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Value Brands of the Year

[editorial]



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F&B Scene: **Atlanta**

By Carson Demmond

There has always been destination dining in Atlanta, whether it's for a chili cheese dog from a car hop at *The Varsity*, fried green tomatoes at *Mary Mac's Tea Room* or the finer pleasures of glazed veal sweetbreads with Georgia pecans at *Bacchanalia*. But over the past few years I have watched my hometown experience a gastoculture boom, with young talent migrating to the city to embrace the quirks of southern fare and veterans of long-respected dining establishments creating the sort of places where they'd like to hang out on a night off. Taking full advantage of the bounty of nearby farming communities, they're revisiting their roots, geeking out over breaking down whole animals and riffing on cocktail classics. There has never been a more exciting time for eating and drinking in ATL.



Leon's Full Service

Holeman & Finch Public House

After hearty success with *Restaurant Eugene*, Linton and Gina Hopkins and bar guru Greg Best decided to loosen their ties, opening a pork-centric joint next door. *Holeman & Finch* draws an after-dinner crowd of Buckhead locals and industry folk for Best's bittered and bettered concoctions and maybe a plate of house-cured charcuterie. They excel at dealing with "parts," as they call the section of the menu dedicated to pork skins, duck liver and veal brains, and are equally adept at handling turnips, kohlrabi and mushrooms. To keep their bread options fresh, they've opened their own bakery (a practice that *Cakes & Ale* (p. 18) endorses as well). Open until midnight most of the week and 1:30 a.m. on Fridays and Saturdays, the restaurant is popular among sommeliers after shift, whether for a glass off wine director Jeff Hagley's list or a drink like the Comfortably Numb, an inspired blend of batavia arrack, Tequila, Vallet bitter, orgeat, citrus and cider. To encourage quality imbibing at home, the team has also opened the H&F Bottle Shop less than half a mile away.

2277 Peachtree Rd. NE; 404-948-1175; holeman-finch.com



Photos by Heather Anne Thomas



Photos (bottom) by Sarah Dorio

Empire State South

Empire State South brought chef Hugh Acheson's innovative southern food sensibilities to midtown Atlanta in 2010. Now, chefs Ryan Smith and Sam Herndon run the kitchen and have turned up the volume with a gratifying repertoire of heirloom grains and pickled and jarred snacks. Because what do we really want? We want pimento cheese and bacon marmalade in a jar. And we want collards. With ham hock, like our grandma made. Wine director Steven Grubbs has authored a list that mirrors the menu's eccentric personality. Riesling abounds, as do grower bubbles, each listing annotated with engaging descriptive like "righteous harmony" or "Paul's boutique of old-vine intensity" for a Paul Garudet Meursault. (Perhaps Grubbs has fond memories of listening to the Beastie Boys while driving up the RN74 in Burgundy...) Steal a seat at the bar for lunch and order a fried bologna sandwich with a vibrant Touraine cabernet franc from Domaine de la Garrelière. You won't want to leave — unless it's for a round of bocce on the outdoor court.

999 Peachtree St. NE; 404-541-1105; empirestatesouth.com

Photo by Heather Anne Thomas

Miller Union

Once a warehouse district, Atlanta's Westside has become a breeding ground for culinary inspiration. *Miller Union* is a thrilling example. Here partner and general manager Neal McCarthy has perfected the sustainable wine shortlist—a single page, front and back, deep in selections from the likes of Rosenthal, Kermit Lynch and Louis/Dressner. Steven Satterfield's cuisine is equally attentive to provenance and transparent farming practices, fueled by a network of local growers and purveyors—think pork-and-fig sausage over a fluffy bed of parsnip purée and braised greens, punctuated by pickled shiitakes. Add a glass of Jean-Paul Brun's Terres Dorées Morgon or a bottle of Grosjean Torrette from Italy's Vallée d'Aoste and you're all set.

999 Brady Ave. NW; 678-733-8550; millerunion.com



[editorial]



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Cakes & Ale

Decatur's *Cakes & Ale* takes its name from a line in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, a request to let the simple pleasures flow, and that's exactly what happens here. After five years of attracting crowds with simple, well-executed dishes based on local ingredients, chef Billy Allin and his team have recently upped their game by moving to a new space on Sycamore Street, adding a bakery as well as a sommelier, former *Holeman & Finch* wine buyer Jordan Smelt. "Since I was already a huge fan of the place," says Smelt, "my plan when I arrived was to elevate the beverage program to the level of the cuisine." The list now is just as playful and wholesome as the menu; Alsace gets a lot of love, as do the Loire and Rhone valleys. There's even a section of "Fun Stuff" like Wind Gap's trousseau gris or Zéligé-Caravent's Manouche—a blend of alicante bouschet and cinsault.

155 Sycamore St., Decatur; 404-377-7994; cakesandalerestaurant.com

Leon's Full Service

Leon's may not have invented Atlanta cocktail culture, but it certainly brought that culture to Decatur—more specifically, to a converted gas station a stone's throw from Decatur's square. The brainchild of Mike Gallagher, Tom Moore and Dave Blanchard, the same folks who launched Atlanta's beer frenzy with *The Brick Store Pub*, *Leon's* pours some cool brews, but it's the cocktail program that reigns. The bar staff, led by Miles Macquarrie, turn out properly made classics as well as seasonal inventions (this spring featured Maxwell's Silver Hammer, a bright, savory blend of Espolon Tequila, salted cashew orgeat, lime and VSOP Calvados). When it's raining, they'll knock \$2 off the price of a Dark 'n Stormy. Good drinks deserve good food, and Eric Ottensmeyer delivers: Try frites with various sauces, roasted marrow bones with green olives, parsley and orange or redfish with rice grits and Georgia rock shrimp.

131 E. Ponce De Leon Ave., Decatur; 404-687-0500; leonsfullservice.com



The Porter and The Bookhouse Pub

Atlantans have remarkable dedication to lagers, sours, Trappists, tripels, quadrupels and, well, anything brewed. *The Porter*, a miniscule space in Little Five Points, is a popular destination for somms and bartenders after an evening of peddling Burgundy and stirring artisanal booze. There, Nick Rutherford and Molly Gunn list no fewer than 700 bottles and 30-something beers on draft, highlighting the newest on their website's drink blog. On another night, those somms may wind down at *The Bookhouse Pub*, a corner space off of Ponce De Leon Avenue that *Empire State South* wine director Steven Grubbs describes as a "Twin Peaks"-themed hunting lodge." There are comfortable booths, a healthy draft list that ranges from lambic to Founder's Red Rye and bottles of ales hailing from Belgium and Japan.

The Porter, 1156 Euclid Ave. NE; 404-223-0393; theporterbeerbar.com
The Bookhouse Pub, 736 Ponce De Leon Ave. NE; 404-254-1176; bookhousepub.com