

BEST
NEW
RESTAURANTS

THIS PAGE:
Chef Kevin
Thompson
of Favorites
Southern
Kitchen
presents
his seafood
cioppino.

Acadiana's diverse culinary scene grows by leaps and bounds every year. Lafayette alone has seen new restaurants opening monthly, but it's the variety that gives us foodies pause, from the traditional Cajun and Creole to a fusion of flavors and farm-to-table cuisine. There are even those eateries, such as The Duke in Houma, daring to not only cook outside the box but also batter and fry the box itself.

Here are a few new restaurants contributing to the vast culinary landscape of Acadiana.

BEST NEW

RESTAURANTS

BY
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Coen //
PHOTOS
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CLOCKWISE:
Favorites'
seafood cioppino
// Asia's crispy
duck // Favorites'
buttermilk
pancakes
Foster

FAVORITES SOUTHERN KITCHEN/ ASIA

THE DINING SCENE AT

L'Auberge Casino and Resort in Lake Charles continues to evolve.

In December, the café morphed into Favorites Southern Kitchen, while Asia expanded both its kitchen and floor space and added a sushi bar.

The casino café has long been known for its breakfast and several down-home dishes such as the crawfish grilled cheese sandwich, but now Favorites Southern Kitchen offers an expansive menu, updated décor and seating in the newly opened terrace overlooking the resort's lazy river.

"It was like a breakfast destination," Chef Kevin Thompson says of the original café. "Now we're pushing it as a destination for not only breakfast but for lunch and dinner as well. The ambiance is very different."

The breakfast everyone loved is still there, Thompson explains, though there are now quiches, casseroles and freshly made cinnamon rolls. The expanded dinner menu now includes wine service and dishes such as the short ribs braised in

SUGGESTED DINING: ASIA

▲ **STARTER:** The Rock-N-Shrimp serves up crispy fried shrimp accented by a spicy mayo sauce, so good you might want to enjoy it as an entrée. For sushi, try the Lake Charles roll that consists of crawfish, avocado and that delicious spicy mayo.

▲ **MAIN COURSE:** The crispy duck slices up roasted duck with scallions and steamed rice topped by Hoisin sauce. For something more on the wild side, try the Hunan shrimp served with baby corn, broccoli, carrots, mushrooms, snap peas water chestnuts and a spicy sauce.

▲ **DESSERT:** Asia doesn't serve desserts, but the aptly named Desserts store is only a few feet away, serving up a wide variety of gelato, chocolates and pastries, all house-made.

Abita beer and the spinach and frisée salad topped with a poached egg that's breaded in Panko crumbs and flash-fried so it's crispy on the outside and gooey on the inside.

"It allows us to be more cutting edge," Thompson says of the 24-hour restaurant, which now follows a bistro style. "We run the gamut with what we offer but we still offer the comfort foods you enjoy."

Asia opened with the resort in 2005 as a small restaurant serving up Asian-fashion specialties. Because of its popularity, the resort soon expanded the restaurant to increase seating.

"We had already expanded once, and it still wasn't big enough," says Stephanie Miller-Vincent, director of L'Auberge food and beverage.

Its latest expansion increased seating to 122, plus a private dining room and sushi bar, Miller-Vincent says. The recent renovation, which opened in December, also allowed the resort to increase the kitchen capacity to allow Chef Vilavong Prasith to enhance the Asia menu.

Favorites Southern Kitchen // Asia // L'Auberge Casino Resort // Lake Charles // lakecharles.com

SUGGESTED DINING: FAVORITES SOUTHERN KITCHEN

▲ **STARTER:** New on the menu are seafood beignets, a portion of five beignets comprised of shrimp, crawfish and crabmeat topped with a chipotle aioli. "It gives us a chance to showcase what Louisiana has to offer with its seafood," Chef Kevin Thompson says.

▲ **MAIN COURSE:** The Louisiana-style seafood cioppino combines lobster, shrimp, grouper, redfish, mussels, clams and crabmeat in a saffron-tomato seafood broth. The dish is accompanied by steamed red potatoes and crusty bread for dipping into this goodness.

▲ **DESSERT:** Choose between the key lime cheesecake topped with either a mango purée or a raspberry purée or the bananas Foster sundae: bananas cooked in Myers rum and cinnamon until they are glazed, then served over homemade banana gelato and topped with fresh whipped cream.



THIS PAGE:
Asia's
Lobster
Roll

THIS PAGE:
 Chef/owner
 Ryan Trahan
 adds strawberry
 snow to his
 brûléed
 cheesecake
 dessert.



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LEFT:
 Chef Cory
 Bourgeois
 plates the
 catch of the
 day. RIGHT:
 Dark
 Roux's root
 vegetable
 salad.

DARK ROUX

RYAN TRAHAN HAS LONG advocated farm-to-table cuisine, promoting locally produced food products of Acadiana. He opened Lafayette's hip Brick & Spoon with Bryan Jewell but wanted to get back to his core ambitions of keeping everything Louisiana.

After selling his interest in Brick & Spoon, Trahan opened Dark Roux Dec. 29, 2014, in the same restaurant space on Kaliste Saloom Road in Lafayette. His menu features dishes by Trahan and Chef Cory Bourgeois that incorporate produce and meats from local growers such as Gotreaux Family Farms, Mary Mary Markets, Urban Naturalist, Inglewood Farms and Bread & Circus Provisions.

In fact, except for his organic corn grits that hail from California, everything on the menu begins in Louisiana. "Almost everything is purchased in Louisiana and about 75 percent comes from the Lafayette area," Trahan says. In addition, produce such as oregano, chives and collard greens is grown in the restaurant's gardens, in the surrounding parking lot and even throughout

the eatery. Items such as bacon, sausage and even the kombucha tea are all made in-house. The alcohol also has a local connection, Trahan says, including Louisiana-produced beer and wine from France, Spain and German, three countries with cultural ties to Louisiana. Trahan is a self-taught cook from Lafayette while Bourgeois cut his teeth in New Orleans.

Both are in their 20s and collaborating on a new, burgeoning food scene. "We are very similar culturally but have different food backgrounds," Trahan explains of the team.

3524 Kaliste Saloom Road, Suite 101 // Lafayette // 337/504-2346 // darkrouxla.com

SUGGESTED DINING

▲ **APPETIZER:** The root vegetable salad topped with an arugula pesto with locally produced goat cheese is a prime example of Dark Roux's commitment to serving only Louisiana-grown products.

▲ **ENTRÉE:** Dark Roux's catch of the day arrives fresh from Gulf waters and served with locally grown sides. For instance, the pan-seared red snapper with ham consume is served with charred bok choy and crispy shallots.

▲ **DESSERT:** A blood orange flavors a cream mixture that's frozen with liquid nitrogen to produce a powder that looks like snow. This "snow" then tops an ice cream-stuffed marshmallow that arrives on a stick to enjoy like in the good ol' days.

CLOCKWISE: Funky dining atmosphere // co-owner René Gary // crispy catfish appetizer



SUGGESTED DINING

▲ **APPETIZER:** Very thinly sliced catfish that's lightly battered and fried make up the catfish fries appetizer that comes with a creamy artisan tartar sauce. The cream and perfectly seasoned corn and crab bisque is a favorite among customers.

▲ **ENTRÉE:** Fresh Louisiana bluepoint crabmeat makes up the crab croquettes that are panko-battered and fried and served on a toasted croissant with a house-made New Orleans-style tartar sauce.

▲ **DESSERT:** All desserts are made in-house but the pistachio cake is one hailing back to co-owner René Gary's roots, a cake flavored with crushed pistachios in both the cake and whipped cream-powdered sugar frosting that's finally topped with coconut.

FRICASSÉE CAFÉ & BAKERY

OPENING A RESTAURANT

seemed a natural fit for Acadiana natives Eddie and Renée Gary. "Eddie and I both love food and we love to cook, and we've entertained guests for years," Renée Gary says. "People always said, "You all should open a restaurant." Suggesting is one thing; doing is quite another. The

restaurant business is not for the faint of heart. But the Garys, who have run Nanny's Candy Company in Carencro for 26 years, envisioned the prospect as a retirement job, one with limited hours. They opened Fricassée Café & Bakery in Carencro last summer, in the house once belonging to Eddie's grandparents. The building

also contained the office for Nanny's Candy Co., but that operation has since moved next door (restaurant patrons will get a delicious whiff of pralines upon arriving). Fricassée serves Creole and Cajun lunches weekdays, offering fresh produce, meats and fish dishes. The kitchen is helmed by Chef Larry Nico Jr. of Lafayette. "Everything we do is fresh," Renée Gary says. "Nothing we do is frozen."

Popular items include the creamy corn and crab bisque, the stuffed shrimp appetizer, catfish fries with an artisan tartar sauce and the housemade chicken salad. Seafood platters and poor boys are offered as well as the old-fashioned Angus beef burgers. Café Fricassée has become so popular with the locals that the Garys now offer dinner hours Fridays and Saturdays, featuring boiled crawfish

during the season, crab cakes with a horseradish aioli and lots of fried seafood and beef options. "The place takes on a completely different ambiance at night," she says. "We really kick up the menu as well."

3823 N. University Ave. // Carencro // 337/886-6353 // facebook.com/fricassée



THIS PAGE: Crab croquettes served on a toasted croissant with housemade tartar sauce

TOP: Rustic modern dining room of Urbano's.
BOTTOM: Argentino Taco with sliced steak.



THIS PAGE: The Homeboy Taco features Panko breaded shrimp, cabbage, raw radish, green onion, cilantro and sweet Thai chili sauce.

URBANO'S TAQUERIA

AS A CHILD GROWING up in Honduras, Ricardo Valerio was ambitious, selling fruit on the streets at age 12 and cooking steaks streetside at 14. Even though he later owned a bar and worked in the hotel industry in his native country, his father, a USL graduate, encouraged him to come to Lafayette to study.

Valerio graduated USL (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette) in engineering but found it difficult to get a job since he wasn't a U.S. citizen. He reinvented himself once more and opened Urbano's Taqueria, a hip Latin American taco eatery.

"I've always wanted to bring something different to Lafayette," Valerio says.

Urbano's is a "world inside a tortilla," Valerio explained, incorporating the tastes of Latin America within its cuisine and not just Mexico. "We're urban; we're street food."

The menu remains simple: 28 tacos with names and corresponding flavors such as the Jamaican Surf with grilled shrimp pineapple, rotisserie corn, jerk sauce and lettuce and tomatoes; or El Cubano with honey ham, pulled

pork, sweet sauce, spinach, queso fresco and corn. For those who want to remain closer to home, culinarily speaking, there's the gringo taco with Angus beef or shredded chicken and lettuce, tomatoes and cheese.

Tamales are made with plantain leaves, Valerio's grandmother's recipe, and he recently introduced rice and salad bowls.

The restaurant has taken off so well, Valerio has purchased the two Bullrito's franchises in

town and plans to open the second Urbano's soon. He also runs a food truck and offers party planning.

Valerio chalks up his success to ambition, perseverance and sweat.

"Nothing is impossible," the 30-year-old

said. "I came here without a single penny and now I have all this. It's about hard work."

2023 W. Pinhook Road //Lafayette // 337/534-0529 // facebook.com/Urbanostaqueria



SUGGESTED DINING

▲ APPETIZER: Nothing starts a meal better at Urbano's than their homemade margaritas coupled with fresh guacamole or fried salted plantains. Natural or Mexican sodas are available for non-alcohol drinkers.

▲ ENTRÉE: You'll want to tango enjoying the Argentino Taco that combines sliced steak that's been marinated for 48 hours and coupled with queso fresco, spring mix and chimichurri inside a six-inch corn tortilla.

▲ DESSERT: Urbano's version of the tres leches cake - a sponge cake with three types of milk - is owner Ricardo Valerio's mother's recipe but topped with a shot of Kahlua. Because of that alcohol infusion, Valerio calls the dessert tres boracho, or "three drunks."

THE DUKE

THE LATEST ADDITION to the Houma culinary scene is an eclectic diner that doesn't shy away from innovation, though your cardiologist may have some concerns.

The Duke on Main Street in downtown Houma serves up hearty and innovative fare such as The Hangover Burger, which starts with an eight-ounce beef patty topped with a fried egg, grits, cheese and bacon and served with a helping of gravy fries.

"It's a heart attack on a plate," kitchen manager Rick Voisin says with a laugh. "It's pretty messy. You need a lot of napkins."

The buffalo fries are a top seller: fries loaded with cheddar cheese, chicken bites, blue cheese crumbles, bacon and two dressings, The Duke's homemade buffalo sauce and basil blue dressing.

"It's just stacked up in a giant plate," Voisin explains. "It could probably feed four people."

Other dishes include the "Meat-A-Butter Sandwich," an eight-ounce patty topped with peanut butter and bacon on toast and the pulled pork nachos that combine shredded pork, buffalo sauce, bacon, jalapenos, onions, tomatoes, cheddar cheese and avocado ranch dressing. For something truly unique, try the American sushi, a hot dog with blue cheese, onions and bacon inside a bun that's battered and fried and then cut up like sushi and topped with sauces.

Make sure to save room for dessert – again, don't tell your physician. Choose from the fried Oreos topped with ice cream or the fried cheesecake or bring in your own sweet dish, from candy bars to cakes, and The Duke will batter and fry them.

"We will fry anything for roughly two bucks," Voisin says.

7819 Main St., Houma
// (985) 262-0203 // thedukerestaurant.com



SUGGESTED DINING

▲ **APPETIZER:** Big enough to feed several people are the buffalo fries which starts with French fries, then cheddar cheese, The Duke's homemade buffalo sauce, chicken bites, blue cheese crumbles, homemade basil blue dressing and bacon on top.

▲ **ENTREE:** Get out plenty of napkins for the Hangover Burger, eight ounces of beef on a biscuit with grits, a fried egg, cheese and bacon with gravy fries on the side.

▲ **DESSERT:** The Duke will fry anything you bring them for \$2, but for something fried on the menu we suggest the fried Oreo cookie with vanilla ice cream on top that's topped by a drizzle of chocolate syrup.



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THIS PAGE: Deep fried Oreos drizzled with chocolate syrup.

CLOCKWISE: The Hangover Burger // buffalo fries // pop art wall in dining room

LE PETIT GATEAU

MARY BERGERON WORKED in the oilfield regulatory compliance for 30 years, but when her company went under, she started considering a new career. Marrying her love of baking with Acadiana's lack of a tea salon led to her opening

Le Petit Gateau bakery and tea parlor in Sunset. At first, she considered opening a place in Lafayette, but competition was stiff and she worried about getting lost in the busy culinary scene.

"In Lafayette, I would have been just another bakery," she says. "Sunset, it's a good fit."

Bergeron opened Le Petit Gateau in Novem-

ber, selling items one would find in a French bakery – éclairs, palmers, croissants and cookies, even a traditional French king cake during Carnival with a religious medallion inside. Jumping over the Channel, so to speak, Le Petit also serves up English tea service beneath crystal chandeliers and among comfortable chairs and chaise lounges. There's

even a "hat tree" filled with exquisite handmade hats for those who want to dress the part, a favorite with young girls.

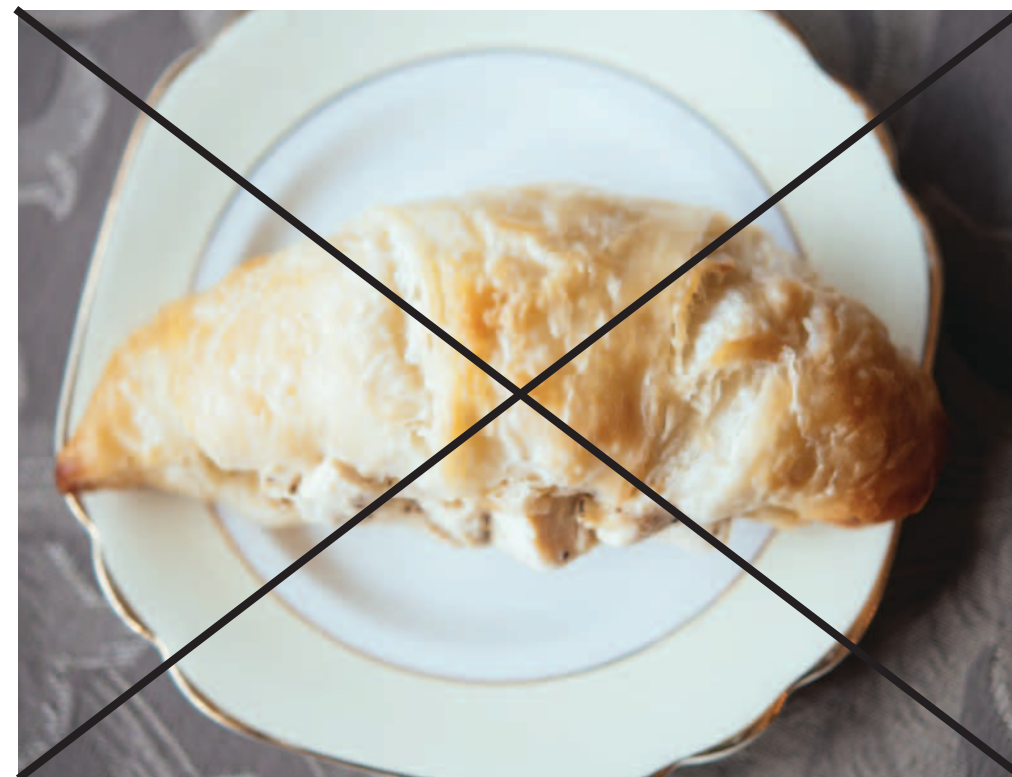
Le Petit serves up both the traditional English High Tea and a Royal Court Tea by reservation. High Tea consists of three courses of tea sandwiches such as cucumber, egg salad and chicken-almond croissant plus scones and

desserts. The Royal Court Tea includes soups and salads and the sandwiches are "more involved," Bergeron explains. "The last one we did was a roasted duck sandwich."

The bakery is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays with Sunday reserved for private parties. Bergeron hopes to expand hours and services as the bakery finds its legs, and include events such as storytime, holiday parties and larger food offerings for the lunch crowd.

829B Napoleon Ave. // Sunset // 337/662-3000 // lepetitgateau.co

CLOCKWISE: Chicken-almond salad on a croissant // Seven Princes Flowering tea // owner Mary Bergeron



SUGGESTED DINING

▀ **MAIN COURSE:** Chicken-almond salad on a croissant is one of the many sandwiches served at High Tea, but many times patrons may purchase a larger sandwich for lunch.

▀ **DESSERT:** The white chocolate cranberry pecan cookies offer something chunky in each bite and the restaurant's scones are moist and soft, a perfect accompaniment to tea.

▀ **TEA:** The Mother's Day Tea is naturally decaffeinated but carries a delightful taste of spearmint and the China Milky tastes of cream after being brewed, a "surprise tea" says owner Mary Bergeron. The flowering teas sink to the bottom of the glass pots and open as they brew. "It makes this beautiful display," Bergeron says.



THIS PAGE: White chocolate cranberry pecan cookies