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THE
ATLANTA
PUBLIC
SCHOOLS
CHEATING
TRIAL VERDICT
HAS CLOSED THE
BOOKS ON ONE
OF THE CITY'S
DARKEST MOMENTS.

BY MAX BLAU

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Fine food, fine art

Buckhead's new Atlas serves up a high-end experience



THE CURE: Lightly cured hiramasa kingfish (left) with chili peppers, mint, pomegranate, hearts of palm, and pickled onions; Atlas' kitchen (right) is helmed by chef Christopher Grossman.

BY ANGELA HANSBERGER

Fine dining is slowly disappearing from the restaurant landscape as the prevailing trend toward gastropubs, communal tables, and food halls continues. For many, Bacchanalia has long been *the* place for fine dining in Atlanta, but Buckhead's eight-week-old Atlas offers another alternative.

Developed by renowned restaurateur and consulting chef Gerry Klaskala (Aria, Canoe) and investor Tavistock Group, Atlas replaces Paces 88 within Buckhead's St. Regis hotel. Chef de cuisine Christopher Grossman, who hails from Klaskala's Aria and most recently from a stint at the French Laundry in Napa Valley, helms Atlas' open kitchen.

The luxurious St. Regis hotel, with its grand double staircase and sparkling crystal chandeliers, does not intrude on Atlas. It is even possible to enter the restaurant without walking through the hotel's lobby. Stairs from the valet lead up to the restaurant's courtyard entrance followed by a thick, impressive wooden door. Once inside, the ritual of fine dining begins — the *maitre d'* receives you, an attendant collects your coat, and another

offers you a seat in the library to wait for the rest of your party.

Just beyond the hostess stand is a copper bar, as well as glass display cases full of expensive cognacs, Scotches, and ports that are downright swanky. The dining room's combination of lacquered walls, emerald accents on curtains and pillows, and low, mood-setting lighting further sets a sexy scene.

Our table had a view of Francis Bacon's "Study for a Portrait." White tablecloths, formal service, impeccably plated dishes, and some of Tavistock founder Joe Lewis' modern art collection on display all contribute to the fine-dining feel. Other high-end touches are complimentary bread service from a black wooden basket and wines by the glass poured tableside. Locally cultivated caviar is also available for added indulgence.

A starter of lightly cured hiramasa kingfish (\$17) with pineapple consommé is like modern art on a plate. Alongside spicy and sweet chili peppers, mint, pomegranate, tiny rings of hearts of palm, baby cilantro, and pickled onions arranged just so, the dish is a showcase of bright colors and complementary textures. Toasted truffle-potato dumplings (\$17) are paired with slow-braised wagyu

beef and dollops of celery root purée. Grossman spikes the dish's earthy softness with crispy Parmesan wafers.

One evening — the menu changes daily — entrées ranged from \$29 to \$49. Plump, pan-seared scallops (\$34) come with sugar snap peas, bok choy, puffed wild rice, and quinoa brightened with subtle Meyer lemon purée. Pecan grilled venison (\$38) is served over swirls of plum-cherry purée, dotted here and there with tangy charred Brussels sprouts, a single roasted parsnip, and barley porridge with bits of truffle. The staff brought a steak knife to cut the veal, but it was so tender a butter knife would have done the job.

Pastry chef Judy Roman's desserts cost \$11 each. There was a light and quivering coconut panna cotta and a dish of cookies and ice cream with a buttery Brazil nut shortbread and house-made whiskey-toffee ice cream. But the table favorite was a chèvre tart with warm goat cheese mousse, and preserved cherries in a delightful crushed-walnut crust.


After dinner, our server asked if we'd like to take the art tour. Intrigued, we stood

and she escorted us to the walls displaying work. With the skill of a gallery guide, she described each painting in detail.

After the tour, we were still too enchanted by the chic ambiance to make ourselves leave. We opted instead for a nightcap in the library, near the entrance. Amid teal shelves filled

with hundreds of locally inspired books, and with cocktails in hand, we settled into cushy leather chairs. The Bullfighter, with Scotch, vermouth, Cherry Heering, and orange juice, was a delightfully layered riff on a Blood and Sand, while the Southern Buck, concocted from whiskey,

ginger beer, and lime juice, was a great take on a Moscow mule.

Service here is unobtrusive yet has a formality that is attentive to every anticipated whim. Gingham-clad servers sweep away crumbs between courses, offer educated wine suggestions, and time the arrival of food and drinks so as not to intrude on conversation. An evening like this does not come cheap. With appetizers, entrées, dessert, and a glass of wine each, dinner for two at Atlas runs around \$200 with tip. But that includes exquisite service, Grossman's captivating cooking, and a gallery tour complete with Picassos, Van Goghs, and a Chagall. 

Atlas

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