

SPRING DINING GUIDE

# A fresh, new energy

Metro Atlanta’s restaurant scene, from Decatur to Alpharetta, has finally arrived.



This charcuterie board from the Cockentrice in Krog Street Market includes Heirloom Prosciutto, Second Stanza spreadable salami, &B pickles, Mexican gherkin, Mt. Tam cheese, apple butter and pickled alba mushrooms. CONTRIBUTED K Y/BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM K



By John Kessler  
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A few weeks ago, I had a good/bad meal replete with friendly but awkward service at a new restaurant under review. Afterward, I needed a nightcap and a few minutes to replay the meal in my mind and calibrate the angle of my thumbs. I grabbed a bar stool at Cakes & Ale in Decatur, my favorite neighborhood haunt, and before long I saw chef-owner Billy Allin making the rounds in his usual get-up of T-shirt, shorts, clogs and a clean but unfancy apron. “What are you up to?” he asked. “Trying to decide if I like a restaurant,” I answered candidly. Perhaps too candidly, though I didn’t name the place. “There’s a lot to choose from,” he said, adding, “It seems like Atlanta finally has a dining scene. People have been saying it’s been coming for years, but it’s really here now, don’t you think? There are so many places I want to try.” Allin was right. I’ve been tracking and promoting the burgeoning dining culture of this city for most of the 18 years I’ve lived here. Now that I’m signing off on my last dining guide, I can see that the change this time is different. There’s a fresh energy, a kind of post-recession, post-farm-to-table spirit that celebrates creativity, vision and technique. It flows through the new high end (Buckhead’s luxe Atlas), the new bistro (Inman Park’s fabulously meat-crazed the Cockentrice) and the new low-key (Decatur’s funky Dish Dive). Restaurateurs like the Last Word’s

Bernard Moussa are looking to their own ethnic heritage for inspiration, while chefs such as Cakes & Soldiers’ Landon Thompson are really doing the research to bring a region, such as Spain’s Basque country, to life. Here are the best new restaurants in Atlanta this season. I’ve organized this guide around some of the themes and trends that are remaking the city’s dining culture. Included on the list is Buckhead’s new American Food and Beverage, the place I was contemplating at the Cakes & Ale bar, and which I’ve decided I do like, overall. It has some work to do and plenty of competition to keep up with if it can sail in the big race. But during this delicious spring 2015 in Atlanta, the rising tide raises all boats.

## Inside: 5 dining trends, plus a list of our favorite new restaurants on D6



**1 BIG PLATES ARE BACK**  
A few newcomers to theK area’s restaurant scene haveK established themselves asK tapas-free zones. **D3**



**2 RETURN OF TECHNIQUE**  
Today’s chefs aren’tK afraid to show youK how they manipulateK ingredients. **D4**



**3 SERVICE AT THE NEXT LEVEL**  
Good service is timeless,K but a few new restaurantsK have taken it a stepK further. **D4**



**4 THE RESTAURANT CRAWL IS ON**  
Krog Street Market andK Avalon have kick-startedK the idea of a progressiveK dinner. **D5**






**5 NEW GLOBAL OBSESSIONS**  
It’s Mediterranean dishesK that everyone is talkingK about, right? Or is itK Spanish? **D5**

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**Our Spring menu is blooming delicious.**

Come in and try our Spring menu filled with Chef-inspired favorites and handcrafted cocktails. Grab everyone you know and try something new at Marlow’s.

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1 The return of big plates. A few notable newcomers aim to please with real main courses and substantial portions.



The Luminary, in the Krog Street Market, gives an American accent to its French brasserie menu. Chef Eli Kirshstein shows off the seafood selections at the restaurant's raw bar. CONTRIBUTED BY BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK 2014K

Several years ago, I got a great “grumpy old guy” missive from a reader who was so sick of my constantly writing about passing and sharing small plates. He liked real entrees. Actual main courses. Why couldn’t I write about restaurants that served real portions? Small plates aren’t going anywhere. But a few notable newcomers have established themselves as tapas-free zones.

Atlas, which drips in old-school class and elegance, holds firm to the classic appetizer/entree/dessert format. There is no bite-sized gift from the kitchen nor chef’s tasting menu, only substantial and intricately constructed plates, which are often so good you won’t want to share a bite.

Le Bibloquet, a French brasserie in the Buckhead Atlanta complex, harks back to a timeless menu of foie gras, coq au vin and entrecôte with béarnaise sauce. Share plates? Non, merci!

American Food and Beverage, just down the street, has a few appetizers built for sharing. But this kitchen shows its moxie with complex entrees such as crisp trout with creamy mustard green purée or an astonishing sweet-tea-brined pork shank served with loose grits and a tomato marmalade.

The Luminary in Krog Street Market gives an American accent to its French brasserie menu, and few of the dishes like smoked chicken wings with curry crème fraîche seem made for sharing. But guests opt for an appetizer, such as mustard green salad with apples, followed by, say, a duck breast with turnips. Now that I’m a grumpy old man, I don’t mind this reverse trend at all.



Atlas, inside the St. Regis hotel in Buckhead, serves a pecan-grilled cervena venison chop with roasted parsnip, marrow bone, charred Brussels sprouts, barley porridge and plum-cherry puree. WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



American Food and Beverage's blackened tilefish is served with clams, kale and white beans. WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



Le Bibloquet serves a crepe Suzette with caramelized orange and Grand Marnier. CONTRIBUTED BY HEIDI GELDHAUSERK

DON'T MISS THESE ONLINE EXTRAS: FOUR PREVIOUS DINING GUIDES

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FALL 2014  
The Atlanta 50 Returns  
John Kessler picks theK Atlanta restaurants thatK defined dining in 2014.K



SPRING 2014  
25 Great Plates  
We comb the region forK classic dishes every Atlantank must try.K



FALL 2013  
Atlanta's Dining Trails  
Westside, Roswell, Duluth andK Decatur are neighborhoodsK that abound in great tastes.K



SPRING 2013  
The Atlanta 50  
Atlanta Journal-ConstitutionK dining critics pick the topK restaurants in the metro area.K



# SPRING DINING GUIDE

## 2 The return of technique. Today’s up-and-coming chefs aren’t afraid to show you how well they can manipulate ingredients.

A lot of restaurant food in recent years has been artless in the best sense of word – i.e., as a rejoinder to artifice. Here you go, happy diners, local meat and vegetables cooked simply, with care. So, when did meals in beautiful, upscale restaurants start to seem like the contents of a CSA box set on a plate and sent out with a \$28 price tag?

Today’s up-and-coming chefs aren’t afraid to show you how well they can manipulate ingredients. Kevin Ouzts at the **Cockentrice** cooks with a kind of unbridled joy in his craft. Try his “butcher’s batter” – a kind of fluffy buckwheat dumpling baked in a deep soup plate, then topped with tender pieces of guinea hen, a roulade of the hen’s leg filled with forcemeat, glazed turnips and chestnut cream. It’s a tour de force.

A tiny cooking space doesn’t stop **Grain**, a new Midtown cocktail bar, from tossing salted caramel corn in billowing liquid nitrogen and showering it with vadouvan curry – a showboat technique that produces the best frozen-crunch bar snack you could imagine.

Next door, at **Community Smith**, chef Micah Willix gives a master class in precision-cooked meat, whether he’s confiting chicken wings or slow-roasting pork.

Another veteran, Ian Winslade at **Paces & Vine** in Vinings, shows off his command of technique, new (aerating parmesan cheese for mushroom pasta) and old (cooking Gulf snapper on a steel plancha griddle). The kitchen conversation has tacitly moved from ingredients to skill.



New Midtown cocktail bar Grain’s Charcuturie Board with Mortadella Mousse includes Sicilian pistachio macarons, Carolina Reaper, chocolate salami served with Sweetwater 420 Beer Mustard, pickles and baguette. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



A lamb burger from Paces & Vine in Vinings exemplifies chef Ian Winslade’s command of technique. CONTRIBUTED BY MICHAEL KUNZK



Community Smith in Midtown offers a lunch portion of Sumac Smoked Chicken, which includes braised carrot and brown butter streusel. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK

## 3 Service at the next level. A few new restaurants go a step further to create an elite dining experience for their patrons.



Cafe at Linton’s in the Garden’s asparagus features spring onion, egg and charred lemon vinaigrette. WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



The coastal soul cuisine at Asante includes fried buttermilk-soaked poussin, Mac’n 3 Cheese and sautéed green beans. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK

The hallmarks of good service are timeless. A friendly mien, attention to detail and an ability to read a guest’s mood and preferred level of interaction will always earn repeat business. A few new restaurants go a step further and curate the experience.

At the minimalist 16-seat **Dish Dive**, owner Jeff Myers pops out of the kitchen to take your order on the iPhone he uses for calculating your tab, chats a little and opens the bottle of wine you’ve brought to this strictly BYO establishment. You choose from the six or seven dishes on the menu (heck, get them all and don’t miss the lamb-neck gravy fries), and pay by swiping your finger on the phone. It’s like a handshake that says “until next time.”

Enter the Atlanta Botanical Garden at night to visit the **Cafe at Linton’s in the Garden**, and you will be greeted at the entrance booth by a host who will personally walk you to the cafe 200 feet away. He can answer questions about the restaurant, the gardens and the exhibits, and when he hands you off to the restaurant hostess, you feel like a VIP. The shrimp and grits with she-crab cream are as rich as the surroundings.

Top kudos to the terrific crew at **Asante** who are tasked with explaining chef Marvin Woods’ vision of “the coastal soul cuisine of the African diaspora.” Under General Manager David Espin’s direction, they do an outstanding job of elucidating the common foodways developed through the slave trade while making you desperately hungry for Brazilian nut cheese with tomatoes and the yam dumplings called ducana, which arrive in a pungent Caribbean salt cod saute.



Chef Marvin Woods sits in front of the wine cellar at Asante in downtown Atlanta. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



This is Dish Dive’s Shakashuka — stewed peppers, tomato, okra, jalapeno, corn, sweet potato, feta and fried egg on flatbread. CONTRIBUTED BY WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



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The crawl is on. Ambitious real estate developments in the metro area have kick-started Atlanta’s restaurant culture.



These fajitas from Superica at Krog Street Market include guacamole, charred onions, salsa fresca, Mexican butter, house tortillas and lime. [WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)

Avalon’s Oak Steakhouse serves a 24-ounce dry aged bone-in ribeye and a 16-ounce boneless ribeye. [BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)



We’ve said it before, we’ll say it again: Krog Street Market, Avalon and other mega-developments have changed the city.

These new arrivals have done more to kick-start Atlanta’s restaurant culture than anything since the Olympics.

There may be details that throw you off, such as the canned music emanating from the bushes at Avalon or the crowds that can make getting a lunch sandwich an ordeal at Krog. But, whenever you have a lot of ambitious restaurants close together, you have the opportunity for a tremendous crawl.

Park your car, and the progressive dinner is on.

Is the quoted wait time 90 minutes at the **El Felix** in Avalon? Don’t be discouraged, because you’ll love your puffy tacos and steak fajitas at Ford Fry’s new Tex-Mex destination. So, walk over to the cozy bar at **Oak Steakhouse** and treat yourself to an oyster Rockefeller or two and a terrific house Manhattan.

Maybe you’re angling for a nearly identical table at the El Felix’s intown sister, **Superica**, in Krog Street Market. Follow the Beltline to **Ladybird Grove and Mess Hall**, which looks like the mess hall in a summer camp and has a patio so inviting you might never want to leave.

Even our well-established mini-city, Atlantic Station, has some fresh flavors on the dining front. Chef Todd Richards brings an only-in-Atlanta combination of barbecue and fresh oysters to the **Pig and the Pearl**. Ron Eyester of Rosebud has recently opened his version of a New York City diner and called it, yes, **Diner**. Hey, truth in advertising. I’ll have a tuna melt.



In Alpharetta, the chef’s special at The El Felix is Wild Gulf Red Snapper marinated in guajillo chili adobo and deep fried, topped with roasted tomatillo salsa, avocado, white onions and cilantro. [BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)



Diner in Atlantic Station serves the Breakfast of Champions with two eggs any style, home fries, grits, sausage and silver dollar pancakes. [BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)



On the menu of Ladybird Grove and Mess Hall on the Atlanta Beltline is a Fluffernutter sandwich — marshmallow crème and hazelnut butter on white bread served with banana chips. [BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)

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Food trends. With inventive tapas and cocktails, the new global flavor obsession is Mediterranean. Or is it Spanish?

Atlanta has long been a great town for a bowl of Korean bi bim bap, an Indian masala dosa or Mexican street taco. It has consistently been a disappointing falafel town until now.

**Yalla** in Krog Street Market has seriously upped the ATL’s chickpea game, serving these crunchy balls in terrific fresh pita or in bowls they share with a panoply of salads and pickles. Bezoria offers a more basic but still tasty option in Midtown.

I’m most excited by **Last Word**, where owner Bernard Moussa lets his Lebanese heritage inform both the food and drink. You may have to ask some questions, though. Like, is za’atar really a mixture of herbs and sesame seeds, and does it belong in a cocktail? Yes! Just try the Pliny’s Tonic, a riff on the French 75 enlivened with the spice mixture, and you’ll be a believer.

But before I can call trend on Mediterranean cooking, I’ve got to point out the sudden proliferation of Spanish restaurants.

**Gypsy Kitchen** in Buckhead Atlanta is big and blowsy, the restaurant equivalent of the too-drunk person at the next barstool who is nonetheless kind of fun to talk to. Have some cheese and salami with a glass of wine, and enjoy it for what it is.

**Made Kitchen & Cocktails** is the latest from Alpharetta restaurant king Chris Sedgwick. Look



Gypsy Kitchen in Buckhead serves boquerones with celery leaves, lemon and croutons. [WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)

for braised short rib croquettes, lamb sweetbreads and seared scallops with fennel and grapefruit on the inventive tapas menu.

The one not to miss? The Westside’s **Cooks & Soldiers**, which brings a sophisticated and edgy take on Basque pintxos (bread canapés) and grilled dishes off a wood-burning asador. Some strikingly modern food hides on this menu, including a tomato tartare so beefy in appearance and flavor you will be shocked to discover it is vegan.



Cooks and Soldiers’ Klasikoa is goat’s-milk cheese, roasted tomato, green pepper, shallot jam and pistachio. It is served with Pan Con Tomate — grilled bread with fresh tomato, raw garlic and Boquerones. [WWW.KBECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K](http://WWW.KBECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COM/K)



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# AJC’s list of top new restaurants

### American Food and Beverage

This offshoot of a Texas restaurant has a something-for-everyone menu with plenty of hits and misses, but glimmers of excellent cooking.  
250 Buckhead Ave., Atlanta. 678-705-0454, americanfoodandbeverage.com/atlanta

### Asante

Chef Marvin Woods cooks what he calls “coastal soul cuisine of the African diaspora,” which is better in concept than execution, but fascinating nonetheless.  
250 Park Ave. West, Atlanta. 404-893-0022, asanteatl.com

### Atlas

The return of fine dining, with all the coddling service, finessed cuisine and gorgeous furnishing you could want, but with the comfortable vibe Atlantans love.  
88 W. Paces Ferry Road, Atlanta. 404-600-6471, atlasrestaurant.com

### Bezoria

A sleek, fast-service falafel and shawarma spot in the heart of Midtown, answering the prayers of office workers.  
903 Peachtree St., Atlanta. 404-464-5190, bezoria.com

### The Cafe at Linton’s in the Garden

Linton Hopkins has taken over the Atlanta Botanical Garden cafe and serves a short menu of locally sourced fare.  
1345 Piedmont Ave., Atlanta. 404-585-2061, lintoninthegarden.com

### The Cockentrice

Butcher Kevin Ouzts has opened the city’s most exciting restaurant – a wonderland of glorious meat like none other.  
99 Krog St., Atlanta. 470-428-2733, thecockentrice.com

### Cooks & Soldiers

This fun, sophisticated take on Basque cooking is the crowning achievement of the Castellucci family and one of the city’s hottest reservations.  
691 14th St., Atlanta. 404-996-2623, cooksandsoldiers.com

### Community Smith

Micah Willix shows off his great grilling skills at this latest restaurant, which inhabits the central if cavernous space inside the Renaissance Atlanta Midtown Hotel.  
866 W. Peachtree St., Atlanta. 678-412-2402, communitysmithatl.com

### Diner

Ron Eyester’s Atlantic Station newcomer promises a greasy-spoon meal for the modern age.  
261 19th St., Atlanta. 404-600-6151, dineratlanta.com

### Dish Dive

This excellent, inexpensive and tiny BYOB is the kind of restaurant Atlanta has long needed.  
2233 College Ave., Atlanta. 404-957-7918, dishdivekitchen.com

### The El Felix

Ford Fry’s heartfelt Tex-Mex eatery dishes up fajitas, margaritas and puffy tacos that could make even non-Texans homesick.  
1130 Avalon Blvd. No. 1030, Alpharetta. 678-248-5239, theelfelix.com

### Grain

The food at this terrific cocktail bar – including a daily selection of oysters – surpasses all expectations.  
856 W. Peachtree St., Atlanta. 404-881-5377, grain-bar.com

### Gypsy Kitchen

This cavernous restaurant, upstairs in Buckhead Atlanta, may not evoke an intimate Spanish tapas bar, but it’s good



Four Mile Farm lamb kifta tagine with JB Farms hen egg and fresh herbs are on the menu at Gypsy Kitchen in Buckhead. CONTRIBUTED BY ANGIE MOSIERK



The menu of the Cockentrice, in Krog Street Market, includes Suckling Pig Grattoons made of Jerusalem artichoke whip, brandied apricot gastrique and warm pork belly mustard. WWW.BECKYSTEINKPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



The Shellfish Roast is made with shrimp with pei mussels, lamb sausage, smoky cabbage, potatoes and grilled bread at Ladybird Grove and Mess Hall. WWW.BECKYKSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



Smoked Cheddar Mac ‘N’ Cheese — made with double cream and tabasco — is a specialty at the Pig and the Pearl. WWW.BECKYSTEINKPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



The Braised Leg of Alabama Rabbit comes with hand-cut pappardelle, pine nuts, English pea puree, black trumpets, Parmesan, spring onions and lemon at Atlas, inside the St. Regis hotel in Buckhead. WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK

to know about when you just want salami and wine for dinner.  
3035 Peachtree Road, Atlanta. 404-939-9840, gypsykitchenatl.com

tinguishes this new Spanish offering from Northside restaurant mogul Chris Sedgwick.  
45 Roswell St., Alpharetta. 770-452-6233, madekc.com

### Oak Steakhouse

Splurge on the dry-aged steaks at this satellite of a well loved Charleston cow palace.  
950 3rd St., Alpharetta. 678-722-8333, oaksteakhouseatlanta.com

### Paces & Vine

Tom Murphy and Ian Winslade bring the vibe of Virginia-Highland’s Murphy’s to this Vinings newcomer.  
4300 Paces Ferry Road, Atlanta. 404-205-8255, pacesandvine.com

### The Pig and the Pearl

How about some ceviche, raw oysters and barbecue? Yes, please, and throw in a craft cocktail as well.  
1380 Atlantic Drive, Atlanta. 404-541-0930, thepigandthepearl.com

### Superica

A near replica of the El Felix: lots of Tex, lots of Mex.  
99 Krog St., Atlanta. 678-791-1310, supericaatl.com

### Yalla

Todd Ginsberg and Layla Walk serve the Mediterranean food popular in Israel, including falafel, shawarma and loads of salads.  
99 Krog St., Atlanta., 404-506-9999, yallaatl.com



American Food and Beverage serves this Devil’s Food Cake with cajeta and pistachio ice cream. WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK



Steelhead Trout comes with radish, citronette and toasted almonds from Community Smith in Midtown. WWW.BECKYSTEINPHOTOGRAPHY.COMK

## ABOUT THE AJC’S CHIEF FOOD WRITER

John Kessler has written about food and dining at the Atlanta Journal-Constitution for the past 18 years. A graduate of Williams College, he attended L’Academie de Cuisine culinary school near Washington, D.C. and worked for several years as a restaurant cook and chef in Washington and Denver.  
His writing has received many awards, including the National Headliner Award and

four citations from the James Beard Foundation. His essays, columns and food features have been anthologized 10 times in “Best Food Writing,” and he recently passed first-level certification by the Court of Master Sommeliers.  
He lives in Decatur with his wife and the last of his three daughters still at home. He will bid a fond farewell to Atlanta in June.



John Kessler

## AJC DIGITAL EXTRAS

**John Kessler’s Personal Journeys:** Go to myAJC.com/goguide to read Kessler’s stories about some of the most compelling members of the Atlanta dining community, including:  
“Savoring the now,” the story of the late Ryan Hidingier and his wife Jen and their dream of opening a philanthropic restaurant, the Giving Kitchen.  
“Brothers’ keepers,” the story of restaurateurs Alex and Chris Kinjo and their everlasting quest for an MF Sushi empire.  
“The upstart cattleman,” the story of Will Harris III, the owner of White Oak Pastures cattle farm in Bluffton.  
**Have dinner on us:** The AJC would like to treat you to dinner at one of John Kessler’s favorite restaurants. Enter for a chance to win at [www.AJC.com/go/springdining](http://www.AJC.com/go/springdining).