

## 4th & Swift: Full house

Refined Southern cooking fills seats

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By [Besha Rodell](#)



James Camp

HOT DAMN! The tuna tartare with hot mustard oil at 4th & Swift

### 4th & Swift

**3 stars.**

621 North Ave., Building B. 678-904-0160.

[www.4thandswift.com](http://www.4thandswift.com).

Mon.-Fri., 5:30-11 p.m.; Sat., 5:30-midnight;

Sun., 5:30-10 p.m. Full bar. Valet parking.

There was a brief time when 4th & Swift felt like a wonderful secret, a beautiful, mainly empty restaurant serving thoughtful, exuberantly fresh food. For six weeks, the management took the term "soft opening" to its extremes, eschewing promotion, and allowing people to hear about the place through word of mouth alone. It was a great time to eat at the restaurant – the service was personal, the atmosphere calming. Those days are gone, however, and it's unlikely that they'll come back. If there's any rhyme and reason to our fickle dining scene, 4th & Swift ought to be packed every night from here on out.

Despite the stampede of customers (mainly due to a very positive *AJC* review), 4th & Swift has managed to maintain an uncommon level of quality and composure. On a recent Sunday evening, the host was turning away parties without reservations even though there were plenty of empty tables in the cavernous room. It's a smart move. I get the feeling that the folks at 4th & Swift want to ensure that the customers who *are* in seats get a great experience rather than the overwhelmed madness that so many new, trendy restaurants offer in their first weeks of popularity.

Located in Southern Dairies' former engine room, the space epitomizes industrial elegance. An architectural partition adds structure and divides the restaurant, with a long, sleek bar on one side and the main dining area on the other. Exposed and white painted brick walls play gracefully against banquettes with fat cushions, polished wood accents, and some subtle back lighting.

The Swift in the name refers to chef Jay Swift, who came to prominence as the chef at South City Kitchen. He maintains his focus on Southern cooking at 4th & Swift, but with a more refined and personal touch – taste comes first, not aw-shucks gimmickry.

The elegant summer pea and radish salad that accompanies the tuna tartare elevates simple Southern ingredients. A strange kick of hot mustard oil brightens the pristine tuna beautifully. Succotash under the roasted chicken acts as a matchmaker for exuberant summer flavors – corn, outrageously fresh lima beans and garden herbs. Swift's cooking shows hardly any ego. Instead of culinary acrobatics, we get a waltz – simple, beautiful and classic.

The one dish Swift gets cutesy with is the "three little pigs," pork served three ways – loin, sausage and belly – with a dish of creamy (and by that I mean doing the backstroke in cream) mac-n-cheese. My only complaint is that the belly seemed trimmed of all its fat – kind of a contradiction to the very idea of pork belly. The taste was piggy and wonderful, but the texture was a tad like jerky.

There are a few different menus on any given night, most often a menu of daily specials, the regular menu, and at the bar, a snack-centric menu. On Sundays, a prix-fixe three-course menu is available for \$30. It was here that I found perfectly sautéed chicken livers cloaked in a musky brown pan sauce, but the accompanying crouton was too brittle to really do any sopping. Swift seems to have a talent for meat's dark, rich flavors, and it'll be interesting to see what he does with a fall menu. One of the best appetizers on the summer menu actually seems borrowed from fall: a jumble of tender braised lamb shoulder "lasagna" with wild mushrooms and ricotta cheese.

I was excited to try the swordfish loin with calamari and rouille, a sauce made with garlic, saffron, bread crumbs and chili. Unfortunately, everything on the plate added to the swordfish's fishiness rather than complementing it. The fennel salad also took on a slightly fishy flavor, ramped up by the addition of capers.

Desserts offered an opportunity to swim back into summer with a raucously colorful green melon soup with scoops of watermelon and cantaloupe sorbet. Even better is the passion fruit parfait and shortbread sandwich, a creamy tropical delight presented with a wink in a small wax paper bag.

Although there are no more quiet, covert evenings to be had at 4th & Swift, the charm and friendliness remains intact. In fact, the striking industrial space feels naturally inclined to hold laughing, chattering crowds. If it has to transform from charming secret to "it" restaurant, then so be it. Jay Swift, and the public, both deserve to reap the rewards.