

SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 2008

## A first look at Chef Jay Swift's ITP return—4th and Swift

**Chef Swift has crafted a rich, seasonal menu that appears to be humming at a pretty good clip right from day one.**



4TH AND SWIFT SEARED DIVER SCALLOPS (PHOTO BY SPARK ST. JUDE)

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### DINING ESSENTIALS

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4th and Swift  
621 North Ave. NE  
Atlanta, GA 30308 678-904-0160  
[www.4thandswift.com](http://www.4thandswift.com)

**Hours:** Mon.–Thu. 5:30–11 p.m.; Fri.–Sat. 5:30–midnight, Sun. 5:30–10 p.m.

**Reservations:** Yes

**Dress code:** Business casual

**Alcohol:** Full bar

**Cost:** \$19–\$36, entrees

**Credit cards:** All major

**Parking:** Complimentary valet

By Aaron Lipson

And to think, we owe it all to a Yankee. Chef Jay Swift may not pack the “born and bred” credentials of his white-toqued Johnny Reb contemporaries, but the Atlanta dining scene owes him a massive debt of gratitude.

Pre-Olympics, rightly or wrongly, Atlanta was repeatedly harangued by Northern aggressor columnists and reviewers as a culinary wasteland, purportedly populated with chain-loving, tallboy-swilling ignoramuses. Critics and travelers alike pointed to the occasional high-brow successes of the Hedgerose Heights Inn or Nikolai’s Roof, and the venturings of Steve Nygren or Pano when he still had Paul, but the pickings were alleged to be few and far between. If anything righted the C.S.S. Hundley of Atlanta dining, it was the rise of “modern Southern” cuisine. We look now to the Watersheds and Wisterias and Sunday Suppers at Restaurant Eugene and are fat and happy as we revel in the Reconstruction of fried chicken, stone ground grits and collard greens.

The Fort Sumter of modern Southern, though, may well have been South City Kitchen and its Mason-Dixon line straddling chef, Jay Swift. Swift ran the South City Kitchen show in its heyday, when the New York Times proclaimed that “if this is the direction that new Southern cooking is taking, it’s on the right track.” And for that, we should all be thankful. Swift ultimately departed to the more continental offerings of Rainwater, brought his fried pickles and cheese grits to Smokejack, and has now hung an eponymous shingle in the Old Fourth Ward. It feels good to rise again.

## The Look

Among the spate of industrial warehouse rehab restaurants, 4th and Swift, housed in the former engine room of Southern Dairies, looks mighty fine. Its design team retained the exposed brick and the iron beams and added glass, leather and wood in just the right places. It’s intimate and a scene all at once.

## The Food

A basket of focaccia and flatbreads gets the juices flowing for some hearty first courses. Lasagna of braised lamb shoulder, house-made pappardelle, mushrooms and a super smooth, über-creamy ricotta is rich and filling, almost the perfect country winter dish. An arugula salad with braised beets is, strangely, equally as filling, as it’s topped with massive fried cheese “beignets” that simultaneously add guilty flavor and subtract any sense of moderation that might accompany the salad.

Main courses stay in the hearty vein and deftly prove the well-known culinary adage that salt and pepper are the two greatest seasonings ever invented. Seared diver scallops with a sweet corn risotto specked with peas and bacon is a delight of creamy, succotash-style fun. The so-called “Three Little Pigs” offers pork, pork and more pork in the form of a devilishly smoky sausage, flawlessly caramelized belly meat, and a superbly seasoned, but sadly tough, slice of loin. Plated with a solid serving of mac ‘n’ cheese, it’s a very fine dish. Equally good was a duck breast “market” special. Perfectly grilled with a savory crackle in the fatty skin, it arrived with two deliriously good sides: Vidalia and cabbage slaw, and whipped brown butter sweet potatoes that were light to the point of ethereal. More perplexing was a roasted heart of rib eye. On the plate were charred peppers and onions, a chimichurri sauce spiked with crushed olives, and shaved potato chips—it all screamed manly, filling and good. Serving the heart of the rib eye alone theoretically elevated the steak to a more filet or strip-like appearance, but robbed our inner primates of the beauty of the cut—gone was the fatty lip and tail that smackingly make the steak.

Desserts wandered off track, as a peanut butter tart with raspberry sauce had a mousse-like consistency that was far too airy and completely lacked the sugary denseness one craves. Profiteroles with vanilla ice cream seemed a bit tired, although the accompanying chocolate cognac sauce was pleasingly complex. The cheese plate was a bit sad as well, served far too warm and with only marcona almonds and a single fruit accompaniment to accent the four distinct varieties of cheese.

Sweets and my missing piece of beef fat (maybe they’re hoarding all the rib eye lips and tails to create the greatest steak dish ever envisioned?) aside, Chef Swift has crafted a rich, seasonal menu that appears to be humming at a pretty good clip right from day one. Definitely one to watch, to return to and to savor. **SP Four out of five stars**