



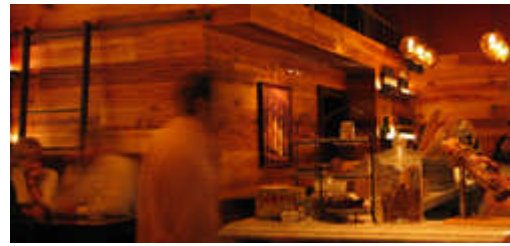
02/05/06 Food Lead

Romantic dining with a twist

Forgo the fancy restaurant, and try something new this Valentine's Day

By Elisabeth Bergman

Truth be told, Valentine's Day, like New Year's Eve, is one of the worst nights of the year for a romantic night out. First of all, your favorite restaurant probably already is booked. Secondly, the restaurant you do end up in will be packed and the servers will most surely be stressed out because kitchen is in the weeds. Plus, most establishments, preparing for the onslaught of lovers, replace their regular menu with a tepid prix fixe affair that culminates in a molten chocolate cake or vanilla-kissed crème brûlée. So save the five-star restaurant for birthday splurges or anniversary dinners and try something a little different this Valentine's Day. We've come up with five alternatives to the traditional restaurant meal.



Wine, small plates and romance are on the menu at Krog Bar. (photo Courtesy of Krog Bar)

Bring the love home

You may not be able to get a reservation at Bacchanalia on Valentine's Day, but takeout from Star Provisions, the restaurant's prized gourmet shop, is the next best thing (perhaps, even better because it gives you an excuse to browse the store's collection of dinnerware, kitchen gadgets and artisan cheeses). Star Provisions has come up with a Valentine's Day dinner for two that includes sweet Maine lobster bisque, wood-grilled tenderloin of prime beef, fingerling potato puree, pear & almond tart and handmade chocolate truffles, so all you have to do is pick it up and pay the bill (\$110, \$150 with a bottle of NV Dappier Rose, Val des Demoiselles). Get out the fine china for this one. 1198 Howell Mill Road, Atlanta, 404-365-0410 ext. 134, www.starprovisions.com. All orders must be placed by 6 p.m. Feb. 10.

Dare to dine

Valentine's Day probably isn't the time to really go all out and try pig's brains or the triple-hot shrimp vindaloo. But experimentation is the spice of life. For something a little different, try the food court at Super H Mart. True, a food court sounds about as romantic as spending your honeymoon with both sets of in-laws, but after feeding your sweetie dumplings of every variety, sharing a bowl of bi bim bop or a selection of sashimi and splitting a pastry from the Mozart Bakery stall, you'll be glad you took the risk. If you want something a bit more glamorous, try one of the many restaurants (Book Chang Dong Tofu House is a good choice) that have popped up around the supermarket. Afterward, walk off your meal by taking a romantic stroll through Super H Mart's impressive produce section. 2550 Pleasant Hill Road, Duluth, 678-543-4000.

Nibble on this

Save room for romance by heading to Krog Bar, Kevin Rathbun's intimate wine bar in Inman Park's Stoveworks. You don't need reservations, and you won't be served a bloated multicourse extravaganza. You

will get an ambience that channels the spirit of a real Spanish tapas bar—the amber lighting alone propels it into the romantic bar category. The wines are from Spain, Italy and France. The food is simple, high quality and ideal for feeding to your lover—paper-thin slices of chorizo, velvety chicken liver pate, nutty manchego cheese. It's like having a picnic with an unlimited supply of wine. 112 Krog St., Suite 27, Atlanta, 404-524-1618, www.krogbar.com.

Make love in the kitchen

Food is love. And having a professionally trained chef cook for you (or with you and your partner) is a wonderful way to show how much you care. Brad Lev, founder of the year-and-a-half-old Lit Kitchen, a company that brings the chef to you, says his company will customize any menu to your liking, bring the food, the equipment and either cook for you or teach you how to prepare it. All of Lit Kitchen's chefs have culinary degrees and enjoy working with people—they'll even give you a quick lesson on knife skills if you need one, Lev adds. Packages start at \$350 and sessions usually last about two hours. All you need is a functional kitchen and a big appetite. The chefs do the rest. The best part: They clean up for you. 404-215-2150, www.litkitchen.com.

Go private in public

If you must follow protocol, reserve Trattoria Monaco's chef's table where you and your honey can dine in the gauze of privacy. Chef Chad Scott's Italian-influenced menu—think braised lamb shank, lobster risotto, goat-cheese truffle salad, warm chocolate cake—lives up to the romantic setting. Or if you prefer a Midtown locale, the sexy cabanas at Twist (404-869-1191) provide a trendy, up-to-the-minute option. 5530 Windward Parkway, Alpharetta, 770-664-0056, www.trattoriamonaco.com.