

BEST



IDENTIFYING

BY LISA LEBLANC-BERRY
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOSEPH VIDRINE

Each year, Acadiana Profile celebrates the top chefs and restaurants within the 22-parish region that encompasses 14,500 square miles and more than 1,400,000 residents. We have explored the very heart of Acadiana to find the best of the best. Resilience prevails, from lunch counter wizards to young rising-stars and seasoned chef-proprietors who broke ties with family dynasties to pursue their dreams in Acadiana. They share similar ambitions and the ability to not only survive but thrive in the midst of challenges, from hurricanes to pandemics, strengthened by a love of food, family and community. The following pages showcase just a fraction of the success stories we encountered. We hope you have a chance to enjoy their hospitality.

RESTAURANT
OF
THE
YEAR

WEST

Live fire fuels Acadiana's hottest new restaurant, named for the Roman Vestal priestesses charged with keeping sacred fires blazing for Vesta, goddess of the hearth



POTATOES
Smashed potatoes with duck fat, taleggio and chives

STEAK
All steaks are served with bone marrow herb butter



Getta Ent This

1 STEAK

Sink your teeth into a juicy 40-ounce, dry-aged tomahawk embellished with bone-marrow butter fragrant with fresh herbs.

2 DUCK

Few can resist Vestal's mouth-watering koji-cured duck breast crowned with bourbon foie gras.

3 FISH

Foodies return to Vestal for the zesty whole fish tinged with olives and capers, finished with a dried tuna-seaweed broth, lime and smoked chili oil.



Chef Ryan Trahan is changing the way Acadiana foodies dine, one flaming dish at a time. The self-taught Crowley native ambitiously installed Lafayette's first massive wood-burning hearth at Vestal, a sleek Southern farm-to-table haven with extravagant cocktails infused with fire.

"It's designed as an interactive experience," says the 33-year-old Cajun chef.

Opened in April, Vestal radiates a palpable, Great Gatsby-esque glamour. Evocative skylit murals and plush velvet banquettes accentuate sleek Art Deco chairs and vibrant mosaics.

Lovers gravitate to the flickering flames and raw oysters, caviar and bubbly. Foodies demand ringside seats at the kitchen counter. Chef Trahan is at the open hearth, orchestrating complex live fire theatrics with a tight team of dexterous chefs.

"It's definitely a task, to offer this type of dining experience with a 14-foot fire in the middle of a restaurant and no firewall between guests," says Trahan. "We were able to create something Lafayette has never seen before."

Chef Trahan's affinity for live fire, fans and fame developed while he helmed the now-shuttered Dark Roux and Blue Dog restaurants. His 2018 King of Louisiana Seafood crown boosted myriad national connections.



ABOUT THE CHEF

A rare diamond in the rough, Chef Ryan Trahan's culinary interests began with his foodie parents, owners of Frosto's in Crowley and King's Truck Stop near Port Barre. His ambitious ascent from executive chef posts to becoming Vestals' proprietor has inspired the return of his formidable in-sync Dark Roux crew. Trahan now commutes weekly from Denver, where his wife was reassigned.

GIRLS AND CIGARS

Bourbon, basil, blackberry shrub and lemon

CAVIAR

Bowfin, crème fraîche, yuzu herb salad and ciabatta



"Before we closed Dark Roux in 2017, we were invited to do a 65-person live fire charity dinner," he says. "We built a ground fire and did a six-course tasting in the middle of a yard at River Ranch. Many requests followed. We've been working on the live fire concept ever since."

Trahan creates seasonally-focused regional fare designed to support his top farms and purveyors.

"My cuisine is really grounded in Cajun cooking with a classical French approach, but I also incorporate many Asian ingredients and techniques," he says.

Trahan's enthusiasm accelerates while describing a new dish.

"We're taking on a four-element duck dish using Backwater Farm's humanely raised ducks because they don't force-feed them to make foie gras," says Chef Trahan. "We'll koji-cure the breasts, cook the legs down into a marmalade with vinegar, use the bones for sauce and cure the duck liver with bourbon for a foie gras, which we'll shave atop the duck breast. It'll melt like butter," he adds.

"As Vestal progresses through time and our pantry grows, we're perfecting new flavor profiles and techniques," Trahan says. "We're always evolving."

Chef of the Year

Kim Nuzum



WHAT'S NEW

Our upcoming Acadiana Cooks series features non-professional cooks who become our executive chef for a night.

MOST FAMOUS DISH

People would go crazy for my carrot cake in Colorado. They came from all over the world to have it. It's my great-grandmother's recipe.

LAGNIAPPE

I'm making homemade jams for brunch. I make everything fresh, from our boudin to boursin cheese.

B

culinary prodigy, Chef Kim Nuzum's ambitions began at age 10, winning gold medals for cooking followed by more in high school at the Cajundome, with multiple wins in the Acadiana Culinary Classic's junior division. After a degree from the Culinary Institute of America in New York and 18 years as executive chef of top Colorado resorts, she has returned to Acadiana. As Chef of Café Sydnie Mae, she is dazzling diners with new fare: boudin-stuffed quail laced with blackberry demi-glace, sous-vide pork chops with cane butter, seafood crepes cradling boursin-stuffed shrimp, lump crabmeat and crawfish blanketed in velvety lobster bisque sauce, rack of lamb with figs, crispy Brussels sprouts with bacon jam, coconut red curry snapper, tender pork shanks with rice and chef's famous gnavy (au-jus demi-glace) and gorgeous soufflés paired with various homemade ice creams (tip: bourbon roasted pecan).

cafesydniemae.com
Breux Bridge



Best Patio

Little Big Cup

ARNAUVILLE You can drive your car or boat to Little Big Cup's two-level, verdant patio overlooking Bayou Fuselier. The charming 16-seat lower deck invites intimacy while the spacious, flower-filled upper-level has majestic views. Grab a Tiger Pride cocktail and enjoy chargrilled oysters and bronzed red snapper for a breezy Cajun dinner amid twinkling lights. littlebigcup.com

BEST TAKE-OUT

BON CREOLE

New Iberia's beloved Bon Creole lunch counter doesn't look like much but it is serving up terrific Sunday barbecue, award-winning chicken-sausage gumbo and over-stuffed po-boys. Delicious plate lunches tantalize tastebuds: pork roast with rice and gravy, baked chicken with rice dressing, stuffed catfish with angel hair and crawfish étouffée on Friday. bon-creole.com
New Iberia



BEST FOR MUSIC

HIDE-AWAY ON LEE

Owners Wilson Savoy (Pine Leaf Boys), David Livingston (Lonesome Whistle Recording) and Line Livingston (Line 'Em Up Music Company) renovated a 1910 building for the jamming new House on Lee. Top bands perform al fresco (see Steve Riley and the Mamou Playboys October 7 and the Savoy Family Cajun Band November 7). Try a Hadacol Boogie cocktail with a Leadbelly and poutine.

BIGGEST WINE SELECTION

VIC & ANTHONY'S STEAKHOUSE

Lake Charles Honored with Wine Spectator's coveted "Best of Award of Excellence," the elegant Vic & Anthony's Steakhouse inside Golden Nugget Casino attracts oenophiles for its vast, comprehensive wine list with over 640 selections amplified by top vintages from California, Bordeaux, France and Italy. Wine Director Josh Ponthieux assists diners with recommendations for seafood and steaks. vicandanthony.com

BEST COCKTAIL PROGRAM

JAZZES 710



Lake Charles Restaurateur Ben Herrera's latest triumph is the chic, globally inspired James 710, where Blakelee Kibodeaux fashions a unique, creative craft cocktail program utilizing house-made bitters and syrups for such visually alluring originals as his spicy cucumber margarita layered with muddled jalapeño, tequila, Cointreau, orange, lime and cucumber juices, garnished with fanciful cucumber ribbons. Great with kimchi debris fries and beetroot hummus. thejames710.com

OL'SMOKEY
13 Templeton Rye, Szechuan Amaro, bitters, smoked wood chips

best dish

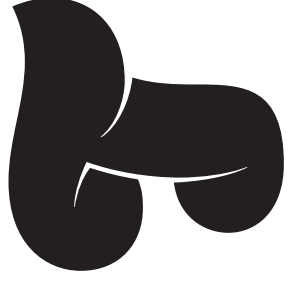
MEDITERRANEAN FISH

with Gulf shrimp, artichokes, peppers, olives and lump crabmeat in a white wine lemon sauce

PROCESS
Everything goes under the broiler after it is sautéed and sauced, with fresh lump crabmeat as the crowning finale.

THE TRIMMINGS
Chef Barrera roasts the peppers first before they are blended with the fish and shrimp medley.

FISH
Halibut, grouper and triple tail are among the fish favored for this light and luscious Mediterranean creation.



Third-generation New Orleans restaurateur Chef Nash Barrera met his wife, Jenny, in Acadiana and relocated to open Nash's Restaurant in an exquisite circa-1908 Queen Anne-Colonial Revival home listed on the National Historic Register. Couples celebrate anniversaries in the utterly romantic glassed-in semi-octagonal Doric front gallery. New Orleans-style barbecue shrimp, veal Orleans, shrimp fettucine and homemade cannelloni stuffed with baby spinach and veal are among local favorites. Mediterranean fish (sautéed with garlic, Gulf shrimp, roasted peppers, artichokes, ripe olives, capers and grape tomatoes in a white wine lemon sauce topped with lump crabmeat) is frequently requested during the casserole-laden holidays. "It's one of our most popular entrees because it has the healthiest ingredients," says Chef Barrera.

nashsrestaurant.com
Broussard



FOR DATE NIGHT
HOUMAS HOUSE

Take a scenic weekend drive at dusk along River Road to Houmas House for cocktails in the storied Turtle Bar then enjoy a custom five-course feast in opulent Latil's Landing (advance reservations required for the 1770s French House) or dine at the glass-enclosed Café Burnside overlooking lush gardens. houmashouse.com Darrow

CELEBRATE A SPECIAL OCCASION

Riverfront

Abbeville Situated on the banks of the Vermilion River, this popular upscale seafood haven is ideal for big family reunions and special occasions. The handsome bar is separate from the dining room and a wrap-around, outdoor dining area overlooking the river. Order the fire-roasted oysters, masterful gumbos, shrimp trinity, eggplant Evangeline with crabmeat bechamel and celebration-worthy desserts. riverfrontla.com



CHEF'S SCRAMBLE
Eggs with select seasonal ingredients

SPICY CHICKEN SANDWICH
Breaded chicken, house pickles, whipped burrata and triple yolk aioli

EGGS IN BRIOCHE
Herbed bechamel, Gruyère, ham, Helen St. Bakehouse bread

best brunch

FIRE & OAK

Chef-owner Andrew Green's wildly popular new brunch, available on a patio beneath the oaks, features eye-openers with spicy chicken and jalapeno cheddar waffles, eggs in brioche with herbed bechamel, 1910 Coulis Benicio with jalapeno corn cake, pulled pork, egg and hollandaise and amazing beignets credling coffee ice cream, banana crème anglaise, strawberries and chocolate sauce.

facebook.com/fireandoaklake
Lake Charles

BEST FAMILY SPOT

PETE'S

Restaurateur Charles Goodson (Charley G's, Social Southern Table & Bar, The Taproom) acquired the circa 1968 Pete's in 2016, renovated it and added multiple table and arcade games to the kid-friendly, sports-themed eatery. After hamburgers sliders and shakes, kids can delve into Nascar and mini-basketball while parents relax with beer and sports on 20 HD TVs. peteslafayette.com Lafayette



Best Late Night Eats

Wurst Biergarten

LAFAYETTE The open-air, dog-friendly Wurst Biergarten is a happening scene with live music, live-mic trivia, comedy night and late-night food trucks featuring Paco's boiled crawfish in season, crab cakes, boudin, egg rolls, wraps, jerk chicken and spicy burgers. wurstbiergarten.com ■