



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: *Camarones a la Diabla* at Estrella; Cold Beer; The Medicine for Melancholy cocktail at Tiny Lou's; The Mission + Market bar.

Off the Beaten Path

EXPLORE ATLANTA'S STELLAR—AND OFTEN SURPRISING—DINING SCENE. **BY WENDELL BROCK**

For any city worth visiting, a list of the newest, hottest, trendiest restaurants is a mere Google search away. But what about those places that don't make the list? While Atlanta has scads of award-winning, celebrity-owned, destination dining rooms, there's also an abundance of good things to eat and drink in unexpected places. At pop-ups, food halls, markets, breweries and hotels, deliciousness abounds. Here's an insider's look at some notable options.

BARM: It's easy to zip past this hipster hangout across the street from Ponce City Market without realizing there's a top-notch restaurant and bar in the cottagelike former dog-training academy. Since taking over earlier this year as executive chef, Maricela Vega has developed a cultlike following with her veggie-forward cuisine, which frequently nods to her Mexican ancestors. Vega doesn't merely pay lip service to the farm-to-table movement—she works side by side with the people who grow her corn, ducks, collards, figs, pigs, peanuts and nearly everything else she cooks. Discover this original before everyone else does.

ESTRELLA: The BeltLine has spawned a plethora of beer halls, pizza parlors and destination restaurants. For those in the know, there are some appealing nooks and crannies that are off the beaten path (literally). To get to Estrella, a Yucatán-inspired restaurant with Latin-accented cocktails, you must pinpoint the warren of shops and cafés housed in the Bazati Building across from Old Fourth Ward Park and take the stairs up to the second level. You'll emerge in a stylish, all-white room, bordered by a rooftop patio with spectacular views. It's the perfect perch for sipping caipirinhas and spying on BeltLine passers-by. The skyline view's not bad, either.

GATO NIGHTS: By day, Candler Park's Gato is a cozy diner serving better-than-average burritos, huevos rancheros and omelets. By night, it's a different kitty cat: Gato Nights. That's when chef-owner Nicholas Stinson exhibits his deep knowledge of Mexican regional cuisine (think Oaxacan moles, Yucatán-inspired pork belly three ways, dulce de leche with figs) and the bar shakes up spiked salty limeade and other creative sippers. Stinson likes to talk about his craft and his amiable, laid-back nature makes you feel as if you're visiting a dedicated home cook in his kitchen.

MISSION + MARKET: Deep in a well of office towers in the heart of glitzy Buckhead, British-born chef Ian Winslade makes contemporary fare that's as exciting as the fashions on offer at nearby Phipps Plaza and Lenox Square. Sup on lusty butter-basted clams with bacon or grilled bread and celery salad, or slurp down citrus-marinated oysters with paddlefish caviar. The cocktail list will likewise tantalize, with surprising ingredients such as Irish gin and ratafia made with Georgia peach pits.

ATLANTA NATIVE

Ron Hsu

Executive chef and partner, Lazy Betty

With a résumé that reads like a culinary highlight reel—with stints as creative director at Manhattan's Le Bernardin and an appearance on *The Final Table* on Netflix—Henry County-born chef Ron Hsu could have successfully built a business just about anywhere. Instead, in 2019, alongside his siblings Anita and Howard and chef de cuisine Aaron Phillips, he opened his first restaurant, Lazy Betty, to wide critical acclaim. "I came back to Atlanta because I wanted to push the dining scene further," explains Hsu, who grew up in the hospitality industry as his parents owned Chinese restaurants around town. "We are very multicultural, and I wanted to change the rhetoric on what 'Southern dining' is," he adds. Now he's putting his stamp on the city's culinary landscape with artfully executed plates spread across multicourse tasting menus. —J.B.F.



RESTAURANT 356: This one-of-a-kind dinner experience at the Porsche Experience Center Atlanta is a high-octane blend of fast cars and fine food. While sports car geeks circle down below and planes whiz in and out of Hartsfield-Jackson next door, you can feast on braised lamb with spaetzle or lobster ravioli while enjoying uninterrupted views of the racetrack. Fasten your seat belts for pastry chef Charmain Ware's popsicle-shaped Meyer lemon semifreddo with coconut and raspberries. And don't snooze on the cornbread: It comes with little Porsche-shaped pats of butter.

SWEETWATER BREWERY TAP-ROOM: Thanks to changes in Georgia law easing alcohol sales at breweries and distilleries, many craft beer makers are upping their food game. At SweetWater, nosh on chef Nick Anderson's luscious pimento cheese with toasted spent grain and butter-dipped saltines, IPA-battered shrimp hush puppies and Korean barbecue cheesesteaks. Save room for a Georgia peach ice-cream sandwich—and enjoy the pet-friendly, tree-shaded outdoor garden.

THIRD STREET GOODS AND CARDINAL: At their bodega-style neighborhood market south of Grant Park, owners Kathryn DiMenichi and Holli Medley take pride in showcasing local products (including those from vendors who are women and people of color). Go to Third Street for good coffee, bread, beer, fresh fruits and veggies. At cocktail hour, step into Cardinal, a seductive, speakeasy-style bar with a separate entrance and delicious drinks and nibbles made with ingredients sourced from the market.

TICONDEROGA CLUB: You could spend a lot of time at Krog Street Market and somehow miss the nationally acclaimed cocktail bar and restaurant hidden away in a corner. Yes, this svelte watering hole was a finalist for a 2019 James Beard award for outstanding bar program. Turns out the New England-leaning cooking ain't too shabby, either. Try the \$17.66 all-belly Ipswich clam roll, fish and



WHAT'S NEW?

A big part of Atlanta's appeal is that it's always in flux. Here are some new and upcoming restaurants to get excited about:

COLD BEER Don't believe the name. The latest from *Top Chef* favorite Kevin Gillespie features supercreative fare, an ambitious cocktail program and high design on the BeltLine. And, yes, there is cold beer while you wait.

LAZY BETTY Chef Ron Hsu, formerly of New York's Le Bernardin, serves a highly personal tasting menu in a restaurant dedicated to the memory of his late mother, Betty Hsu, a Chinese-Malaysian immigrant who owned seven Chinese restaurants in Atlanta throughout her lifetime.

REDBIRD After selling the historic Southern restaurant Watershed, Ross Jones has joined up with chef Zeb Stevenson as owners of Redbird, in the old Bacchanalia space on the Westside.

VIETVANA Buford Highway remains the epicenter of Vietnamese dining in Atlanta. But local foodies are excited about this promising Avondale Estates newcomer, which offers plenty of options beyond the usual pho, banh mi and rice plates.

WONDERKID Atlanta's beloved King of Pops (headed up by brothers Nick and Steven Carse) is teaming up with restaurateurs Eric Simpkins and Darren Carr (The Lawrence, Bon Ton) to create a casual diner for breakfast, lunch, dinner, desserts and soft-serve. Opening this fall at Atlanta Dairies on Memorial Drive. —W.B.

chips or the singular Cobb salad.

TINY LOU'S: Atlanta hotels have a tradition of creating food-and-drink joints that become icons of nostalgia. Trader Vic's (inside Hilton Atlanta since 1976) is a beloved repository of tiki culture. The circa 1967 Polaris (atop John Portman's landmark Hyatt Regency) is the town's top spot for frozen peach daiquiris and 360-degree views. The latest hotel-based, down-the-rabbit-hole instant classic is Tiny Lou's, a superb French-American restaurant in the newly restored Hotel Clermont. Follow the glowing neon sign down a staircase from the main lobby and ensconce yourself in a Paris-perfect boîte named after a burlesque dancer from the hotel's 1950s salad days. Chef Jeb Aldrich's Tennessee rabbit cassoulet, Vidalia onion soup and steak frites are masterful, and pastry chef Claudia Martinez's desserts have their own cheering section. ▼