



Christopher Grossman, chef of Gerry Klaskala's newest restaurant, Atlas *By Alexa Lampasona*

The latest Buckhead restaurant to turn heads this spring will be Atlas, slated to open in January at the St. Regis Atlanta. Gerry Klaskala's newest concept focuses on farm-fresh American cuisine with European influences. At the helm of the kitchen is Christopher Grossman, who worked as chef de cuisine at Aria before working a stint at The French Laundry this past year. Here we talk with Grossman about how he's harnessing his experience under Thomas Keller to create Atlas' menu.

The French Laundry is touted as one of the best restaurants in the world. How did that experience change your thinking as a chef?

I really learned about the range of ingredients that you could get locally grown. And I learned how important it was to build relationships with different farmers. It opened up the lines of creativity for me.

What about in the kitchen- what was essential at The French Laundry?

The importance of execution and plate presentation. Every single step that goes on behind the scenes has to be perfect, from prepping vegetables to seasoning. Guests eat with their eyes first. It's our responsibility to present the food in the best way possible, and we want guests to have that "wow" feeling when they receive a plate.

Talk about your experience working with Thomas Keller.

He lives up to his reputation, if not exceeds it, as an incredible chef. He has a presence in the kitchen. Keller has developed a restaurant culture that is extraordinary, and that's what translated at The French Laundry. He created a culture where the kitchen worked together without the chef even being there, and that is huge.

How will your approach to seasonality differ from California?

Seasonality is so much longer. The nice thing about coming back to Georgia is that our farmers are doing a great job. They have developed a sense of appreciation by both chefs and diners. I can draw from their inspiration because the quality of their products is so high. That affects the whole restaurant scene because each chef's interpretation is unique.

What role will farmers markets play on Atlas' menu?

The farmers market focuses more on quality and freshness. Most of what they sell at the market was picked the day before, so there is an unparalleled freshness that you couldn't get when it was shipped across the country. So the menus will be dynamic-constantly changing and evolving-based on what I see is fresh at the farmers market.

