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Best New Restaurants

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← The Harvest
Room at
Miller Union



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GOES BACK
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← A seasonal vegetable plate at Miller Union
photograph by Alex Martinez



**Best New
Restaurants
2010**

By BILL ADDISON

[editorial]



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RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

MILLER UNION

999 Brady Avenue, 678-733-8550, millerunion.com

BNR2010

THERE'S NO WAY AROUND IT: Atlanta is in a rut when it comes to restaurant openings. Sure, new places launch every week, but the creative sparks that recently blazed through local kitchens have noticeably dimmed. Praise be, then, to these ten restaurants. They showed imagination and gumption over the last year, and they illustrate that even in economically challenging times, it's better to take risks and surprise diners than to bore them with safe, dull menus. With fine dining on hiatus, the spotlight falls on modest and midscale upstarts serving outside-the-box salads, Southern vegetable plates, sublime pizza, and unusual specialties from all around Asia. May their example kindle Atlanta's next culinary revolution.

WHEN I WANT VISITORS NOT ONLY TO EXPERIENCE THE BEST of Atlanta's dining scene but also to grasp the prevailing philosophy of its more prominent chefs and restaurateurs, I start by taking them to Miller Union. Simply driving to its Westside location tells a story about the city. Where Tenth Street crosses Howell Mill Road, it narrows into a cheerless commercial strip; parked eighteen-wheelers often hug one side of the street. Just when you start to wonder whether you're totally lost, a recent industrial redo—once part of the Miller Union stockyards—looms into view on the right, with the restaurant and its front wall of windows perched in the southwest corner.

Inside, the space encapsulates the city's singular aesthetic: a little bit country and a little bit rock 'n' roll, with a generous dash of hip-hop. The three-sided bar has old-timey appeal. You want to shed the day's worries there, bolstered by a stiff bourbon. Turn the corner, and the hallway is covered with silky burgundy patterns that suggest old blues clubs and Prohibition-era speakeasies. Maybe co-owner Neal McCarthy or one of his hostesses will sit you in the Hopperesque middle room full of Americana knickknacks, or maybe you'll be shown to the edgier room on the left, a pastiche of chocolate banquettes and slate-gray walls.

McCarthy's posh British accent may throw you for a second: They do serve Southern food here, right? Oh, yes. Georgia native Steven Satterfield cooks regional foods free of clichés or pretense. His farm egg baked in subtle celery cream with crunchy toast became an instant classic. The wintry dishes he served when the restaurant launched in November—braised rabbit over grits, a spunky winter greens soup—disappeared with the cold weather. If summer sunshine had a taste, it would resemble the pan-seared duck breast over a succotash of sweet corn and butter beans on a recent menu. Satterfield was a bit shy with seasoning when Miller Union first opened, particularly in his approach to fish, but scamp grouper surrounded by summer squash, corn, fennel, and tomato proves that he's now mastered the dual arts of simplicity and temerity.

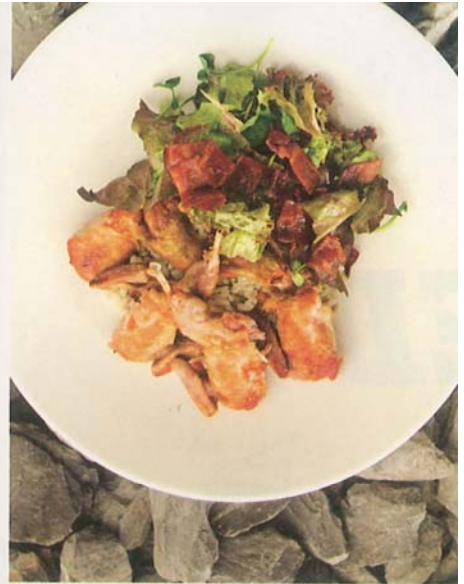
If you want to really steep yourself in Satterfield's cooking, attend his family-style Harvest Dinner the third Tuesday of every month. In July, it featured country captain—the curried chicken and vegetable dish from the Georgia coast—served with scallion spoon bread and fried okra encased in the sheerest batter. For dessert, the staff brought out juicy blackberry cobbler. It immediately ignited a food fight at our communal table: Should cobbler be made with pie crust or biscuit dough? Even while getting riled up over the merits of biscuit dough, I felt happy. We need more restaurants like Miller Union that encourage quarreling over Southern cornerstones. ■

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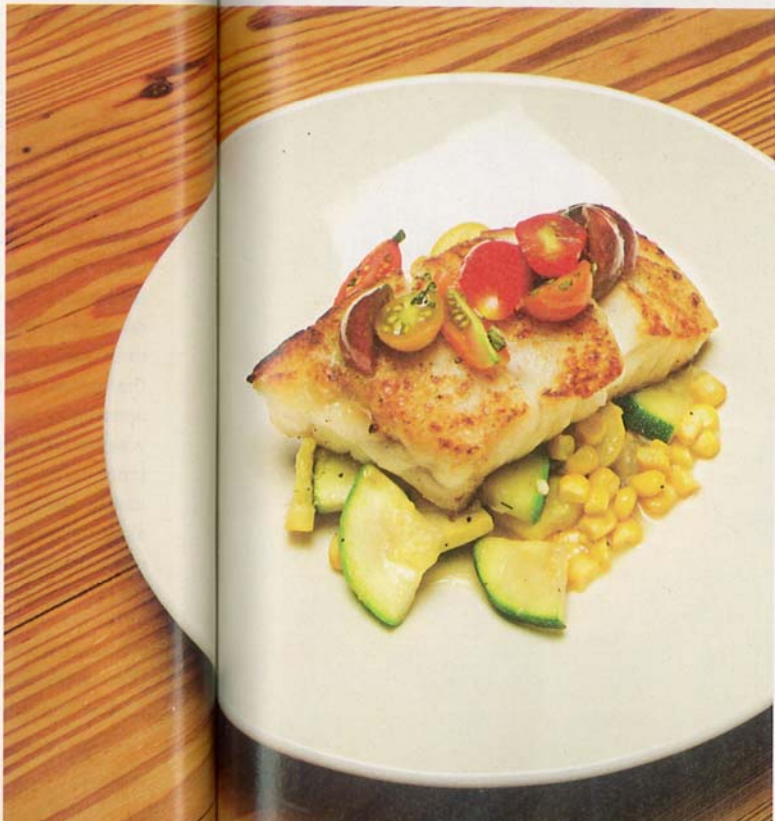
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Steven Satterfield, Miller Union's co-owner and executive chef, offers liting entrees such as sauteed quail over herb-pecan rice with wilted salad and scamp grouper over summer squash and sweet corn. Bartenders concoct nonalcoholic sodas in several flavors, including blueberry-ginger (pictured).



PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEX MARTINEZ

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