







VS & REVIEWS IANIIARY 25 2017 7-30 AM

## The Triangle's Best Restaurants of the year. And the winners are ...



















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North Carolina companies take home 2017 Good Food Awards

Durham and Chapel Hill restaurants offer vegan, offal menus next week











und throughout the menu at The Durham. Juli Leonard

BY GREG COX

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Every year, as I look back over the previous 12 months of restaurant comings and goings in the process of putting together my annual Best Restaurants list, one or two noteworthy trends invariably stand out.

These naturally have varied from year to year, running the gamut from small plates to authentic regional Asian cuisines to food truck operators opening brick-and-mortar locations. In 2015, we saw a bumper crop of new ventures from James Beard Award-winning chefs. Looks like we'll have to call the theme for 2016 "all of the above."

Every trend I can think of that has made the news in recent years picked up steam last year.

Well, every one except for cupcakes. That one appears to have leveled off.

[The best restaurants in the Triangle for 2016]

But let's talk superstar chefs. Ben and Karen Barker, with two Beard Awards between them, out its stalk superstar ents. Ben and Karen Barker, with two Beard Awards between them, teamed up with their son, Gabe, to open Pizzeria Mercato in Carrborn in Pebruary. That same month, Nana's owner/chef and perennial Beard contender Scott Howell opened. NanaSteak in Durham. Beard semifinalist Matthew Kelly Vin Rouge, Mareo partnered in two new ventures, Lucky's Deli and Mothers & Sons Trattoria. Scott Crawford, yet another semifinalist, left Herons to partner in Standard Foods - then promptly left that restaurant to the Crawford Matthew Scott Scott Control of the State Crawford Scott S

Tired of chasing food trucks? No need to check Twitter for the current location of Pie These or classing flood mixes: No fleed to eleck Nutter for the Current location of ries.

Pushers' brick-and-mortar location, which opened in September in downtown Durham. Or Belgian Waffle Crafters, which joined fellow food truckers American Meltdown and Porche in the Streets at Southpoint food court.

Brew N Que's permanent address in Cary has been so successful that a second location opened late last year in Apex. Captain Poncho's Tacos parlayed the success of its Southern Village location to a second in Wilmington and a third, just weeks ago, on Franklin Street in Chapel Hill.

The best restaurants in the Triangle for 2015

Maybe you're looking for a new place to share some small plates. Check out newcomers Whiskey Kitchen (Raleigh), Tandem (Carrboro), Littler and Black Twig Cider House (both in Durham). With share plates that include the likes of pork cracklin' biscuits, crab-stuffed devided eggs, Southern poutine and potted rabbit with house-made Ritz crackers, they'll get you out of your rut.

But in terms of sheer numbers, all of these trends pale in comparison to the rapidly expanding lineup of authentic regional Chinese and Indian restaurants. Szechuan Garden (Morrisville) and Szechuan Tasse (Gardon) opened within weeks of each other last summer. East Garden (Carry) brought Cantonese with dim sum and live fish tanks.

By my count, eight newcomers - with specialities ranging from Southern dosa (Dharani, Madras Dosa & Curry) to biryani (Hyderabad House, Biryani XPRX) - push the total number of Indian restaurants in the area to more than 50. Further sweetening the pot, a little retail shop called Mithal House of Indian Deserts recently reintagined itself as a "contemporary Indian snack bar, tea house, bakery and dessert destination," and changed its name to

Just as the year was coming to an end, the owners of the Tan-Durm food truck partnered with the owners of Bull McCabe's Irish Pub to open Viceroy in downtown Durham. The partners are Bulling their joint venture as a British pub serving Indian Cuisine – a combination that, in light of recent trends, seems perfectly natural.

Who knows? Maybe it's the first blip on the radar screen of new trends for 2017.

## Our Restaurant of the Year

Andrea Reusing has built a stellar reputation largely on her thoughtful melding of Asian flavors and North Carolina ingredients at Lantern, the Chapel Hill restaurant that helped her win the 2011 James Beard Award for Best Chef: Southeast.

But fans familiar with her long-running Lantern Table series, in which she has explored cuisines from all over the world, will attest to Reusing's versatility. And those who remember her pre-Lantern days nearly two dec

For her latest venture - the restaurant at The Durham, a boutique hotel in a restored mid-century modern building in downtown Durham - she draws on all of her experience and considerable talent to present a seasonally evolving menu inspired by American classics.

What's especially impressive, given the bold sweep of a menu that can whisk you herney Pennsylvania- butch scrupple to California gold rush-inspired Hangtown fry in the course of single brunch—is the consistently high level of execution. Having sampled liberally from the menu over the course of several meals, I have yet to come across anything I'd even call a near miss.

Instantian, looking over my notes from those meals, I see the word "textbook" sprinkled liberally throughout descriptions of dishes, from classic spaghetti carbonara to roasted spice-cured breast of Moulard duck, showered with cress and shaved white truffle. A bone-in dryaged rib-eye, flanked by a roasted marrow born ersting on a small tangle of greens willing in hot beef fat, was the most memorable steak I've had in the Triangle. And that includes

I could go on. There was an ethereal deviled North Carolina blue crab soufflé, and a brunch side of bacon with a crisp crackling edge so good, even the word "bacon"

But you get the idea. Given the seasonal nature of the menu, some of the dishes  $l^\prime m$  describing might well no longer be on the menu anyway.

That's where the consistency of execution comes in. The Durham is one of those rare places where you can feel free to follow your whim when ordering, and know you're in for a memorable meal. Factor in a hospitable, well-trained wait staff and a vibrant cosmopolitan decor in the historic building's architecture (don't miss the rooftop bar with a view of one America's most vibrant foodie towns), and you've got the Restaurant of the Year.

The Durham: 315 E. Chapel Hill St., in The Durham Hotel, Durham. 919-768-8831,

Note: You can find my restaurant reviews online at themenunc.com.