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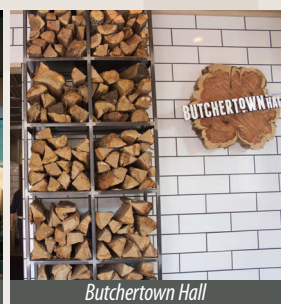


Nashville's Restaurant Revolution

By Angela Roberts



Fenwick's 300



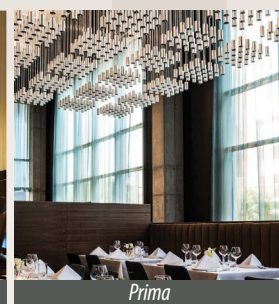
Butchertown Hall



Etch



The Southern Steak & Oyster



Prima



Fido

Nashville hasn't always been a food destination, relying much more on music as its main attraction. But with the turn of the new century, the city is proving itself to be a culinary hotbed, stretching its limits with first-rate restaurants, unique food events, an iron fork competition and a respectable Music City Food and Wine Festival.

There are some real food heroes who have paved the way. Some stayed true to their Southern roots, cooking comfort food at meat-and-threes: Jack and Rose Arnold opened the legendary **Arnold's Country Kitchen** in 1982; Lon and Annie Loveless welcomed the first diners to the **Loveless Cafe** in 1951; and the uniquely Nashville **Prince's Hot Chicken Shack** can trace its roots back 70 years. Prince's earned a James Beard America's Classics Award for what is now Nashville's spicy signature dish, easy to find in many neighborhoods, from the nationally acclaimed Hattie B's Hot Chicken to upscale restaurants like Silo.

Some of the more recent food buzz can be traced to the advent of food trucks, which began serving gourmet street fare to long lines. Now,

with over 40 trucks roaming the city, some have gone brick-and-mortar with astounding success.

Mas Tacos Por Favor and **Biscuit Love** both won the 2015 Munchies People's Choice Food Awards, respectively, for best tacos and best food truck in America.

Nashville native Tom Morales, of TomKats, a successful Hollywood movie-set caterer for decades, has made a significant impact on the area's food personality. In 2002, he opened **Saffire** in Franklin's historic Factory, becoming one of the first restaurants to serve elevated Southern food in a fine-dining atmosphere. He showcased dishes including shrimp and grits, and chicken-fried chicken.

When Morales opened the **The Southern Steak & Oyster** in the SoBro (South of Broadway) district, he changed the face of downtown dining. Executive Chef Matt Farley has been preparing out-of-the-box Southern food,



The Southern's fish and grits

coined "south of somewhere," to a full house every night. The oyster bar and the patio are great places to people-watch and spot celebrities.

One of Morales' major contributions to Nashville has been preserving its history through food. Most recently, he reopened **Acme Feed & Seed**, a Lower Broad storefront that had been sitting vacant for years. It takes a visionary to transform a three-story farm supply building into multiple restaurants filled with historic local memorabilia, live music, an events venue and a rooftop bar.

Chef Deb Paquette is another well-known and respected name here because she has brought resounding culinary innovation to the Nashville food scene—and was the first female to qualify as a certified executive chef in Tennessee. She paid her dues in the early days before opening Zola,



Etch Chef Deb Paquette

groundbreaking with its creativity and global flavors.

When Paquette closed Zola after 13 years, she soon returned with an even more amazing venture. **Etch**, her upscale downtown restaurant, is the culmination of 30 years of kitchen experience, showcasing the kind of creativity and expression Paquette's customers have come to trust. Now, the acclaimed chef is opening a new restaurant she's calling **Truss**, because it means *bringing together*, and the Sylvan Park neighborhood can't wait.

Margot McCormack, of **Margot Cafe and Marché**, has been a trailblazer in the East Nashville restaurant revival, consistently serving high-quality French- and Italian-inspired food since 2001. She is often compared to Alice Waters, of the famed Chez Panisse, for her fresh ingredients and culinary view—neither whimsical nor mysteriously achieved. Margot is one of the culinary mothers of local chef-driven establishments, having mentored and collaborated with chefs who are now restaurant owners in their own right. She speaks highly of the talent Tandy Wilson showed for two years as her sous-chef, before moving on to open **City House** in Germantown.

City House opened in 2007, wooing people to the evolving Germantown area before it was the charming dining destination it is today. Serving pork belly pizza and corn bread gnocchi, owner/chef Wilson has become a local favorite. As for the secret, his response is simple. "I just cook good food," he says. Yes, he does, as Wilson is a finalist for a James Beard award for the third year in a row. City House is known for rustic Italian food, house-made charcuterie and a very well-crafted cocktail.



Husk Chef Sean Brock

If there ever was a chef's chef, it's Sean Brock of **Husk**. Another James Beard finalist, Chef Brock opened Husk in an 1880s-era Rutledge Hill mansion with an adjoining garden. Here, he pulls heirloom herbs for

his authentic Southern cuisine, including fried chicken skins served in the most upscale way possible. If you can't get to Husk, you can buy his cookbook, *Heritage*, which is also a finalist for a James Beard award.

Jan Strawn opened **Mack & Kate's** with her Southern family recipes, elevating them just enough to provide a memorable, yet more modern, dining experience. Her life reads like a country song gone gold: growing up dirt-poor, but rich in spirit, guts and compassion. She sees herself as a rescuer of people, and she does it with food, especially with her signature shrimp and grits found on every one of her menus.

Strawn is a juggler, opening **M Restaurant & Bar**, and the **M Market** in Cummins Station, only to shoot back down to Franklin and open **Kate's Kitchen**, a smaller Southern bistro. She and her husband, Bernie, run the restaurant and provide the catering for the **Cedar Creek Yacht Club**—only to turn around in her **Smokies BBQ** restaurant and feed the homeless every night at 8:00. When asked what she would love to do in the future, she talks about a soup kitchen.

She realizes she's a part of something bigger than herself. "You've got to start with the dishes. We're in the happiness business, yet it's a business of broken dreams. It's hard. It takes guts." This is the Nashville spirit that draws people to this town.

Eat a Little, Pick a Little

As the upscale Southern dining scene was taking hold, comfort food with a side of live local music began to satisfy a certain appetite.

Puckett's story is its very own, keeping close to its roots with casual, Southern, stretchy-pants food combined with a heaping of local music. After acquiring the original Puckett's Grocery in Leiper's Fork, owner Andy Marshall embraced and became a part of the community by showcasing singer/songwriters, along with the burgers and barbecue. His daughter, Claire Crowell, now director of operations, was only 15 years old, and it was her job to set up and take down the stage.

Claire tells favorite stories, such as the evening Vince Gill dropped in, played all night



Husk — Oysters



The Farm House — Macarons



Mas Tacos Por Favor Tortilla Soup



Acme Feed & Seed — Broken Spoke

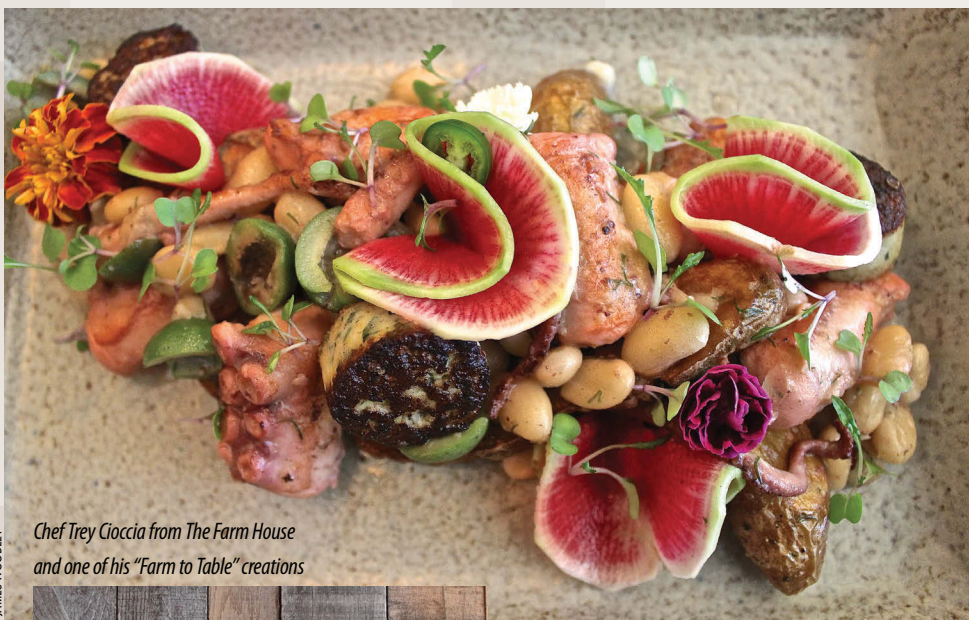


The Southern Steak & Oyster — Lamb T-bone

JAMES WOODLEY

ASHLEY HYLBERT

EMILY B. HALL



Chef Trey Cioccia from *The Farm House* and one of his "Farm to Table" creations

JAMES WOODLEY



JAMES WOODLEY

Combining the Old With the New

People do get excited when a local opens a new business. Recently, Nashville veteran food entrepreneur Christie Hauck replaced his Christie Cookie storefronts to open **Goozy**, the first dessert bar in Nashville, offering maple bourbon milkshakes, grilled pimento cheese sandwiches and gooey desserts. Hauck says he feels like an old dog with new tricks in an ever-evolving city.

Broadway's stately Union Station, now a historic hotel, houses an opulent main dining room, **Prime 108**. Surrounded by stained glass windows and Hollywood-style curved leather booths, this glamorous setting almost makes you think Mae West is about to enter.

One of the most impressive uses of historic space is **Pinewood Social**, located in the former Trolley Barns in SoBro. It's a fun restaurant with a lounge, a premier coffee bar, **Crema**, and a retro bowling alley. Owners Ben and Max Goldberg have been instrumental in raising Nashville's nightlife profile. Among the brothers' many endeavors, they put crafted cocktails on the local map at **The Patterson House**, a speakeasy-type bar; and they continue to gain national acclaim with **The Catbird Seat**, where each evening, only 32 guests interact with the chef while being totally dazzled by an artful 15-course tasting menu.

Their next venture is a French restaurant, **Le Sel**, in The Gulch—an area that, until recently, was an abandoned train yard, lifeless and desolate. Today, The Gulch is an urban mecca and a thriving dining destination.

As the chefs astound us with food, the restaurants are getting more beautiful. Recently the interior design of **Butchertown Hall**, in

Germantown, has wowed locals as one of the most aesthetically pleasing beer halls ever, serving house-made sausages and brisket smoked in the backyard.

Dark, masculine steak houses have been replaced with stylized modern design and new twists on the menu. **Kayne Prime** is favored by celebrities (including Nicole Kidman, who likes the kale salad), but the most talked-about item might be the house-made bacon with maple cotton candy—a star itself.

The newest place to distinguish itself as a steak house is **Prima**, where, in addition to a ribeye, you'll find braised rabbit and lamb osso buco. Your eyes might go first to the high ceilings and stunning lighting designed by artist Bruce Munro. But Executive Chef Sal Avila sums up the soul of Nashville when he says, "We want people to come to Prima and feel like they are at their rich uncle's house, where the surroundings are elegant, but the food is approachable."

Fleming's Prime Steakhouse & Wine Bar offers dry aged beef, an abundant wine cellar and a view of West End. With one of the best happy hours in town, Fleming's recently expanded the bar area, offering casual appetizers, including filet mignon flatbread, lobster lettuce wraps and 100 wines by the glass.

At the **1808 Grille** in the Hutton Hotel, the sommelier has carefully selected a wine pairing for each entree, providing a well-rounded dining experience. Seasonal, modern American cuisine is served in an attractive, casual setting with unexpected twists such as a cauliflower Caesar salad or wild boar Bolognese, and for dessert, a trio of house-made doughnuts.

The formula for success is not necessarily a big space or million-dollar building. The **404 Kitchen** was a former shipping container, and the room seats only 56—if you include the patio. The advantage of a small, chef-driven restaurant is the ability to experiment and maintain intense quality control, which shows in every bite. Chef Matt Bolus sources most of his food locally and cooks with an Italian rustic-yet-modern viewpoint. House specialties include a black truffle burrata with leeks, beurremont butter and Tennshootoe (Tennessee prosciutto), a stellar cured ham that doesn't have to travel from Italy.



EMILY B. HALL

Cocktails from Acme Feed & Seed

Of all the new and exciting places to dine, **The Farm House** might feel most like home, most like Nashville.

The Farm House is not farm-to-table—it's *farmer-to-table*, as chef/owner Trey Cioccia is a born-and-bred Tennessean. When he's not in the kitchen, he's driving a tractor.

Chef Cioccia says his food can be described with two words—loyalty and honesty—referring to the way he composes his dishes and partners with local farmers. Everything in the restaurant is American-made, often Tennessee-made.

His Southern and Italian roots meld together when he creates dishes including lamb chops with sauteed kale, house-made cavatelli and cannellini beans braised in buttermilk. When you bite into the pimento beignets, you'll feel pleasure down to your toes. This is a chef who likes to give customers a meaningful Southern experience, and if you want to meet him, just ask.

It's an exciting time for Nashville, as it becomes a significant restaurant city. Not all the places are Southern, but Southern hospitality is evident in the relationships the chefs have with local farmers, in the way they collaborate with each other, and in the way they connect with their customers. The landscape is wide-open for the creative culinary entrepreneurial spirit to thrive. We've done it with music; now we're doing it with food.



Hot chicken from Hattie-B's (above) and Silo (below)

