

cooking and entertaining

Fall Flavors:

# A SEASONAL FEAST

by Chef Ben Vaughn of River Oaks

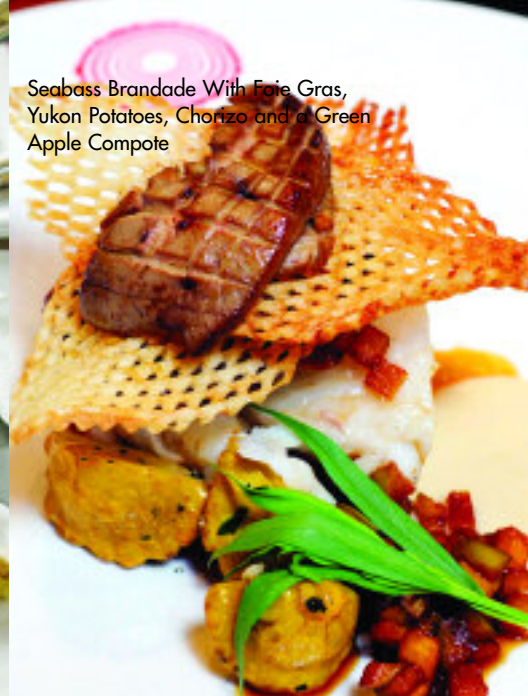
WRITER JENNIFER CHANDLER  
PHOTOGRAPHER JAY ADKINS



Roasted Black Mission Fig With Prosciutto and Ricotta Salata



Seabass Brandade With Fave Gras, Yukon Potatoes, Chorizo and a Green Apple Compote



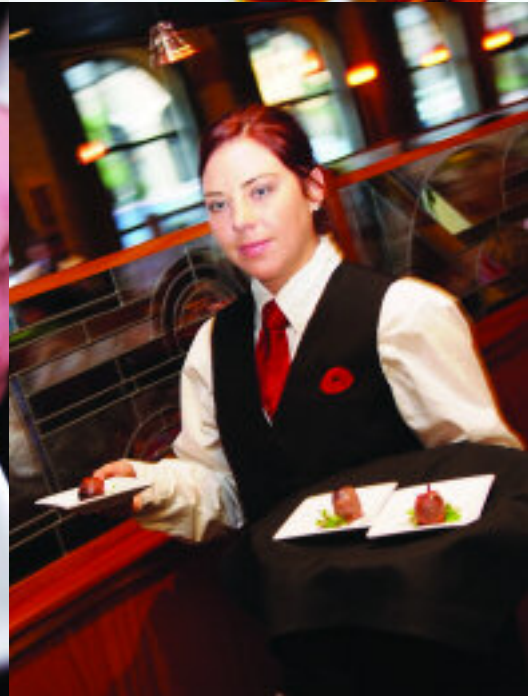
Lime Sorbet Intermezzo



3 degrees of Kobe Beef



Pumpkin Cheesecake With Ginger Gelato, Crème Anglaise and Maple Gastrique



The transformation of the leaves into vibrant reds and yellows and the slight chill in the air signal the coming of autumn in the mid-South. And with the change of the seasons also comes a transformation of the dinner table. Root vegetables, apples, squashes of all varieties and wild game now take center stage. Heartier and richer dishes become the norm.

At a recent Chef's Table dinner, Chef Ben Vaughn of River Oaks wowed his guests with a five-course Chef's Table tasting menu featuring culinary gifts of the fall season.

While his technique is rooted in the classic French style, Vaughn is known for pairing foods from diverse regions of the globe to create original and tantalizing dishes.

"The ingredients are more important than the recipe" is his mantra when developing his innovative creations.

To complement Chef Vaughn's contemporary American cuisine, the restaurant's management team has developed an extensive wine selection. "We feature wines from every region around the globe," explains wine manager Andreas Karaminas, "but our wine list is designed to match our food."

At this particular meal and at all of his special Chef's Table events, Vaughn pushed the envelope to prepare innovative and original dishes using seasonally fresh ingredients.

To tempt the palate, Chef Vaughn served a delightful and exquisite *Amuse Bouche*. A single black mission fig was stuffed with ricotta salata and wrapped in prosciutto before being roasted to perfection. This simple yet divine bite was paired with a crisp Montaudon Brut Rose Reims Champagne.

The first course was succulent Maine lobster served atop a crispy egg noodle pancake and garnished with Mississippi Molasses butter, a refreshing lemon pine nut gremolata and a butternut squash cr me fraiche. Believe it or not, the egg noodle pancake was the highlight of this dish. Vaughn took a simple and lowly ingredient and transformed it into a full-flavored dish that was devoured by all at the table. The crisp yet fruity Stag's Leap 2005 Sauvignon Blanc that Karaminas chose was the perfect foil for the richness of this course.

#### CHEF'S TABLE AT RIVER OAKS

Whether for two or 20, guests can arrange to have Chef Ben Vaughn design a special Chef's Table tasting menu.

"I love it when guests put the meal into my hands," says Vaughn. "It allows me to be creative with seasonal ingredients."

Chef's Table tasting menus are generally five courses, but can be as elaborate as a 12-course feast.

Chef's Table reservations and menus should be made well in advance of the special occasion. Call 901.683.9305 for more information.

Yukon potatoes. Contributing the flavors of autumn, the tart green apple compote was a nice complement to the richness of this dish. A classic Napa Valley-style buttery chardonnay, a Merryvale Starmont 2005 Chardonnay was a nice pairing with this complex course.

Next on the menu was a game dish that featured Arkansas quail and duck confit. The accompanying cornbread stuffing consisted of bite-sized pieces of cornbread, fresh corn kernels, ground chorizo sausage and figs. The sauces for this dish were of note: a mole-style Vahlrona chocolate duck glaze accented by a sweet and spicy guava chipotle glaze. The Paradise Ridge Elizabeth & Henry's Vineyard 2005 Pinot Noir that accompanied this course is a single vineyard, limited production wine that would be perfect for a Thanksgiving table.

The last entr e course was aptly named "3 degrees of Kobe." Illustrating the diversity of beef, each of three "degrees" featured a different cut of meat. One was a fork-tender slice of tenderloin served with a smoky tomato brioche bread pudding and a beurre rouge sauce. Another degree was a braised short rib garnished with sweet potato gnocchi. Rounding out the selection was a grilled flank steak served with honey ginger-glazed pearl onions and a sun-dried cherry reduction. Perfect for most any red meat, a Geyser Peak Reserve 20002 Cabernet Sauvignon was the chosen wine for this dish.

Even after four courses, guests still found room to savor the sweet conclusion to Chef Vaughn's autumn-inspired feast. Drawing from the flavors of Thanksgiving, dessert was a pumpkin cheesecake with a shortbread pumpkin seed crust served with ginger gelato, cr me anglaise and a maple gastrique. And, of course, every dessert needs a beverage accompaniment. Karaminas chose a Quinta do Noval 2000 Late Bottle Vintage Port to be the final note of this memorable meal. ●

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