organics, which promotes sustainable and locally grown food. georgiaorganics.org (<http://georgiaorganics.org>)

Hot Cakes

Inspired locavore cuisine loosely defines the experience at **Cakes & Ale**, which relocates to new spacious digs this summer. Chef Billy Allin is most excited about space for more whole-animal preparations, bigger dishes for sharing (think a 22-ounce veal chop with morel mushroom cream for two) and a new wood-burning oven. Also coming: a rooftop garden, outdoor seating, a private dining room and, of course, the pièce de résistance, a bakery. They'll seduce you with delights such as pistachio-rosewater phyllo cigars, layer cakes and exquisite homemade breads. 254 W. Ponce de Leon Ave., 404.377.7994, cakesandalerestaurant.com (<http://cakesandalerestaurant.com>)

Curb Yourself

The **Sweet Auburn Curb Market** (sweetauburncurbmarket.com (<http://sweetauburncurbmarket.com>)) just received a \$1.5 million grant to fix damages that occurred during the massive 2008 tornado that damaged downtown. Expect an overhaul to start in the fall. Until then, the market is filled with delicious vendors and resembles a smaller Seattle Pike Place Market. Hang with the Grady docs on break at **Grindhouse Burgers** (grindhouseburgers.com (<http://grindhouseburgers.com>)) and try newbies **Bell Street Burritos** and **Yumbii's** (yumbii.com (<http://yumbii.com>)) soon to open Good Dog!!

Extra Virgins

These virgins—with their single varietal, handcrafted, handpicked, first-cold-press freshness—are so fabulous they recently landed on the shelves at Star Provisions. **Las Doscientas'** extra virgin olive oils get their award-winning pedigree not from Italy, but Chile's Maule Valley, tucked between the Andes and Coastal Mountains ranges. Try the fruity Arbequina on salads, poultry and fish while the intense and peppery Picual is ideal for roasting meats. Available at *The Fresh Market*, *thefreshmarket.com* and *Star Provisions*, starprovisions.com (<http://starprovisions.com>)

Ice Ice Baby

Morelli's Gourmet Ice Cream & Dessert boasts unusual flavor profiles (jalapeño-coconut, maple-bacon brittle) and now has a big name to back its new location in Edgewood. Kevin Gillespie will lend a hand seasonally. 749 Moreland Ave., Ormeewood Park, 404.622.0210, morellisicecream.com (<http://morellisicecream.com>)

Mad Scientist

"All dishes are based on tradition," says chef **Peter Cheng** of his Sichuan-inspired menu at **Tasty 2**. But his experiments with classic ingredients and techniques have led to a unique style that draws rabid fans from around the globe to his restaurant in Sandy Springs. Precise temperatures, specific cooking times and secrets he simply won't share yield creations like dry-fried eggplant, bang-bang shrimp, fragrant duck and Guanzhong beef—mouthwatering dishes Cheng swears grace no other menu. Even recipes he learned from his mother have been reinterpreted: He sheepishly admits that his spareribs with lotus-root soup bests hers. He boils the difficult-to-tame lotus root for three hours in a clay pot to get the right texture. Across the varied menu, Cheng avoids tongue-torching heat in favor of more subtle spices that allow nature's ingredients to shine. 6450 Powers Ferry Road NW, 678.766.8765, peterasty2.com (<http://peterasty2.com>)

Best New Fine Dining

Over the years, much of Atlanta's fine-dining scene has had to close doors due to the recession. However, one who opened during the height of bad times has triumphed. Under chef Olivier Gaupin, **Eleven** has crafted a beautiful, luxurious menu that, while delivered with high-end service, has plenty of downhome inspiration. Gaupin has brilliantly married Southern favorites like a braised pork belly BLT with pickled okra with tonier items like a bone-in Midwest corn-fed New York strip with truffle fries and Béarnaise. 1065 Peachtree St. NE, 404.745.5745, loewshotels.com (<http://loewshotels.com>)

High Grades

Chef Tom Naito of **TOMO** is stealthily churning out the best sushi in Atlanta inside his small Vinings restaurant. Naito earned his culinary stripes with three years in the kitchen under legendary chef Nobu Matsuhisa. Yes, that Nobu. With deft skill, Naito transforms his flown-in-daily-from-Japan fish selections into silken, buttery wedges of sashimi and nigiri. Addictive alternatives, such as shrimp stix (shrimp, asparagus and shiso) wrapped in a spring roll, deep fried and presented in a glass atop a pillow of salsa, make the meal as artful as it is delicious. Naito also has some fun weaving elements of Italian and French cuisine into more traditional Japanese presentations with dishes such as his lobster carpaccio with white truffle oil and pink sea salt. For lunch try the soft-shell crab salad over spring greens and finished with a refreshing yuzu dressing. And just try to resist the fresh squid, served tempura style with a kicky jalapeño sauce. 3256 Cobb Pkwy., Vinings, 770.690.0555, tomorestaurant.com (<http://tomorestaurant.com>)

Second Life

Unbeknownst to most Atlantans, many of our top chefs don't spend every second in the kitchen. They actually have hobbies. Miller Union's **Steven Satterfield** pedals a Bianchi racing bike when he's not playing guitar in the band Seely. **Pat Faucher** of Ruth's Chris Buckhead and **Christian Messier** of Sun Dial prefer Harleys. Aria's **Kathryn King** makes jewelry and **Russell Sleight** of The Westin Peachtree Plaza rescues horses bound for the slaughterhouse. Chef **Linton Hopkins** collects first-edition books (perhaps why he has author dinners at Restaurant Eugene).

Summer Chef Series

Every few weeks **ONE. Midtown Kitchen** (onemidtownkitchen.com (<http://onemidtownkitchen.com>)) chef Drew Van Leuvan will have a friend over for a five-course dinner. They'll be cooking for you, natch. Here's the lineup: **July 20**, Ford Fry, JCT. Kitchen; **Aug. 3**, Hector Santiago, Pura Vida; **Aug. 31**, Carvel Gould, Canoe. \$75 with beverage pairings.

Fowl Behavior

As of January, **White Oak Pastures** began building a new USDA-inspected poultry abattoir. When it's finished, it will be the only poultry plant in Georgia, Alabama and Florida to process free-range birds. Due to these developments, the Bluffton-based, five-generation family farm will start selling chickens, turkeys, ducks and geese in August to some of the most acclaimed restaurants in Atlanta. Look for shout-outs on menus all over.

Docksiders

"We're not looking to stock a freezer full of frozen prawns. We want to keep it fresh, we want to keep what's available, what's seasonable and what's responsible as well," says Jeff McGhee, co-founder of **Off The Dock**

Seafood. Since launching his Atlanta-based fresh-fish delivery business last October, he and co-founder Thom Duncan have been cutting in on some of the major players' business around town. So far they've received patronage from top-tier restaurants like **Goin' Coastal**, **4th and Swift** and **Restaurant Eugene**—folks who tend to source from the very best. They tap seafood in nearby local markets, including the Gulf, and the North Carolina and Georgia coasts. Aside from providing local, fresh-caught fish, Duncan and McGhee put a huge emphasis on connecting chefs with fishermen. "We pass along the good word behind responsible product," Duncan says. 404.549.2576

Italian Lessons

Seven years ago, when Mangia closed in Brookhaven, Executive Chef Linda Harrell went on a kind of walkabout. She traveled, consulted and cooked all over, waiting for the perfect opportunity to re-emerge on Atlanta's culinary scene. As Facebook fans got busy wondering where she'd pop up—at the same time begging for the recipe to her rigatoni gorgonzola with pistachio cream—she was plotting her next move. This month she opens **Cibo e Beve** in Sandy Springs with 101 Concepts. The space, designed by architectural gods ai3, is a hip mix of Old World Italian and modern touches. A zinc bar was custom-made to go with rows of vintage leather settees. An Italian marble antipasti table settles in front of a wood-burning pizza oven where guests can sit and watch the kitchen create addictive Arancini Siciliani saffron risotto balls, red velvet zeppole with mascarpone and orecchiette with a twist (instead of broccoli rabe, she uses turnip greens). Harrell has also scooped up Justin Hadaway from The Iberian Pig, a guy she considers the best mixologist in Atlanta. He'll be chipping ice off 50-lb. blocks to create classic cocktails (made the old-fashioned way with real egg whites for sour mix) and some inventive newbies like the Melon-choly and the Thyme Card. [4969 Roswell Road](http://4969.Roswell.Road), 404.250.8988, ciboatlanta.com (http://ciboatlanta.com)

Street-Smart Chef

Rarely does "fancy" and "playful" work in perfect harmony, but such is the case at **Tuk Tuk**, the street-food homage created by Dee Dee Niyomkul, daughter of Nan and Charlie (Tamarind Seed, Nan). Inspired by her grandmother, who was a street vendor in Bangkok, Dee Dee does colorful and interesting street nibbles with Nan-level execution. It's then served in a dining room that boasts everything from glass lanterns to stacks of bright, old-fashioned snack boxes—proving again that outstanding, serious food doesn't always have to be that serious. [1745 Peachtree St.](http://1745.Peachtree.St.), 678.539.6181, tuktukatl.com (http://tuktukatl.com)

Addictive Appetizers

Ever find yourself wanting to bat hands away on the starter? Here are some of our fave, I'll-fight-you-for-the-last-bite, snacks:

Homemade chips with warm blue cheese. **Buckhead Diner**, [3073 Piedmont Road NE](http://3073.Piedmont.Road.NE), 404.262.3336, buckheadrestaurants.com (http://buckheadrestaurants.com)

Mussels in pasilla pepper broth with corn. **Tierra Restaurant**, [1425 Piedmont Ave.](http://1425.Piedmont.Ave.), 404.874.5951, tierrarestaurant.com (http://tierrarestaurant.com)

Pimento cheese with bacon marmalade. **Empire State South**, [999 Peachtree St.](http://999.Peachtree.St.), 404.541.1105, empirestatesouth.com (http://empirestatesouth.com)

Toss up between: Queso Fresco (baked Mexican cheese) with shaved radishes or fried hominy with truffle oil. **INC Street Food**, [948 Canton St.](http://948.Canton.St.), Roswell, 770.998.3114, incstreetfood.com (http://incstreetfood.com)

YaYa's Eggplant Steak Fries. **Rathbun's**, [112 Krog St.](http://112.Krog.St.), 404.524.8280. And down the road, Lobster Fritters. **Kevin Rathbun's Steak**, [154 Krog St.](http://154.Krog.St.), 404.524.5600, kevinrathbun.com (http://kevinrathbun.com)

Catch This!

The global fare at Kaleidoscope has locals infatuated and reservation lists skewing long. Once seated, do not hesitate to order Azalea's famous whole sizzling catfish. It comes drizzled in Chinese black bean sauce, pickled ginger and lime. A few slices from the waiter and the meaty parts fall away from the spine for your pure delight. [1411 Dresden Drive](http://1411.Dresden.Drive), 404.474.9600, k-pub.com (http://k-pub.com)

Farm to (Cafeteria) Table

Ashley Rouse wants kids to fall in love. She's on a mission to make all 41,000 Atlanta public school students go head over heels for farm-fresh food. A mother of three children in the Atlanta Public Schools system, Rouse was inspired to make over school cafeterias after planting a garden at her daughter's elementary school in Candler Park. "The ultimate goal of our 'farm to school program' is to teach youth the advantages of eating fresh by serving those foods in the lunchroom," she says.

When Rouse began, her district was only serving around 12 percent of fresh or local foods. Thanks to her efforts and partnerships with companies like Fresh Point, 52 percent of food served in APS cafeterias are now local and fresh. Students get to eat Mercier apples from Ellijay, Matthews Farms strawberries, broccoli from Loganville's Dillwood Farms and Bluffton's White Oak Pastures grass fed beef. Her next project? To train cafeteria staff with the likes of Mary Moore, owner of **Cook's Warehouse**, Joe Reynolds of **Love is Love Farms** at Gaia Gardens and chef Shaun Doly of **Yeah! Burger**. "I want our cafeteria managers to work with these experts to help them better understand how to prepare the fresh foods and connect all of this back to the classroom with the teachers," she says.

Morning Magic

The dinner service at **Haven** has been packed since jump street. But these days the Brookhaven bistro has been quietly churning out some of the best brunch fare in the city. The lineup ranges from shrimp n' grits with Vidalia onions to C.A.B. hanger steak n' eggs with Béarnaise. Housemade sausage, fluffy semolina french toast and a BLT with Grafton cheddar and lemon aioli will cure any of the remnants of last night's ballyhoo. [1441 Dresden Drive](http://1441.Dresden.Drive), 404.969.0700, havenrestaurant.com (http://havenrestaurant.com)

Beginnings and Endings

From the first sip to the last chug, here are our picks for the best spots to bookend a meal with cocktails and two of our favorite feast-finales.

The Morningside Daiquiri from **Leon's Full Service** is a modern take on two combined classic cocktails—a traditional daiquiri and the Corpse Reviver #2, known in the '30s as a morning-after drink to soothe the previous night's revelry. [131 E. Ponce de Leon Ave.](http://131.E.Ponce.de.Leon.Ave.), Decatur, 404.687.0500, leonsfullservice.com (http://leonsfullservice.com)

Order the El Chumuco or Mali Nali at Riccardo Ullio's latest incarnation, **Escorpion**, his Mexican-focused spot that's serving cocktails and tequilas containing 100 percent agave. With slight twists on classic south of the border cocktails, mixologist Adam Fox is luring fans to crowd this new bar. [800 Peachtree St.](http://800.Peachtree.St.), 678.666.5198

The Moscow Mule is popping up on drink menus around the city, but the one at **The Iberian Pig** is the best in our book. [121 Sycamore St.](http://121.Sycamore.St.), Decatur, 404.371.8800, theiberianpigatl.com (http://theiberianpigatl.com)

Italian zeppoles are tough treats to master, but chefs Ford Fry and Drew Belline do justice to the doughnut-ish pillows. If you're lucky, it won't be long till you can try **No. 246's** version, the ricotta zeppole with warm chocolate and sour cherry. [129 E. Ponce de Leon Ave.](http://129.E.Ponce.de.Leon.Ave.), Decatur, no246.com (http://no246.com)

The food front is awash with a throwback to pie. "Queenie," the mother of **Goin' Coastal's** chef Zach Kell, is cranking out the delicious Walt's Mama's Pecan Pie. [1021 Virginia Ave.](http://1021.Virginia.Ave.), 404.941.9117; [125 W. Main St.](http://125.W.Main.St.), Canton, 770.479.3737, goincoastalseafood.com (http://goincoastalseafood.com)

