



On the way: Good Food, Big View

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12/3/08 - Pastries at Amelie's include these tartlets: mixed berry, pecan and fresh fruit. - LISETTE POOLE
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Forget what you're thinking about the economy, just for a minute.

2009 just might be a *great* year for new restaurants here.

Yes, places are going out of business amid reduced consumer spending, and yes, that's likely to get worse before it gets better. (And yes, you had better support the places you love most if you want them to survive – cut back on spending by splitting more plates.)

But some of the most exciting new places understand what's happening and are trying to adjust. And if all goes well, diners will reap the benefit.

Here are the four most exciting prospects right now for this new year:

1. **Good Food on Montford.** No, really: That's the name. It's Bruce Moffett's sophomore effort – after eight years, that is, of perfecting the well-respected Barrington's. Here, slated to open to the public Jan. 13 at 1701 Montford Drive, brother Kerry is part-owner and head chef, and the menu is a tapas lineup. In the small-plate sense, not the Spanish-food sense, which means influences will range from Asia to the South. Fried oysters with black bean salad; mussels with green curry; boneless short ribs with polenta and balsamic glaze, stuffed quail with foie gras and truffles, pumpkin soup, handmade pastas: You get the picture. Stainless steel bar, hardwood ceilings and exposed brick work toward a cozy feel, and ingredients will lean to the local – like a whole lamb from Underwood Farms, maybe, or “whatever we feel like cooking.” Prices will be in the \$6 to \$14 range per dish.

2. **Big View Diner and Lounge.** From the folks who brought us *ilios noche* and *Nolen Kitchen* comes a classic diner with additional twists: *Stratos Lambos* lists veal meatloaf with mashed potatoes, but also Vietnamese spring rolls on the menu-to-come. Also look for everything from braised brisket on challah to braised beef stroganoff over egg noodles tossed with butter to Friday night prime rib specials. Target opening is February, and the spot – at Ardrey Kell and N.C. 521 – will have a bar, patio, milkshake station (housemade ice creams, natch) and a big display case for the wares of star pastry chef Frank Kaltsounis. You may recall that *Big View* partners *Lambos*, *Kaltsounis* and brother Angelo *Kaltsounis*, come from family-diner backgrounds a la *The Landmark* in Charlotte, and they've sent the chef to train in New York and Atlanta (*Buckhead Diner*) – as *Lambos* says, “It's an art to know how to cook (high volume) but serve as if you were in a slower environment.” So my hopes for this are as high as its “super fins”; those are illuminated columns spaced around the exterior.

3. **Vivace.** Urban Food Group, aka Kevin and Stacey Jennings, has four restaurants in Raleigh: the modern American

Frazier's, Porter's City Tavern, the Italian Vivace and the latest, a French brasserie called Coquette. The sparkle is slated to expand to Charlotte in summer, when a second Vivace is scheduled to open at the urban marketplace called Metropolitan (site of the former Midtown Square). The Group's executive chef, Jeremy Sabo, was a semifinalist for a 2008 rising star chef award from the James Beard Foundation, and plans to offer modern presentations of traditional Italian fare. Look for reasonable prices; Kevin Jennings notes all his restaurants have been moving to "more properly portioned items" than "the Cheesecake Factory model" (as in enormous) and commensurate lower prices. Signature dishes such as Margherita pizza and spaghetti and meatballs will be the same as Raleigh's, with the rest of the menu more fluid. (Raleigh's includes dishes such as pan-roasted N.C. grouper with pancetta and pesto, wood-fired flat-iron steak and veal saltimbocca: www.vivaceraleigh.com.)

4. **Dining at the Silos Subdistrict.** Though delays are afoot, both **CHOW** (from J.D. Duncan of Bonterra and Mac's Speed Shop) and **LOCAL** (from Johnson & Wales culinary grad Eric Pliner) look interesting, and paced for the new economy. LOCAL plans to offer "pub food, but it's going to be fresh, upscaling a little bit," says Pliner: Kobe sliders, pizza dishes, chicken wings in a house marinade, then grilled. He's described the place as one for "all the Charlotteans who do not take themselves too seriously." CHOW's details are TBA, but expect burgers.

And here's to the last year

The best performances by new places in the last year or so:

Big Daddy's Burger Bar: This Dilworth spot from Frank Scibelli packed in the diners from the word Go, and hasn't slowed much since. I'm a fan of the Sam I Am burger, and the holistic approach of the concept, down to its metallic interior. 1626 East Blvd.; 704-714-4888.

Pie Town: Pizza re-thought by the trio of Peter Reinhart (with the fabulous title of "chef on assignment" for Johnson & Wales), chef Tim Groody and restaurateur Pierre Bader brought complex thought and ingredient depth to the genre. It's not for everybody (I'm talking to you, diehard Original Ray fans), but the adventurous mustn't miss it. 710 W. Trade St. uptown; 704-379-7555.

Amelie's: This French bakery in its second incarnation is working hard and adding things routinely. What a pleasure to find pain au chocolat and good croissants along with a savory vol au vent or two. 2424 N. Davidson St.; 704-376-1781.

Café Monte: France, encore. Monte Smith took a prime location in the Phillips Place/SouthPark nexus and put in a place that looks and feels French, down to the Nutella crepes and café au lait. 6700 Fairview Road; 704-552-1116.

Tamarind: Indian took a south Charlotte turn at this warm and golden spot, hitting a nice middle ground between basic and complex. 6420 Carmel Road, 704-541-8222.

Passion8: Who can resist a tiny place with heart, particularly when it serves Italian food in what the owners call a former brothel and video poker palace in Fort Mill? Brava. 3415 S.C. 51, Fort Mill, S.C.; 803-802-7455.



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