

When You Crave the Unexpected Drawing Room

INSIDE THE VENDUE HOTEL, YOU'LL find a lion sculpture composed of gold-plated bullets and a faux-taxidermy tiger head made from bold fabrics. Drawing Room, a world-class restaurant located within the hotel, serves dishes just as captivating as the pieces that line the walls. The chef at the center of it all is Forrest Parker. Named 2016's South Carolina Chef Ambassador by Gov. Nikki Haley, this culinary renegade sets out to craft cuisine that delights the

BY KALENE MCCORT

eye, thrills the taste buds and, most importantly, tells a story.

"Musicians dream about playing at Carnegie Hall; chefs dream about cooking at The James Beard House," said Parker, who got the opportunity last August. "I remember cooking recipes with my dad back in Anderson out of 'The James Beard Cookbook,' but I never imagined I'd actually have the chance to cook there."

Parker is on the forefront of a gastronomic renaissance and resurgence, aptly called restoration cuisine. Wading through rice fields, recruiting help from agricultural experts and digging through college libraries are all part of his job description. He once walked the city's cobblestone streets as a tour guide, and, in some ways, he is just as much a historian and an anthropologist as he is a chef. Tracking down seedlings once thought to have been rendered extinct, he's plating our past in a way that's both vintage and modern.

"Charleston consistently gets voted the No. 1 travel destination," said Parker. "There's no reason why the food on diners' plates shouldn't reflect that."

From Nostrale rice dating back to the 1700s to seashore black rye found to be growing in a remote area of Edisto Island, there's no telling what cultural marvel will end up

in your dish. Deceptively sweet Bradford watermelons, the elusive Carolina African runner peanut and other various heirlooms are making quite the comeback at this downtown eatery.

If ever there was a dish that encapsulates the Lowcountry, it has got to be the pirlou. This visually stunning array of stackable color, texture and flavor incorporates some of the region's most notable ingredients: Lobster, shrimp, crab and grouper delicately rest on a bed of saffron-tinged Carolina gold rice.



Photo courtesy of Drawing Room.

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Having spearheaded many a restaurant venture in other culturally diverse cities, Parker sees the intrinsic value in food of all varieties. From traditional Ethiopian bread, injera, to Salvadorian pupusas, he feels lucky to have tasted some of the world's finest international cuisine, stateside.

"Being exposed to such a cross-section of people forces you to stop looking at what sets them apart and look at what they have in common," said Parker. "I like viewing people through the lens of food."

Purple Straw wheat and Purple Ribbon sugar cane are in the process of being restored and, for Parker, this presents yet another opportunity to go

to work in the kitchen – reviving pastry recipes thought to have vanished with the passing of our ancestors.

"We are able to prepare food that will have the same taste it did 200 years ago," said Parker. "This is really exciting to be able to connect the dots."

With specialty cocktails, live music and artists putting paint to canvas right in the middle of the dining room, Drawing Room is the ideal place to visit when you crave the unexpected. 🍷

To learn more, visit www.drawingroomrestaurant.com or call 843-414-2334.