



Gourmet

by Moreton Neal

Year in Review: Restaurants & Cookbooks

TRIANGLE FOOD WRITERS DINE OUT AND PICK THEIR FAVORITES FROM 2004

2005 already!

Can it be possible that five years have already zipped by since, facing certain millennial disaster, we hoarded cans of soup and tuna fish?

Though the 20th century seems like yesterday, the *Metro* area restaurant scene actually has changed quite a bit in the first half-decade of the 21st. For a while after 9/11, it seemed that more restaurants were closing than opening in these parts. Happily, this past year saw several new restaurants appear on the scene, notably Nana's Chophouse in Raleigh, Starlu in Durham, and Chapel Hill's Tàlulla. I can vouch for the excellence of the latter and intend to check out the other two as soon as possible.

I've visited many wonderful restaurants and had more than my share of great meals in 2004, but there are a couple of stand-



Port Land Grille

outs—one old, one new. Vin's can't be called an old-timer quite yet, but is certainly in its prime. Chef Ashley Christenson's simple but sophisticated flavors paired with her recommendations of wines on Vin's superb list—heaven! Fairly new on the scene is Duck and Dumpling in downtown Raleigh. I was infatuated upon entering the door and totally besotted after only a few bites of

David Mao's divine dumplings.

Among the eateries I look forward to trying in the New Year are Port Land Grille and Jerry's in Wilmington, and Blue Moon Bistro in Beaufort. All receive consistent raves from beach-loving foodies.

This year I asked other food writers in our *Metro* neighborhood to join me in sharing their favorite restaurants of 2004.

Al Carson, Features Editor for Durham's *Herald Sun*, who writes a weekly food column: "My favorite place for getting a little fancy is Burkenstocks in downtown Wake Forest. It is run by a husband and wife team who met while studying at Johnson & Wales in Charleston. He does great things with crabs and crawdads.

"As for good ol' greasy spoons, you gotta love Wimpy's ('I'll gladly pay Tuesday for a hamburger today') Grill off Hillsborough Street in Durham, where former butcher Larry Mishoe still grinds his own beef fresh daily. While I love the hot dogs, the cheeseburger with mustard, chili, onions and slaw is to die for."

Susan Houston, Food Editor for Raleigh *News and Observer*: "My favorite special occasion place is Elaine's. There's always a dazzling choice of menu options and interesting surprises from the chef and the service is just perfect—professional, efficient and cordial. Yet I also have a weakness for the bacon, lettuce and tomato sandwiches at Merritt's Store, a hole in the wall place in Chapel Hill that serves up the largest and tastiest BLTs in the Triangle. The ingredients are cleverly layered so you get a generous taste of each in every bite."

Jean Anderson, author of dozens of cookbooks including *American Century Cookbook*: "My particular area favorites, I

TEN GREAT COOKBOOKS FROM 2004

For me, January is the best time of year to stay home and cook. I can't wait to explore these cookbooks more thoroughly in the wake of the holidays:

All About Braising: The Art of Uncomplicated Cooking by Molly Stevens



My idea of the perfect winter cookbook—easy stews from all over the world.

Apple Pie and Fried Chicken by John T. Edge
The author of *The Southern Belly* travels beyond the Mason-Dixon Line.



Barefoot in Paris: East French Food You Can Easily Make at Home by Ina Garten

The Barefoot Contessa revisits French country classics.

Bruce Aidell's **Complete Book of Pork** by Bruce Aidell



My pig-loving husband will hog this book.

Frank Stitt's Southern Table by Frank Stitts

Tempting recipes from Stitt's nationally acclaimed Highlands Bar and Grill in Birmingham.

Les Halles Cookbook by Tony Bourdain. Bad boy Tony gives away secrets from his own restaurant's kitchen in his inimitably outrageous style.



North Carolina's Historic Restaurants and their Recipes by Dawn O'Brian. Fun for armchair travelers as well as for cooks.

The Pat Conroy Cookbook: **Recipes from my Life** by Pat Conroy. When he's not writing novels, the versatile Conroy stays busy cooking up some mighty fine Low Country victuals.



Sweet Stuff by Karen Barker. Now we can try Magnolia Grill's divine desserts in our own kitchens!



Editor's Note: (Moreton Neal is too modest. Don't forget her new cookbook, *Remembering Bill Neal*)