

# RATHBUN'S



## Best New Restaurants, 2004

Right now is the best time to dine out in America

by John Mariani | Nov 01 '04

I'm still standing. And 356 meals later, I can happily report to you that 2004 was the best year to dine out in America. Ever. People are filling up restaurants again, prices have not risen (except in Vegas), Japanese restaurants are getting more exciting, Italian restaurants are getting more authentic, and charcuterie and great cheeses are being served everywhere. Young chefs we've been keeping an eye on for years have opened their own places, while celebrity chefs have overextended themselves into oblivion—so leave 'em to the tourists and bank on this: If you go to any of our picks for the Best New Restaurants of 2004, the chef will be there cooking for you. And tell them Esquire sent you.

### ATLANTA: Rathbun's

A restaurant set in a large warehouse often means overwhelming noise and way too many diners flagging down way too few waiters delivering way too tepid plates of food. But somehow chef and owner Kevin Rathbun has kept those distractions to a simmer, and there's just no arguing with the all-American goodness of his cooking, like braised brisket in a smoked-tomato jus with poblano quesadillas on the side and crispy hand-cut french fries with a blue-cheese fondue. Big Kevin doesn't skimp on portions of his Maine-lobster-and-roasted-green-chile taco with cascabel cream and tomato pico or his sea scallops on country-ham-studded grits with a spiced hollandaise. That doesn't leave much room for the lime shortcake with peppered peaches—but force yourself anyway.

**Don't-miss dish:** The three-soup sampler.  
(112 Krog Street, Suite R; 404-524-8280)

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## Travel & Leisure Magazine December, 2004

Best New American Restaurants 2004

This year, chefs across the United States have stepped up to the plate with some amazing offerings. Hungry? Here are 40 places in 10 cities where you can find your next memorable meal.

by Anya Von Bremzen

What is "American cuisine" now? In search of answers, we traveled to 10 of our most forward-thinking food capitals to bring you the best examples and the top tables in each. As we discovered, choice is the new buzzword: from "small plates" to big ideas, celebrity scenes to intimate neighborhood gems, multimillion-dollar design temples to chic storefronts, the iconoclasts of a new generation are profoundly altering the culinary landscape. Meanwhile, other chefs are taking up the mantle of Alice Waters, romancing farmers' markets and kitchen gardens, preferring a revolution in the smallest details. Over the past year we've seen American chefs (and diners) turn their backs on gussied-up comfort food in favor of food that makes you sit up and take note. Whether they're in Boston or San Francisco, restaurants have become destinations for gustatory thrill rides. Luckily, culinary adventurers need not look beyond our shores to get a taste of the best. Read on.

### ATLANTA

Kevin Rathbun knew with all the certainty in the world that there wasn't a soul in Atlanta who could resist oysters two ways (cornmeal-fried and lemongrass-stewed) or banana-peanut butter cream pie. What really matters, however, is this: the Southern-leaning New American dishes at **Rathbun's** (112 Krog St.; 404/524-8280; dinner for two \$60) taste as good as they sound. One would be happy to eat his food in a mess hall. Yet Atlanta's fashionable Johnson Studio has transformed the 19th-century warehouse space, once home to a potbellied-stove factory, using mod shades of gray, a luminous open kitchen, and oversized stovepipe pendants that cast a fuchsia glow on the city swells who tuck into veal chops with sweet corn and Gouda fondue or Rathbun's cloudlike fresh mozzarella. They leave lusting after all the stuff they didn't manage to order.

Neither a chile-suffused ethnic dive nor a pink box in the mall serving flavorless *pad thai*, **Nan Thai Fine Dining** (1350 Spring St. N.W.; 404/870-9933; dinner for two \$67) reinvents the genre with a sleekly opulent crimson and gold room that hosts *le tout* Atlanta: Buckhead charity-ball queens, pro golfers (Vijay Singh is a friend of the owners'), and sweater-vested academics from Georgia Tech. It's hard to tell which detail is most enchanting: the silk-draped gamins who deliver your tea rose-colored dumplings, the elaborate carved fruits that appear as part of chef Nan Niyomkul's appetizer lollapalooza, or the coconut-milk extractor that the owners imported from Thailand (read: fabulous curries).

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## Airtran Magazine

April/May, 2005

WORDS BY TONY WARE

### Rathbun's \$\$\$

112 Krog St. Ste. R, Inman Park. 404-524-8280

#### DRESSED-UP

A sprawling space with a sprawling menu, Rathbun's marries post-industrial chic with globally informed New American cuisine. The melting pot menu is crafted quarterly around seasonal ingredients by chef and owner Kevin Rathbun, who served his time in the kitchens of Dallas, New Orleans and several of Atlanta's finest dining rooms, before opening his own restaurant. At Rathbun's, his recipes have been organized into small plates, raw plates, side plates, big plates and second mortgage plates, and everything is deliciously creamy, zesty, smoked or spiked. Do whatever it takes to experience Atlanta's most industrious chef's celebration of indigenous food.

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February 9, 2005

## TRAVELER'S TASTE

### Cuisine gets imaginative spin at Rathbun's in Atlanta

By Jan Shepherd, Globe Correspondent | February 9, 2005

ATLANTA -- The culinary scene here is simmerin' with a slew of restaurants that national, regional, and local press single out for "best this and that" lists. Last fall, two Atlanta Journal-Constitution reviewers updated their Top 50 restaurants guide. Among those cited were Seeger's, Woodfire Grill, Rathbun's, Soto Japanese Restaurant, Joel, Bacchanalia, and the dining room at the Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead. Tough to choose, but my Atlanta friends steered us to Rathbun's, a new kid on the block. Months later I'm still dreaming of a return; once is not enough at Rathbun's.

Housed in the Stove Works, an old factory complex that produced potbelly stoves and cast-iron cookware in its heyday, Rathbun's is a marvel of modern style and cuisine. The excitement begins with the setting, a contemporary transformation of cavernous space into a place with pizzazz. The architects, Johnson Studio, turned 23-foot-high ceilings, brick walls, and old floors into assets. Open since last May, the restaurant has a main dining room for 110, a striking bar for 27, and a patio for 52. A 40-seat wine room opened in December.

Owner Kevin Rathbun, an acclaimed chef on the Atlanta scene for more than a decade after sharpening his culinary skills in his native Kansas and in Dallas and New Orleans, looked for more than five years for a place of his own in the Victorian neighborhood of Inman Park. His business partners are pastry chef Kirk Parks and general manager Cliff Bramble, with whom he has teamed in the past.

Rathbun fashions dishes from fresh, simple ingredients using local products and organics as much as possible, and he organizes the menu into Small Plates, Raw Plates, Soup Bowls, Side Plates, Big Plates, and Second Mortgage Plates. That last category offers hefty choices, among them a 20-ounce rib-eye and a 14-ounce veal chop. "Seasonally, I change the menu four times a year, though I can and do make daily changes -- depending on what's good in the organics for the day," Rathbun said in a telephone interview last month.

The distinct flavor combos are drawn from his experiences with Southwestern, Asian, New Orleans, and Southern cuisine. "I'm grown up now and look for what I can hook the taste with," he said. "I try not to be overzealous with too many things. We try to keep it to three flavors. A great oyster with a great sauce, for example."

Our party chose from among a dozen Small Plates, settling on Blue Point oysters two ways: cornmeal-fried and lemongrass stewed; garlic shrimp and local okra with spiced tomatoes; lamb scaloppine, pancetta, and goat cheese; and eggplant steak fries with confectioners sugar. Don't skip the eggplant dipping sauce; the Tabasco and powdered sugar combo is dynamite.

The Big Plates also have enticing tastes, among them Prince William Sound wild sockeye salmon, toasted orzo and Vidalia onions, and sauteed snapper on a bed of fennel and onions.

The restaurant offers samplers to show off Parks's imaginative creations. We swooned over the sampler's chocolate cube, banana peanut-butter cream pie, banana-bread ice cream sandwich, and orange and chili brulee.

So what's the advantage of one's own place? "I can do anything I want," Rathbun said with a laugh. "I can close when I want, open when I want. And I can pay the staff what they deserve."

He's also high on the location: "This neighborhood was Atlanta's first suburb with homes for some of the city's wealthiest families, but it had gotten run-down. It's now on a growth curve, and yet it's less than a half-mile from downtown."

Rathbun's, 112 Krog St., Inman Park, Atlanta. 404-524-8280. [www.rathbunsrestaurant.com](http://www.rathbunsrestaurant.com). Reservations recommended. Small Plates \$4.95-\$7.25; Raw Plates \$4.95-\$7.95; Big Plates \$13.95-\$21; Second Mortgage Plates \$26.95-\$32.95. ■

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## Rathbun Appetit

### Art of the Meal

By Krista Reese

How do you explain the smashing success of Rathbun's, lauded by USA Today and Bon Appetit, and crowned by Esquire as one of the country's best new restaurants?

True-blue American chef Kevin Rathbun's secret is buried deep in his official bio: Aside from a mother and grandmother who taught him the importance of farm and dairy-fresh foodstuffs, Rathbun's formative culinary experiences also derived from "his father? a Kansas City jazz musician, [who] often cooked great BBQ for his musician friends and later had jam sessions in the basement."

Of course: Jazz and barbecue -- America's signature creative inventions, both defined by improvisation within a given vernacular. They explain everything about Rathbun's mastery of nearly every major American regional cuisine, from sous chef under Emeril Lagasse at New Orleans' venerable Commander's Palace to guiding light for inventive menus at the Buckhead Life Group's varied restaurants.

At Rathbun's, in intown Atlanta, the chef steps out for his solo. The Stoveworks' century-old funky industrial stage set is elegant and hip. I prefer the covered patio, with gently trickling fountain, and cutout ovals in the canvas screens that both absorb sound and allow you to spot your friends as they enter. (I also like the fact that no reservations are taken on the 45-seat patio.)

The food is engaging and smartly priced, and as meat-centric as you might expect of a Kansas City native. You can get away with several tapas-like "small plates," priced from \$5-\$7.25 (sambal-tossed fried calamari; Thai rare beef and red onion salad with kaffir lime); a "raw plate" or two, \$5-\$8.50 (cubed hamachi, or yellowtail tuna, with Asian pear and sesame; romaine heart salad with gruyere); entrees or "big plates," \$14-\$21 (wild sockeye salmon, toasted orzo and caramelized onion; pan-roasted cod, shrimp and mirliton squash ragout), or splurge on one of the "second mortgage plates," \$27-\$33 (lobster and roasted green chile soft taco; veal chop with sweet corn and gouda fondue).

The wine list changes weekly, and includes such great by-the-glass finds as Cristalino, a Spanish brut cava, and a bone dry sparkling rose (Laetitia, Arroyo Grande Valley, '00).

Begin with the soups, so rich and bold that only a bite or two of each will satisfy two people in the clever, three-demitasse-cup "1-1-1" sampler. Recently, that included cauliflower-parmesan; pumpkin; and spicy mock turtle with a dollop of dry sherry. The small plates hold exquisite bites of fried calamari and fiery sambal, tender shrimp with al dente fresh limas, almonds and garlic, or chopped romaine lettuce, with a crisp-fried rectangle of gruyere.

It's no wonder critics greet Rathbun's with a standing ovation, and his audience with repeat encores.

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January, 2005

**What's Hot What's Not What's Next - Restaurants Top Tables**

## The Restaurant Reporter

**Special Edition:** An opinionated guide to the year's best - and worst-new restaurants. Plus, what's coming up in 2005

**ATLANTA:** Where the Knowing Are Going: Former Buckhead Life Restaurant Group corporate chef Kevin Rathbun strikes out on his own with Rathbun's, which has everything Atlanta loves-a near-hidden address in an industrial building, small plates, big cocktails, and cooking with a keen sense of place.

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## Chile Pepper Magazine

December, 2004

### Grand Dining For the Holidays

Where to go this winter for good cheer and good eats...by John Mariani

No matter how the year has gone - winning and losing, getting and trading, earning and paying - one's trials and tribulations seem to evaporate with the onset of the December holidays and the promise of renewal. The thought of celebrating with one's family and colleagues means the place has something special: somewhere that evokes a feeling of goodness and delight, so that, while finishing a meal in such a restaurant, hope springs eternal for the year to come. Add some spice, and the whole world looks better. Here, then, are some very special dining spots to celebrate the winter holidays.

Rathbun's: Since opening earlier this year, Rathbun's has become the place to see and be seen. The gargantuan, former warehouse has now been made to look like a hip hangout in TriBeCa.

Kevin Rathbun is a big guy who loves big flavors - evident in his braised brisket in a smoked tomato jus with poblano quesadillas or the hand-cut French fries with bleu cheese dipping fondue. There's a hefty portion of Maine lobster and roasted green chile tacos with cascabel cream and tomato pico de gallo, or his sea scallops on country-ham-studded grits with a spiced hollandaise. The velvety corn soup is laced with pasilla chiles, and Meyer lemons provide a real zing to the tarragon-scented roasted chicken with creamy mashed potatoes.

The space itself is as fit for a celebratory holiday dinner as for a New Year's bash, but call early to reserve a table.

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## From haute cuisine to homestyle cooking, Atlanta has it all

By Deborah Geering, special for USATODAY.com

October 8, 2004

If Atlanta is your only stop in the South, you'll surely want to sample the homey cooking that is the regional specialty. But once you've gotten your fill of grits, biscuits and barbecue, you might want to test for yourself the city's growing reputation for excellent international fare.

Throughout the metro area, diners hungering for adventure will find excellent offerings of Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Thai, Ethiopian, Persian, Greek, Central and South American and many, many other flavors. Although one can stumble across pleasant, established ethnic restaurants with solid reputations just about anywhere in the area, some of the best food is still waiting to be "discovered" by the mainstream restaurant crowd, tucked away in holes-in-the-wall on the Buford Highway corridor north of intown.

Meanwhile, the area's list of nationally noteworthy restaurants is growing. Two Atlanta restaurants carry AAA's prestigious five-diamond rating: The Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton, Buckhead, and Seeger's. And two others — Bacchanalia and Joel — consistently earn attention in national publications.

### Still want Southern cooking?

**Latest, hottest** — Longtime Atlanta chef Kevin Rathbun has made a huge splash with his eponymous first restaurant, located a few miles east of Midtown Atlanta in Inman Park. You've got to love a menu that divides its new American cuisine into small plates, big plates and "Second Mortgage Plates." Hits at Rathbun's include tender braised brisket in smoked tomato quesadillas, smoked salmon tostadas and creamy white corn with gouda cheese. Entrees \$14-\$30. Don't miss the pastry chef's choice of four desserts for \$10 — let Kirk Parks surprise you with delicacies such as banana peanut butter pie, lemon panna cotta and Mexican chocolate mousse. Reservations recommended. The inside feels dominated by the large bar, but the best seating is on the covered, landscaped patio, anyway. 112 Krog St., Suite R; 404-524-8280; [www.rathbunsrestaurant.com](http://www.rathbunsrestaurant.com).



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**Food:** ★★★★★

**Service:** ★★★★★

**Comfort & Aesthetics:** ★★★★★

**Value:** ★★★★★

**Scene:** ★★★★★

## Rathbun's greatest hits

Renowned chef formerly of high-end restaurant group makes new home for himself and dishes from his varied fusion past.

By MISTI HEWATT

Friday, October 08, 2004

Kevin Rathbun is one of Atlanta's most well known chefs. He worked under Emeril Lagasse and at Baby Routh in Dallas, named "one of America's 25 best restaurants" by Travel & Leisure.

In Atlanta, he built his reputation with the Buckhead Life Restaurant Group, working as the executive chef at Nava and Bluepointe, then becoming the corporate executive chef for the group of 13 eateries. While there, he overhauled the menus of Atlanta dining institutions like Chops, Atlanta Fish Market and Buckhead Diner.

Now the chef's delectable history has a home at Rathbun's, which opened recently in Inman Park's Stove Works. The menu mirrors his past with an array of fusion offerings.

From Baby Routh's and Nava come Southwestern and Spanish spices. Bluepointe offers an Asian twist, and the Fish Market's seafood delights are available. With hefty steaks prepared in an 1,800-degree broiler, even Chops makes an appearance.

The menu is considered modern American, but perhaps a more fitting label is "Rathbun's Greatest Hits."

The décor is stylish, but the restaurant is loud. From the banter of Twist to the echoes of Patio, Atlanta restaurants appear to enjoy expanses of cement floors, barren walls and hard surfaces — an acoustic nightmare.

Perhaps Atlanta restaurateurs think that the din creates an illusion of the frenetic Big Apple or the festivity of South Beach. Regardless, Rathbun's joins the list of high-decibel dining, but it also joins the list of promising new eats.

With nearly 15 small plates and 10 raw plates, a tapas evening would be easy, offering a dish for every palate and enough flavors to create a sophisticated tasting menu.

Be sure to include the chicken tenderloins with tofu and panang curry (\$5.25). The chicken and tofu are fresh and complemented smartly by the spicy sweetness of panang. The curry is wonderful and with a bowl of rice could be a satisfying meal.

The Soups 1-1-1 (\$6.25) is a sample of the two house soups (mock turtle and velvet corn) and the soup of the day. Served in tiny coffee mugs, the sampler is fun, and both of the house soups are robust delights.

The raw plates are less impressive. The fresh figs with manchego cheese and coffee scented honey (\$5.25) and the ahi tuna "crudo" with citrus, serranos and cold pressed olive oil (\$7.95) are unsubstantial and lack the deep zest of the other dishes.

For something different, try the hand-cut French fries with blue cheese fondue (\$4). The fries are not perfectly crisp, but the combination is appetizing and a bit novel.

In the entrée category, the menu also provides "Big Plates" and the humorous "Second Mortgage Plates," which include lobster, steaks and generally a special whole fish offering. The "Big Plates" offer a satisfying selection for diners not quite ready to leverage their house for a good dinner.

Pastry chef Kirk Parks creates solid grand finales. The banana peanut butter pie is gaining a reputation as a signature Atlanta dessert. The first spoonful deceives with the taste of a basic banana pudding, but the peanut butter finish begs for another bite, and then another.

With a lengthy wine list and extensive menu, there are countless tastes to explore at Rathbun's. As the months pass, the place is sure to create a new line-up of greatest hits.

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## Best New Restaurant - 2004

The culinary cognoscenti whispered words of worry among themselves when Kevin Rathbun announced he would be opening his own venture in the location on Krog Street where the defunct Virginia's had flailed. Those fears turned out to be most unfounded. **RATHBUN'S is the smash success of the year.** Rathbun has shed his corporate Buckhead Life Restaurant Group skins for a personal take on two of the city's perennial gustatory favorites: small plates and comfort food. Think mussels on toast, rib eye with blue cheese and bacon vinaigrette, and wondrous miniature desserts. Do not think about showing up on weekends without a reservation.

# RATHBUN'S

ajc.com  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



## American beauty

By MERIDITH FORD

Published on: 07/27/04

Overall rating: ★★

### OUR STAR RATING SYSTEM

★★★★★ **Outstanding.** Sets the standard for fine dining in the region.

★★★★ **Excellent.** One of the best in the Atlanta area.

★★★ **Very good.** Merits a drive if you're looking for this kind of dining.

★★ **Good.** A worthy addition to its neighborhood, but food may be hit or miss.

Restaurants that do not meet these criteria may be rated **Fair** or **Poor**.

AMERICANS ARE PURITANICAL as a rule. And try as we might to shed our prudish weight, we still seem a little staunchly starched compared with other cultures.

Perhaps nowhere but in our indigenous foods — and the way we cook them — do we ever truly break from form and relax. New American cuisine embraces a certain comfort factor. It is fun and approachable without becoming gaudy and contrite. It is sophisticated yet doesn't intimidate. It teaches but never oversteps boundaries. It makes mistakes but is all the more likable for it.

And Kevin Rathbun, chef-owner of Rathbun's in Inman Park, is a master at preparing it. His new restaurant embraces the maxim that food should be enjoyable, creative and innovative, but never fussy. The menu is a textbook lesson of what new American cuisine is — a reflection of local tastes and ingredients melded with concepts of preparation that draw from family rituals, formal dining principles and just plain old common sense.

Simply put, this man knows what ingredients to mix with what and make it all come out tasting *real* good. Need proof? Try his white corn — sweet, pan-charred and still just a little bit crunchy, mixed with creamily melted, mildly nutty Gouda and a dice of bright tomatoes. Or sultry smoked salmon, so velvety you barely need to chew it, with a creamy mix of heated, heady habaneros, a lemon-zest vinaigrette and a dab of baby greens over a bite-sized square of toasted tortilla. It is at once mild and spicy, sweet and salty, warm and cold.

Rathbun, at 41, has finally hit his peak — and his stride — at the same time. He cooks with a firm, decisive hand and isn't afraid to make mistakes. That's not to say he is impulsive, though. It was a big gamble to go from the security of being the executive chef of the Buckhead Life Restaurant Group to opening a restaurant in a former warehouse on the outskirts of Cabbagetown, where its previous tenant, Virginia's, had failed to make a go of it. That may be why his menu is full of offerings that sound and taste good. He knows it.

He ought to. Like his food, his is a chapter in the quintessential American success story. Gleaned at an early age (14) by esteemed chef Bradley Ogden (then at the American Restaurant, now the chef-owner of the Lark Creek Restaurant Group in California), he laddered his way to Brennan's in Houston, then to famed Commander's Palace (under then-chef Emeril Lagasse) in New Orleans. Stephan Pyles hired him to work at Baby Routh in Dallas, where he was nominated for a James Beard award.

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## FIRST IMPRESSION

### RATHBUN'S

By CHRISTIANE LAUTERBACH

Atlanta Magazine

Published in: September, 2004

Some people may have seen it coming, but others who live on the Southern fringe of Inman Park woke up one morning to the realization that \$30.00 steaks and rare wines had arrived in the neighborhood together with such upscale concepts as small plates of seafood crudo and a la carte side dishes. Chef **Kevin Rathbun's** bold relocation from Buckhead to the Stove Works is huge news. With his wife, Melissa, and pastry chef and longtime friend, Kirk Parks, with who he worked at NAVA, he finally gets to let his hair down with fun signature items from all over the map. He even makes his own mozzarella and uses his mother-in-law's recipe for eggplant steak fries with confectioner's sugar. Atkins-friendly "Second Mortgage" (higher priced) plates occupy a highly visible but minor spot on an enormous menu dominated by such affordable and delicious dishes as braised brisket in smoked tomato with poblano quesadillas and a delicious, hearty appetizer of P.E.I. mussels on sourdough toast with golden chives and Vermont sweet butter. The restaurant has a vigorous industrial look, a power clientele and a superlative patio. C.L.

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September 3, 2004

## Gourmet selection of new restaurants

When the late-summer bounty begins to roll in from the fields, restaurateurs will roll out a crop of new eateries (**Related Item:** Hold the comfort food: Fine dining returns). Some opened over the summer and are getting up to speed, while others will test their wings between now and the holidays. Among the notable players: Food Network star Bobby Flay, bringing Southwestern cuisine to Las Vegas, and New York's Danny Meyer, bringing fine dining to an art museum. To whet your appetite, USA TODAY's Jerry Shriver offers some places worth checking out (opening dates are estimates):

### Atlanta

Chef Kevin Rathbun (Buckhead Diner) has opened his own signature modern American restaurant, **Rathbun's**, in Inman Park. (404-524-8280; [rathbunsrestaurant.com](http://rathbunsrestaurant.com))

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**Left overs go right; brothers/chefs Kent and Kevin Rathbun trade sibling rivalry for kitchen cooperation when they dig into leftovers for a post-holiday Sunday brunch.**  
**Better Homes & Gardens**, Nov, 2003, by Stephen Exel

Everyone pitches in to prepare Thanksgiving dinner when the Rathbun clan others for the holiday. But come Sunday morning, brothers Kent and Kevin are on their own to prepare the final feast of the weekend, Sunday brunch. Even though the brothers--both professional chefs--dish haute cuisine daily, don't let their dishing up leftovers surprise you. Like most of us, they've got plenty in the refrigerator to use up ... and that's just what happens.

Kent Rathbun is chef/owner of Abacus restaurant in Dallas; Kevin is soon to open Rathbun's in Atlanta. The brothers grew up in Kansas City. Traditionally, the family alternates between the three cities for Thanksgiving.

On Sunday morning, Kent gets up first and starts cooking bacon so the aroma will get Kevin out of bed. A cup of coffee, then the two start opening up containers of leftover turkey, stuffing, gravy, and sweet potatoes.

"We get creative on the fly. We usually set out to do something that makes sense--like a strata--and just let it go. Sometimes it doesn't always look great, but it always tastes great," Kent says.

Kevin adds, "There's a very big mutual respect between us when we cook. We recognize the other may have a better idea. We bounce ideas as well as jokes."

First, the brothers decide what to do with the leftover turkey. They might use slices for Turkey Benedict (right) or a cup of cubed meat for Portobello and Lemon Thyme Bread Pudding (page 266). They also offer these options for using other Thanksgiving leftovers.

**Cranberry sauce:** Boil it down until it becomes a cranberry syrup, or toss the bright sauce into waffle, scone, or pancake batter.

**Gravy:** The brothers wax ecstatic about the wonders of gravy. "Put it into soup. It's a great base for any kind you can think of, such as pumpkin soup made with leftover pumpkin--a brilliant idea--or a turkey-and-dumpling soup."

**Candied sweet potatoes:** Use them in sweet potato pie or in bread pudding. Or make them Mexican by mashing them, adding Monterey Jack cheese and diced jalapeno, and serving in flour tortillas.

**Green bean casserole:** Use the casserole as the filling base for turkey pot pie. Or mix the casserole with bread crumbs, form patties, and saute them until crisp. Use the patties alone or as the base for poached eggs. Top either off by stirring together some leftover cranberry sauce and diced chile pepper.

Whether you're adapting an existing recipe to use up leftovers or making something up as you go along, the brothers stress confidence as a key ingredient. "Take a risk. Start small, add a little of something at a time," Kent suggests.

Once in the oven, "check your creation along the way," Kevin says. "Make sure it's not too wet or dry. Some leftover gravy can go a long or little way, depending."

By the time brunch gets on the table, Kevin and Kent will have cleaned out the fridge. Do too many cooks spoil the broth in the Rathbun household? "Not if they're good cooks," Kent jokes.

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## Large, and definitely in charge.(chef Kevin Rathbun)

Restaurant Hospitality; 8/1/2004; Krummert, Bob

You have to wonder what guests think when Kevin Rathbun steps out from behind the stoves and begins working the dining room at his new Rathbun's Restaurant in Atlanta. He's no different than any other chef who goes from table to table to see how patrons liked their dinners--with one exception. Rathbun, a monster of a man, doesn't so much enter the dining room as invade it. He looks like somebody dressed a NFL lineman in chef's whites and pushed him out onto the floor. What guest would get into the face of an imposing figure like this guy to tell him the food is no good?

In reality, such a situation is unlikely to come up. But it's not because guests feel intimidated. Rather, it's because they are routinely amazed by the meals they're getting at his restaurant.

Rathbun may not look the part of someone who's predisposed to create imaginatively flavored food. But he's been cooking at this lofty level for years. Previously, it was always done as somebody else's employee. This time around--his first as a chef/owner--he's giving it his best shot.

Not that his previous shots weren't memorable in their own right. Want precocious? At the tender age of 17, Rathbun was working as sous chef at the American Restaurant in Kansas City, a kitchen then run by Bradley Ogden. Then came three years as sous chef at Brennan's of Houston, followed by a tour at Commander's Palace in New Orleans when Emeril Lagasse was the boss.

Rathbun next served as chef along with Stephen Pyles at Baby Routh in Dallas before heading for Atlanta to open nationally recognized restaurants NAVA (1995) and Bluepointe (1999). Both were Buckhead Life Restaurant Group properties, and Rathbun soon moved up to a post as that organization's corporate executive chef, overseeing the workings of places like Chops, Atlanta Fish Market and Buckhead Diner.

Headly stuff, indeed. But after 10 years with Buckhead Life, Rathbun decided to strike out on his own. He found a spot at The Stove Works in Inman Park, put together a team of formidable players to help him, rounded up \$300,000 and opened the place this past May.

"I love this city and Inman Park provides everything I was looking for in developing a new restaurant," Rathbun says. "It's a hip, regenerated area with a tremendous growth potential. I love the atmosphere of the neighborhood, yet we're close enough to everybody in the city." In fact, downtown Atlanta's lucrative hotel and convention area is only two miles away.

The chef describes his food as "Modern American," and the menu is definitely in tune with the times, both in structure and in pricing, it's divided into four sections: Small Plates, Raw Plates, Big Plates and what Rathbun dubs the "Second Mortgage" area. "It's seasonally and globally driven food," he says.

Indeed. The Small Plates like Thai Rare Beef & Kaffir Lime Salad or Sambal Tossed Crispy Calamari cost less than \$7, as do all but two of the Raw Plates: Ahi Tuna "Credo" and Hamachi "Crudo," both of which go for \$7.95. Big Plates such as Sea Scallop Benedict on Country Ham Grits, Asparagus & Spiced Hollandaise (\$18.95) and Braised Brisket in Smoked Tomato, Poblano Quesadillas (\$13.95) come in under the \$20 mark. Even Second Mortgage Plates like Maine Lobster and Roasted Chile Soft Taco, Cascabel Cream and Tomato Pico (\$24.95) and Prime 20 oz. Bone-In Ribeye, Hot Point Reyes Blue Cheese & Bacon Vinaigrette (\$29.95) don't really break the bank.

That small plate theme carries over to dessert, where a tasty lineup of choices go for \$3.15 apiece, with pastry chef/partner Kirk Parks' Favorite Four sampler priced at \$10. Parks, a Beard Award winner (as is Rathbun) spent the past nine years as pastry chef at NAVA. General manager and partner Cliff Bramble is another NAVA alum. He also opened and ran restaurants for Marriott Hotels.

Bramble is the author of the forthcoming book, *Your Guide to a Restaurant Business Plan*, so it's no wonder this trio came up with the winning formula they did for Rathbun's. The location, the space, the menu and the pricing add up to an undeniable bargain.

This veteran crew also knows that warm hospitality never goes out of style. That's why Rathbun and the others work the dining room as hard as they do. Even when you've got two Beard award winners in the kitchen, hospitality ultimately makes the difference.

# RATHBUN'S

ajc.com  
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution



**Just a little bite will suffice: The new dessert paradigm puts indulgent and satisfying choices on the menu — just in teeny-weeny portions**

> Published on: 03/11/05

The two-course meal was great, the bottle of wine a nice match. Now it's time to sip a cup of coffee and survey the temptations of the dessert menu.

Don't you feel like having a big, honking slab of Mississippi mud pie?

Well . . . no.

Today's post-SnackWell, "French Women Don't Get Fat"-toting diners are beginning to understand the value of smaller indulgences. Two or three bites of something sweet that *really* hits the spot will not leave you wanting more. In Atlanta, restaurants, supermarkets and bakeries are heeding the call for miniaturized desserts. Not lower calorie. Not lower fat. Not compromised for health concerns in any way other than size.



Small is the new yum at Rathbun's — the popular Inman Park spot that was hailed as one of the best restaurants of 2004 by both *Esquire* and *Travel + Leisure* magazines. All desserts on the menu yield four intense bites for a mere \$3.15 apiece.

Pastry chef Kirk Parks says he and chef Kevin Rathbun "thought that if we miniaturized the desserts, then more people would order them." Indeed, a good 85 percent of Rathbun's guests go for a pastry — say, a baby banana peanut butter cream pie or Mexican chocolate mini cube. That's more than double the industry standard, according to Parks.

A small, rich dessert is "just like a great cup of coffee," Parks continues. "You remember it."

Sheryl Meddin, owner of Atlanta's late, lamented *Dessert Place* restaurant, has been a big fan of Rathbun's mini desserts.

"I like to have a bite of something sweet," Meddin says, "but I'll never order a dessert for myself. I'm always the one ordering a fork."

"I really like that they have those little portions," she continues. "I just want a little taste."



# RATHBUN'S



## ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION

### SPRING DINING GUIDE

#### Meridith Ford's Top 10 restaurants

Published on: 03/16/2005 (listed alphabetically)

#### RATHBUN'S

##### Inman Park ★★★

112 Krog St. 404-524-8280

Kevin Rathbun's menu exemplifies what's fun and comfortable about modern American cuisine. His take is sophisticated, but never fussy, and loaded with influences from the Southeast, Southwest and his native heartland. Most restaurants take lots of time garnering a reputation for a signature dish, but in less than a year the kitchen's sea scallop Benedict over country ham grits — unapologetically salty, sexily smoky — is so popular Rathbun couldn't take it off the menu if he wanted to. Ditto the always-fun eggplant steak fries, cut thick, crisp edged and covered in confectioner's sugar. Rathbun isn't afraid to play with his food, having as much fun globe-trotting through classic Greek dishes like pan-fried kefalotiri cheese (saganaki style) as he does sprucing up tiny tostadas with habanero sauce and smoky salmon. Save room for pastry chef Kirk Parks' creamy, dreamy peanut butter-banana cream pie. It has already become a city legend. Dinner: 5:30-10:30 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays; 5:30-11 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays. \$\$\$

# RATHBUN'S



## Less Is More

A growing number of restaurants are downsizing portions to please adventurous, timid and finicky eaters (and the bottom line).

### By Megan Rowe

Tapas, antipasti, meze, antojitos, cicchetti—call them what you will, small plates are making a big impact on menus. Last fall, *San Francisco Chronicle* restaurant critic Michael Bauer observed the Bay Area alone had 25-30 small plates places, and he predicted more were on the way. While San Francisco is arguably on the leading edge of this transformation, operators across the country are often dishing up smaller portions in response to customer demand.

Small plates aren't likely to replace the tried-and-true appetizer/entrée/dessert ordering tradition, but more diners seem interested in reinventing what defines a meal. At the same time, more restaurants are incorporating less generous offerings as a way to encourage incremental business.

Choice may be the biggest influence driving smaller portions. "Often, people don't want to sit down to a meal, they want to eat light and have a couple of glasses of wine," says Tom Catherall, owner of Atlanta's Here to Serve Restaurants, which operates Twist, Noche and other themed establishments with menus leaning heavily on the small. At Noche, where the entrée-centric menu was recently revamped to include up to 50 small plate choices for \$4-\$6, guests typically order four to six small plates apiece. Sales nearly doubled within one year and the check average increased about 25 percent as a result of the shift in focus.

Sometimes, all those little plates can add up quickly. At Rathbun's, an Atlanta restaurant that divides its menu into small, raw, big and "second mortgage" plates, the 20 small plates selections were designed to encourage multiple orders, draw in local college students on a budget and fuel repeat business. But patrons sometimes lose sight of the value proposition for the items, priced from \$4-\$7.50. "It's like sushi. You order this and this, say 'send us more of those,' and all of a sudden your bill is \$100 for two. You don't realize how much you're spending," notes Kevin Rathbun, chef and partner.

From a food cost standpoint, small plates offer some potential to yield higher profit than more traditional choices. Wave's Subido has found food costs dropped with portion sizes for one key reason: less need to purchase full portions of protein. Small servings of shellfish are standing in for an 8-ounce piece of tuna, for instance. And even if the cost is the same, as it is at Twist, where Catherall divides an \$18 entrée portion of sunburned tuna on ancho mashed potatoes into three tapas-size portions and sells them for \$6, "we end up selling a lot more tuna," he observes.

R A T H B U N ' S



March, 2005  
Hot 50 Restaurants  
Hot spots around the country -  
from the hottest scenes to the best new bites

# RATHBUN'S



## What's Hot

### WHAT'S HOT: Atlanta (01/03/04)

#### **Rathbun's**

112 Krog St., (404) 524-8280

**Seats:** 160, dining room; 26, bar; 50, patio

**Cuisine:** modern American

**Specialties:** sea scallop Benedict on country-ham grits; braised brisket in smoked tomato jus; crudos of ahi tuna and Nantucket Bay scallops; smoked-salmon tostadas; Kirk's banana crême pie; apple spice cake

**Main courses:** \$13.95-\$32.95

**Chef/Owner:** Kevin Rathbun

#### **MidCity Cuisine**

1545 Peachtree St., (404) 888-8700

**Seats:** 100, dining room; 30, bar; 40, private dining room; 60, patio

**Cuisine:** contemporary American

**Specialties:** Vidalia onion salad; turnip piccata with sage butter; chopped liver on toast; heirloom lentil soup with mint and pork belly; hanger-steak frites; braised rabbit legs with buckwheat polenta, endive and Asiago; chocolate brioche pizza; chocolate crême brûlée

**Main courses:** \$16-\$36

**Chef/Owner:** Shaun Doty

#### **Mitra**

818 Juniper St., (404) 875-5515

**Seats:** 65, upstairs dining room; 50, downstairs

**Cuisine:** American with a Latin twist

**Specialties:** pulled pork and jack-cheese-stuffed Anaheim chile; bacalao-and-cheese fritter with jalapeño-Key-lime jelly; banana-leaf-roasted Gulf snapper with escabèche; herb-roasted mahi mahi with grilled vegetables; pumpkin-squash bread pudding

**Main courses:** \$15-\$23

**Chefs:** Gerardo Ramos

**Owner:** Sia Mohsk

#### **Restaurant Eugene**

2277 Peachtree Road N.W., (404) 355-0321

**Seats:** 80

**Cuisine:** contemporary American

**Specialties:** Creole-fried oysters Rockefeller soup; braised Berkshire black pork belly with yellow beets, lentils and apple-radish pickle; Georgia white shrimp and smoked prosciutto salad; seared Columbia River sturgeon with lobster and leek risotto; grilled lavender-honey-glazed quail with fingerling potato salad

**Main courses:** \$19-\$38

**Chef:** Linton Hopkins

**Owners:** Gina and Linton Hopkins

#### **TWO.Urban Licks**

820 Ralph McGill Blvd., (404) 522-4622

**Seats:** 260

**Cuisine:** modern American with New Orleans and barbecue influences

**Specialties:** hot frog legs with cucumber sticks and blue cheese; fried green tomato, crab and avocado stack; flash-fried oysters with Creole tartar sauce and balsamic vinegar; tower-roasted duck with citrus-sage glaze and honey-baked sweet

# RATHBUN'S



by Christianne Lauterbach  
November, 2004

## Rathbun's \*\*\*

**112 Krog St., in the Stove Works Dinner Mon-Thu 5:30-10:30;**

**Fri & Sat 5:30-11:30**

**Reservations accepted (404-524-8280) Credit cards: AE, V, MC, DC \$\$ to \$\$\$**

Five months ago, when we provided you with a detailed first impression of Chef Kevin Rathbun's then brand-new restaurant, we could already tell. Were it not for our self-imposed rules, we would have coughed up a richly deserved three-star rating for a full-term baby with the personality of a grown-up.

The location is, of course, spectacular. Even by industrial conversion standards, this former potbellied stove factory in Inman Park scores big on the scale of cool. The design, by the Johnson Studio, is more solid than fancy, with painted bricks echoing their naked counterparts and drama limited to the concentric sheet-metal chandeliers and their red glow. The indoor patio, defined by canvas walls and, somewhat laughably, punctuated by large umbrellas, could use better lighting, but it is a calmer zone than the super-noisy dining room.

The kitchen is close to minuscule considering the scope of the menu and the intensity of the output. Rathbun loves to cook. Away from the corporate monster, he can finally indulge his desire to work with local produce, make his own mozzarella, offer a selection of raw food (from *hamachi crudo* to zucchini carpaccio with lemon verbena), serve a small sampler of soups in demitasse cups, ask his pastry chef to make mini desserts, and add a full page of daily specials with hand-drawn sketches to his already immense menu.

The eggplant fries dusted with confectioner's sugar, the okra with shrimp and spiced tomatoes, the sambal-tossed calamari with pea shoots, and the amazing out-of-the-shell mussels with golden chives on sour-dough toast drenched with sweet butter (our favorite by far among the small plates) can be shared tapas-style for an affordable meal. Steaks, braised brisket in smoked tomato with poblano quesadillas, Maine lobster and roasted green chile soft tacos with cascabel cream, wolfish with chunks of bacon, and more are primary examples of power-cooking in the American style.

At the end of a meal with Chef Rathbun, scaled-down desserts such as a chocolate cube with Mexican chocolate mousse, a miniature banana peanut butter cream pie, and an adorable lilliputian sundae put his long-time pastry chef, Kirk Parks, in a favorable light.

The restaurant is extremely convenient from downtown, the valets drive the cars right onto a protected loading dock, and with a new private room under construction, congestion should lessen for a place where epic culinary skills and common sense intersect in a spirit of modernity

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# RATHBUN'S



★★★★★ Four Star Review "Rathbun weaves the richest tapestry of New American cooking to arrive in Atlanta in some years"...BILL ADDISON, **Creative Loafing Atlanta**

## Rathbun, fully realized

Chef's eponymous restaurant a crowning culmination of a bountiful career

**BY BILL ADDISON : Funky locale? Check.** Industrial-chic space, two parts grit and one part glitz? Check and check. (Designed by the Johnson Studio? But of course.) Eardrum-damaging decibels and dim, viscous lighting? Oh yes. Agreeable offerings of creative small plates and comfort food by a local celebrity chef? Most assuredly.

Was there any way Rathbun's wouldn't be an instant hit? Kevin Rathbun, veteran of the Buckhead Life Restaurant Group and chef for nearly 25 years, is a smart man. He understands the formula for success in this town, and he's run with it. Venturing out on his own for the first time, he has created a come-hither hot spot that practically compels Atlanta's dining public to investigate.

Make sure you get good directions first. Rathbun's resides in the Stove Works building on the edge of Inman Park and Cabbagetown. When Virginia's occupied the space, I had a habit of getting lost in the neighborhood's brambly streets. Perhaps that was because, despite its bohemian charms, I hardly ever went to Virginia's. Now that Rathbun's, which opened in May, has moved in and I've made three trips in one month, I know exactly where I'm going -- as does the rest of the city, apparently.

"I'm running a few minutes late," I called to tell the hostess one evening. Don't worry -- so are we," she replied drolly.

Another visit we arrived during the prime time dining hour to find cars spilling out onto street, waiting for valet. "The 8 o'clock lineup?" I asked. The attendant just smiled, shook his head wearily and jogged off with my keys.

Once inside, Rathbun's wife, Melissa, will likely let you know the pending status of your table and invite you to wade into the percussive pandemonium of the bar area. I've come to find waits in white-hot restaurants like this tolerable. It gives me a chance to soak in the tingle of the buzz. And this room, right now, is the most electric in town. That the bartenders here pour stiff drinks certainly encourages my patience.

On first glance, the sprawling menu looks unwieldy. But as you peruse the two elongated pages, certain items pop out at you, many of them with a familiar ring. The food (and really, the entire restaurant) is a culmination of Rathbun's career. He unfurls both his celebrated and personally favored dishes, from his early days at Bradley Ogden's American Restaurant in Kansas City to his recent stint as corporate executive chef for Buckhead Life. That's a daunting amount of territory to cover and re-create. Remarkably, the kitchen traverses multiple genres with grace.

Order a bunch of small plates and let Rathbun's life's work flash before your palate. Satiny smoked salmon tostadas with a habanero spike evoke his time at Nava, the restaurant that brought him to Atlanta in 1995. Light, crispy calamari tossed in Indonesian sambal recalls the fusion stylings of Bluepointe, his post-Nava gig.

And the blue cheese fondue served with glorious, mahogany French fries I could down by the deep fryer-full? Sure reminds me of the lionized potato chips with Maytag blue cheese at Buckhead Diner (Rathbun was in charge of the menu overhaul there a couple of years ago).

Digging further into the past, the eggplant steak fries paired with an oddly successful sauce of Tabasco and confectioner's sugar are a salute to Rathbun's days in New Orleans, when he worked for Emeril Lagasse at Commander's Palace. Funny how life plays out: Both these chefs have eponymous restaurants in Atlanta now. Personally, I'd rather eat through Rathbun's entire menu thrice before returning to Mr. Lagasse's establishment.

Wisely, there are also offerings that look to the future. "Crudo," Italian for "raw," is a sort of Italian sashimi recently popularized by Mario Batali at his New York restaurant, Esca. Rathbun's two variations are sublime: In one, chunks of Ahi tuna bathe in fruit-forward olive oil. Slices of citrus -- fresh Mandarin orange on the night I try it -- and shards of Serrano peppers add a sprightly punch to the mix.

In the other, hamachi unites with tomatoes, cucumbers and English thyme in a potentially strange garden-meets-the-sea collision that works. The thyme ties it all together: It's a natural with the vegetables, and also a sly, if perhaps unintentional, nod to the minty shiso leaves with which sushi chefs sometimes garnish their creations.

The frenetic energy of this room puts me in the mood to splurge, and I sample, without shame, every dish under the financially daunting "second mortgage plates" category. (If you've got a modest budget, no need to skip the party: Much of the menu is impressively affordable.) A thick, juicy veal chop wades in an outrageously creamy pool of sweet corn and Gouda cheese fondue. Snarf Central. The veal is outdone only by a 20-ounce bone-in rib eye slathered with warm Point Reyes blue cheese and bacon vinaigrette. Can you imagine anything more caloric? The restaurant should include a gym membership with its \$33 price tag.

There's a huge opening in the dining room wall that leads to the kitchen. Peering in, watching the staff frantically churn out food, reminds me of a scene in spy movies when the hero stumbles onto the villain's secret laboratory full of scientists building an evil weapon. This workshop, happily, uses its resources for good.

Rathbun periodically steps out of the kitchen's mayhem to meet and greet customers like an earnest politician, and Kirk Parks, his pastry chef and business partner, often joins him. Parks, who first worked with Rathbun at Nava, has used his freedom here to create a fresh, dazzling dessert menu of small bites.

The selections are changing with the season: A rapturous cookie basket filled with sweet cream and pristine raspberries is giving way to moist, gently spicy pumpkin cake with a bracing dollop of sour cream. I had what will probably be my last taste of fresh peaches for the year here, topped with a scoop of subtle sage ice cream.

Parks is masterly with ice cream in general, be it a bright berry flavor on top of a gorgeous blueberry cheesecake brownie, or dusky cardamom ice cream in a trio with swarthy chocolate and another darker, brassier variation on berry. And don't miss his banana peanut butter pie. It resonates with the clear, nostalgic aftertaste of childhood.

Only infrequently did I encounter a misstep in my meals. Fried oysters on the "oysters two ways" app were so small they disappeared into their cornmeal batter, and I couldn't detect a hint of the advertised lemongrass in their stewed counterparts. A lumpy crab cake became soggy in its watery tomato sauce. A special cheesecake with Japanese yuzu had an off-tasting, resinous clang.

Truly, though, for every one dish that went south, I tasted seven that were dead-on. And I'm not even halfway through the menu. I can't wait to come back for the tarragon roasted chicken, which one server relayed was a recipe "Chef has been carrying around in his back pocket for 20 years."

The way this menu reads, Chef must have some bulging back pockets. Rathbun weaves the richest tapestry of New American cooking to arrive in Atlanta in some years. So consider yourself informed: If his food sounds appealing to you, pick up the phone and make reservations *right now*, or you'll likely be eating there on a Tuesday at 5:30 or 10 p.m. Even then, you wouldn't be alone.

# RATHBUN'S



## **Jeze heads to five hot new dining venues, gets the scoop on industry news and more**

Atlantans anticipate JEZEBEL's "100 Best Restaurants," waiting to see which of their favorite restaurants fare well in our annual issue. Some of the city's newer restaurants didn't have time to emerge on this year's list, but these five certainly have all that it takes to make the cut. We are proud to introduce them to you and hope that you make your way to them this summer in your quest to dine at Atlanta's top restaurants. - By Jennifer Raznick

RATHBUN'S - 404.524.8280, 112 Krog St, Ste R. - [www.rathbunsrestaurant.com](http://www.rathbunsrestaurant.com)

Kevin Rathbun prides himself on having worked with members of the Brennan family at their legendary Commander's Palace in New Orleans, but pretty soon, others will be bragging about having worked with Rathbun, who now commands his own palace, Rathbun's. "Now that I am on my own, I can do what I want to do and go where I want to go," he said. Rathbun selected the industrial-chic location of The Stove Works and summoned architect Bill Johnson to take the space to a new dimension. Walking up, white-ish panels of fabric with large parthole-like windows provide a glimpse into the courtyard patio that's sexy and intimate. The fuchsia door lures you inside to a light, open space where more fuchsia floats above in giant stovepipe pendants. Rathbun even went so far as to find fuchsia peppermills!

The real focal point, however, is the friendly, open kitchen that allows you to see the culinary masters at work.

A visit to Rathbun's is a departure from the ordinary, a trip to a unique spot where melting-pot flavors from all over blend with modern American cuisine. Small plates include the fun-to share eggplant steak fries sprinkled with confectioners sugar and the ahi tuna "crudo" with citrus, serranos and cold pressed olive oil, which is superb. We also loved the mock turtle soup with dry sack sherry (to clarify, it's veal in the stock for those of you who might have shied away) as well as a unique Gruyere-Caesar romaine salad, inspired by Rathbun's mother-in-law. The first course selections certainly set a high bar for the entrees, which are also exceptional. Topping that list are the rosemary grilled beef flat iron steak with hearts of palm, arugula and lemon oil, and the braised brisket in smoked tomato with poblano quesadillas. And, yes, there's more.

Those of you who know Rathbun probably have tasted the lobster taco appetizers with cascabel cream that he made famous in Atlanta. Well, at this eatery, the chef jazzes up the dish as a "second mortgage plate" with Main lobster in a roasted chile soft taco.

Rathbun's best buddy, Pastry Chef Kirk Parks, also has built himself quite a reputation here. If you can't decide between the peanut butter cream pie or Fuji apple crumb cake with ginger cherry sauce, request a dessert sampler platter, which Parks happily will prepare.

While Rathbun's food, wines and atmosphere are reasons enough to dine here, the chef has a personality that radiates throughout the room more than fuchsia ever could. Make it your business not only to get to know Rathbun's, but also the man behind it.

# RATHBUN'S



## Spot of the Week

JUNE 3, 2004

**On the Menu**

BY JAN BUTSCH

Although I haven't eaten a meal at the newly opened **Rathbun's** yet, I can say that out of the countless restaurant openings I've been to in the past seven years, this one was by far the most outstanding with the best food ever. Designed by the talented Bill Johnson of The Johnson Studios, who seems to design just about every glamorous restaurant in Atlanta, the restaurant features an "industrial meets modern" theme, with exposed brick walls, an open kitchen and a patio walled off by fabric panels. But let's get to the food. Here are just a few of the delectable dishes we enjoyed: eggplant steak fries with confectioners sugar (double dose of those!), blackened swordfish, mock turtle soup, braised brisket, prime New York strip with brown butter and banana peanut butter cream pie. The menu is divided into small plates, raw plates, soup bowls, big plates and second mortgage plates. Prices range from \$4.50 for raw plates up to \$29.95 for the second mortgage plates, with entrees averaging around \$15.

Renowned chef Kevin Rathbun, who was executive chef at Nava and opening chef at Bluepointe, now has his own restaurant and I can't wait to go back for dinner, served Monday through Saturday. You can check out the menu at [www.rathbunsrestaurant.com](http://www.rathbunsrestaurant.com). 112 Krog St., 404-524-8280



# RATHBUN'S



## **In the Stove Works, at the stove**

Rathbun's finds ex-Buckhead Life chef back in the kitchen

**BY** CLIFF BOSTOCK

July 1, 2004

**On a recent** Wednesday night -- my birthday to be exact -- Kevin Rathbun, an imposing figure in his chef's whites, moves from table to table of his new restaurant, greeting customers and asking for feedback. On the other side of the restaurant, his wife Melissa is doing the same thing and, nearby, a third person is canvassing even more opinions. Meanwhile, our server Mark is doing everything but patting my hand and telling me that life is beautiful, even at 100 years of age.

The solicitous service may be the first thing you notice about **Rathbun's** (112 Krog St., 404-524-8280). The founding chef of Nava and his two partners (Kirk Parks and Cliff Bramble) clearly have it in mind to create a restaurant that is personally convivial -- perhaps an intentional departure from the comparatively stuffy Buckhead Life restaurants where all three worked the last 10 years or so. But they are also about good food, of course. "I love being back in the kitchen," Rathbun tells us. "I was the corporate chef for Buckhead Life the last four or five years and I missed cooking."

Before getting to the menu, a few words about the setting. The restaurant is located in the Stove Works space vacated by Virginia's. Ironically, not too long ago I complimented Virginia's for its romantic, artistic environment as an expression of individuality that was a nice change from the high-style corporate look the Johnson Studio has installed in so many restaurants in town. Well, the Johnson Studio has shown up here too, tearing out Virginia's bordello-red curtains and installing a minimalist decor. Like all of the Studio's work, the look at Rathbun's is classy -- I love the huge lanterns that look like they belong in Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* -- but it's not edgy. It's a big open room with cool lighting and sound. Folks coming from Buckhead to Cabbagetown will feel like they are slumming in style.

The food is mainly good although we did encounter some disappointments. I'll get those out of the way first. A starter of lamb scallopini featured weirdly greasy meat with rock-hard little cubes of pancetta and miniscule bits of Sweet Grass goat cheese. Don't order it. You may also want to avoid the entree of sea scallops "Benedict" with country ham grits. The scallops were sweet perfection but the grits were stiff and congealed, a very poor accompaniment to the lake of rich Hollandaise. I get the idea -- three creamy textures -- but it ain't working.

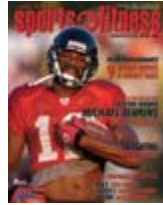
On the other hand, blackened swordfish, with pickled cloves of garlic and slices of orange, tasted almost exotic. For another small plate, Rathbun cubes sushi-grade ahi tuna and baptizes it with cold-pressed olive oil, then plays it against regular oranges marinated in blood-orange vinegar whose sharp notes are in turn further intensified with Serrano chiles. The day's soup, Vidalia onion with gouda and sour cream, was a very adult smoothie. Wayne's entree, pan-roasted George's Bank cod, beat the hell out of my scallops -- and I'm not very fond of cod. It was served with a ragout of shrimp and Louisians' beloved mirliton (chayote squash).

A couple of side dishes worth ordering are grilled artichoke hearts, the stems still on, with only olive oil seasoning them. Cauliflower mashed with brown butter is a tangy alternative to mashed potatoes.

Partner Kirk Parks is also the restaurant's pastry chef and you definitely want to order a sampler plate of four of his desserts. Our favorite was an almond cookie basket and sweet cream with the best raspberries I've tasted in a long time. My second fave was a hard chocolate cube filled with chocolate mousse. Next was the sugar-free lemon panna cotta with local blueberries. Tiramisu, made with Jamaican coffee, was a distant fourth for me, even with its chocolate container.

I should mention that the restaurant's prices are quite agreeable. Small plates, salads and soups are all under \$7. Most entrees are under \$20 with the exception of four grouped under the compassionate heading of "second mortgage plates."

# RATHBUN'S



## **Healthy Eater: A New Restaurant Rich With Healthy Dishes**

By Anna Cate Ridley

With a resume like Chef Kevin Rathbun's, it's no wonder his brand-new restaurant is absolutely packed, even on a Monday night. After serving as the executive chef of Nava, the opening chef of Bluepointe and ultimately the corporate executive chef for Buckhead Life Restaurant Group, Rathbun has finally opened his signature creation, aptly named Rathbun's. And the menu has options galore, many of which are low in carbs, but always high in taste.

Delicious meats and fresh vegetables abound on this menu, which has about 20 starter options—both cooked and raw plates, and about 15 entree possibilities. It's not tough to eat healthy at Rathbun's, but it is tough to decide which delights to feast on. First, I highly recommend the Thai Rare Beef & Kaffir Lime Salad small plate, which is very light and tender. Another great healthy starter option is the Garlic Shrimp & Local Okra with Spiced Tomatoes. Moving on to the small raw plates, you can't go wrong with either the Tuna or Hamachi "Crudo," which are both served with very fine olive oil. My favorite, however, was the South Georgia Shaved Zucchini with Parmesan Reggiano and Lemon Verbena—a fresh and citrusy dish filled with unique flavors.

As for the entree, I had to give the Tarragon Roasted Chicken a whirl. As the story goes, Rathbun came up with this dish 20 years ago, but never served it on a menu until now. Two plump, juicy chicken breasts are marinated by stuffing them with onions, lemon, tarragon and butter and served in a light chicken broth reduction sauce with a side of creamy mashed potatoes, which I opted to substitute for the lower-calorie Brown Butter Cauliflower Mash. The all-natural chicken comes from Ashley Farms, where the birds are free of hormones, antibiotics, chemicals and preservatives. Another solid option for sticking to the diet is the Rosemary Grilled Beef Flat Iron Steak served with Heart of Palm, Arugula and Lemon Oil. Rathbun, despite the demands of running his large, upscale kitchen, can be spotted on the restaurant floor serving and chatting with his admiring guests. That's proof in itself that Rathbun aims to continue to please Atlantans with his unparalleled cuisine for years to come. —by Anna Cate Ridley