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A NEW SENSE OF 2015 SILVER SPOON AWARDS SOUTHERN

BY KRISTA REESE
Photo By Becky Stein



Comfort Food:
Chef Kevin Gillespie
at Revival in Decatur,
with spiced Carolina
catfish, kale salad and
lemon icebox pie



No doubt about it, I've got a pretty sweet gig. Still, when the Silver Spoon Awards roll around and I look forward to recounting the past year's dining successes and excesses, I also worry about what I'm leaving out. It's a big state to cover, and no one person could really canvass the whole of it, even with unlimited budgets and column inches.

Beyond the issues of space and money, there is also time. As in, a magazine's lead time. You'll be reading this in the first days of frost, but I'm writing it on my screened porch in the last gasp of summer. Some of the state's most highly anticipated restaurants are set to open between now and then, in mammoth restaurant-centric complexes like Ponce City Market and the already-hyperventilating Krog Street Market, as well as Buckhead Atlanta and Alpharetta's Avalon, in Atlanta alone. Perhaps you've been to some of them by now, but I'm still here on the porch, noticing the first red-tinted leaves on the dogwoods.

However, as any evolutionary scientist could tell you, you don't need every missing link to see that there is a chain. The Silver Spoons are at best a snapshot – make that a selfie – of a particular moment. I'm looking for the trends and influences that seem to set this year apart from last, especially when they seem to be statewide. Restaurants have moved past the dismal days of drought following the economic downturn, back from bust to boom again – a condition that Atlanta in particular is more accustomed to.

Now Coastal Georgia seems to have finally moved forward, too, with several new and notable efforts, especially Savannah's extraordinary The Grey, which earned a James Beard nomination an unheard-of two months after opening. On St. Simons, there is a new Vietnamese cafe, Island Pho, and the tiny Tybee Island Fish Camp represents another welcome shift – small, but significant signs of progress in places where dining scenes long seemed moribund, despite a built-in tourist trade.

Beyond that, we're also seeing a fundamental shift in how we regard Southern food. Once the near-exclusive domain of funky little meat-and-threes, across the region fried okra, grass-fed beef and obscure varieties of fresh shelled beans and peas from local farms have begun to earn the kind of respect here that South Carolina regularly bestows in places like Charleston's Husk and Hominy Grill.



Southern Revival: Clockwise from left, lemon glazed sweet potatoes, mac n' cheese and local lady peas and snap peas in lemon dill butter at Revival in Decatur

Booming Nashville is currently enjoying a dining revival that celebrates its hometown favorite, hot chicken, in nearly every dining room from the most humble storefront (such as Prince's, where it was invented) to the finest restaurants in town. In Alabama, Birmingham mecca Highlands Bar and Grill shines as one of the first – and still one of the best – purveyors of indigenous ingredients in simple, elegant, traditional cooking. Knoxville and Asheville chefs have only begun to explore their own Appalachian foodways in pretty little restaurants in their old downtowns.

What's coming to Atlanta will only rev up that revival, with Ponce City Market its epicenter. Some of the new eateries will be open by the time you read this: Chef Sean Brock (of Husk) has the second location of his Mexican spot, Minero; Guy Wong (Miso Izakaya,

Le Fat) opens the doors to Ton Ton (ramen, yakitori, steamed buns); and Anne Quatrano (of Bacchanalia) ladles casual, finned fare at Dub's Fish Camp. Linton Hopkins (Restaurant Eugene, Holeman & Finch) throws his hat in the ring with H&F Burgers.

The mix of Southern and immigrant fare (as well as the explosion of more casual eateries, including Indian "street food" restaurants around Atlanta) don't negate, but reflect the exciting mix of cultures and new ways of breaking bread that define what is "Southern" to us, right here, right now. It's also what will ultimately set Georgia's dining

scene apart from that of its neighbors.

Kevin Gillespie's new Decatur restaurant, the aptly named Revival, captures the spirit of the day best: our own best-loved food, in a small house, by one of our best chefs. Like one of the most old-school Southern dishes, Country Captain, it's homegrown, but it also traces international influences from nearby ports, both air and sea.

At the same time, it seems appropriate this year to give a nod to the originators and preservers of this Southern food-as-folk-art trend – our state's best-loved meat-and-threes. In addition to the Silver Spoons, I'm awarding Silver Napkin Dispenser Awards to those bastions of melamine plates, Texas Pete hot sauce and some of the best meatloaf you've ever tasted. Some have white tablecloths and cocktails, which may not technically fit the definition, but they all sure fit the vibe.

COURTESY OF REVIVAL

Silver Spoon

2018
IN NO PARTICULAR ORDER

ATLAS

The locally sourced food is very good, to be sure - the global menu was developed under the watchful eye of Aria's Gerry Klaskala. But here, the experience is the thing, in a lively but cosseted setting lined with an eye-popping art collection.

88 West Paces Ferry Road, Atlanta
(inside the St. Regis Hotel)
404.600.6471
www.atlasrestaurant.com



Eye-popping Experience: Consulting Chef Gerry Klaskala, left, and Chef de Cuisine Christopher Grossman of Atlas in Atlanta

REVIVAL

Kevin Gillespie (Gunshow) taps into the zeitgeist with this gussied-up Sunday night supper menu - it's where you'll want to take Northern friends to show off.

129 Church St., Decatur
470.225.6770
www.revivaldecatur.com

THE GREY

This new critical darling is at the forefront of Savannah's dining rebirth, which includes impressive outposts like Hugh Acheson's The Florence and gritty little upstarts like Ampersand. The Grey, however, sets itself apart with its serious attitude, from the ingenious reinvention of this former bus station to the familiar yet brand-new dishes like Sizzling Smoky Pig, with fried egg, hot buns and pepper jelly.

109 Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd.,
Savannah
912.662.5999
www.thegreyrestaurant.com



Hop Aboard: Sizzling Smoky Pig at The Grey in Savannah

STEEL MAGNOLIAS

The three-story restaurant in historic downtown plays host to a thriving scene, where diners crowd in for Chef Keira Moritz's Southern specialties.

132 North Patterson St., Valdosta
229.259.0010
www.steelmagnoliasrestaurant.com

KIMBALL HOUSE

The crowds have died down a little, which means you can actually dine on oysters and caviar at a reasonable hour. But the food and drinks have not dimmed a bit.

303 East Howard Ave., Decatur
404.378.3502
www.kimball-house.com

FORTIFY

New, and so welcome - a farm-to-table restaurant in the mountains, near the farms.

69 N. Main St., Clayton
706.782.0050
www.fortifyclayton.com

RESTAURANT EUGENE

Chef Linton Hopkins's flagship still serves the most sophisticated iteration of Southern food, with a cocktail program that's unparalleled. This month, the new setting for the Café at Linton's should open in the Atlanta Botanical Garden, featuring more casual versions of Hopkins' dishes, such as the delectable Sea Island peas with ham hock and cornbread crostini.

2277 Peachtree Road, Atlanta
404.355.0321
www.restauranteugene.com

ST. CECILIA

Ford Fry's restaurant empire threatens to take over Atlanta, but somehow, at Buckhead's buzziest intersection, with a simple but spot-on Mediterranean menu, he manages to make this cavernous restaurant feel energetic, but homey. And how does the man find - or develop - this army of expert servers?

3455 Peachtree Road NE, Atlanta
404.554.9995
www.stceciliaatl.com

THE NATIONAL

The "foodier" Athens becomes, the more there is to appreciate about The National and its Mediterranean-with-Southern ingredients menu. Also worth noting: Chef Peter Dale's new venture in "bean-to-bar" chocolate at Condor, near Five Points.

232 W. Hancock Ave., Athens
706.549.3450
www.thenationalrestaurant.com

EMPIRE STATE SOUTH

A recent visit reminds me how prescient Hugh Acheson could be - in some ways this Canadian foresaw the potential in Southern food back when he started in Athens. His Atlanta restaurant now seems the more modern version of his still-singular 5&10.

999 Peachtree St., Atlanta
404.541.1105
www.empirestatesouth.com



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404.874.5642



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180-B Northside Drive, Atlanta
404.525.2023
www.paschalsatlanta.com

LRG PROVISIONS

Thank heaven someone is making good use of the old Cinco y Diez space. The folks from Last Resort Grill serve their own meat-and-three menu every Tuesday night in this popup restaurant, featuring dishes like hot chicken, mac-and-cheese and collards.

1653 South Lumpkin St., Athens
706.850.2020
lrgprovisions.com/pop-ups

MARY MAC'S

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224 Ponce De Leon Ave. NE, Atlanta
404.876.1800
www.marymacs.com

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3367 Highway 411, White
770.334.8125.
www.facebook.com/JsSimplySoul

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2020 Demere Road, St. Simons Island
912.638.7685
www.southernsoulbbq.com

WEAVER D'S

What is it about Southern food and hungry musicians? R.E.M. made Dexter Weaver's "Automatic for the People" motto famous, but his food stands on its own.

1016 East Broad St., Athens
706.353.7797
www.facebook.com/WeaverDs

H&H RESTAURANT

Where "Mama" Louise fed the Allman Brothers - and still oversees the cooking.

807 Forsyth St., Macon
478.621.7044
www.facebook.com/handsoulfood



Old-fashioned Goodness: Veggies and beef over rice at H&H Restaurant in Macon

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1168 Bucksnot Road, Jackson
770.775.6150
www.bucknersfamilyrestaurant.com

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www.mrswilkes.com

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