

Mimosa Grill: Your Table is Waiting

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Mimosa Grill may be the longest running restaurant concept of its kind in Uptown Charlotte. Always a front runner, Mimosa Grill has been on many food writers' Top Ten lists, this food writer included, for most of the 21 years it has been in existence.

Executive chefs at the helm may have changed, but the quality of the food and the dedication to the community have remained the same. Over the course of the past 21 years I have written about Mimosa Grill on several occasions and decided I was long overdue on an update.

Chef Thomas Marlow is at the helm as executive chef at Mimosa Grill these days and is surrounded by a great team. Marlow has a long history with the Harpers Group in general and at Mimosa Grill in particular.

Marlow was originally hired at Mimosa as a server's assistant in 2006 when chef Tom Condron (now of The Liberty and Lumiere) was executive chef and chef Tom Dymess (now of Mama Ricotta's) was the chef de cuisine. Lots of the big names in Charlotte's culinary community have at one time called the Mimosa Grill kitchen their own, and like many before him, Marlow worked his way up the ladder and into the kitchen.

Then left for what he thought would be greener pastures. They weren't.

He came back to the Harpers Group in 2009, this time as a more confident, more talented chef, not as a server. Chef Jon Fortes (now of The Flipside Group) was the executive chef at Mimosa Grill, and Marlow worked with Fortes and through the Harpers Group restaurant kitchens including stints at Arpa, at Zink American Kitchen, Uptown; and at Upstream honing his skills. He then became the chef de cuisine at Zink's SouthPark location.

In 2013 Marlow came back to work with Fortes and chef Joe Cornett at Mimosa Grill. That year these three talented chefs and chef DJ Ivey who is no longer in Charlotte, honed their collective talents and took the city and state by storm, first winning the 2013 GotToBeNC Competition Dining series Fire in the City championship and then taking top honors in the state later that same year. It was a dream team of talent.

Thomas Marlow has been at Mimosa Grill ever since and has been the executive chef there since 2015. "It's been a whirlwind," Marlow told me.



Mimosa Grill Sous Chefs (left to right) Lenny Williams, Jr.; Justin Edwards; and Executive Chef Thomas Marlow

"Whiskey Barrel Meat and Cheese" charcuterie platter for the table to share with a mix of domestic and local cheeses, imported and local hams and salamis, house made pickles, pickled okra, crackers, mustard and toasts



Now flanked with his own team of chefs in Lenny Williams, Jr. and Chef Justin Edwards, both at sous, Marlow seems happy and in his element. Mimosa Grill is a big restaurant doing hundreds of covers for lunch and then again for dinner each day. As executive chef, Marlow not only organizes the team and the menu, but keeps production and ordering well organized. "The restaurant and the line are organized to be successful," he said. Organization is a real strength of Marlow's and of any successful chef. "With this many guests and this much product coming through the kitchen, it just has to be."

The commitment at Mimosa Grill is "to support artisans, farmers, and craftsmen whose passion for food creates the finest ingredients possible." The restaurant's success is in the consistency of that mission.

Hard to keep a kitchen stocked with all local product when consumption is as large as that of Mimosa Grill, and yet Marlow remains committed to the farm to fork mantra on which the restaurant was founded and is dedicated to the idea of shopping local.

To that end, Mimosa regularly uses a lot of local product, and all of the restaurant's eggs and duck are locally sourced as well as a good deal of produce from Harmony Ridge Farms in Tobaccoville, NC. Local cheeses from across the state are often featured on the Mimosa menu, including Uno Alla Volta of Charlotte; and local milk and buttermilk come from Farm to Home Milk in Asheville, NC. Look for great regional product as well including superb lamb from Border Springs Farm in Virginia to excellent chicken from Springer Mountain in Georgia.

Marlow says for Mimosa, 2016 was about working on an investment with local farmers. "It's a partnership, and they have to know I will be there for them living up to my orders just like I need them to be there for me providing product as promised," he said. With 2017 Marlow sees attentions turning to developing more of an in house charcuterie program. To do so and do it right, will be an investment of time, regulations and attention to detail. "We are realistic about each year and what we are able to do – how we are able to grow." It's that commitment that has kept Mimosa Grill on top of its game all these years.

With the ever growing local partnerships this year, the commitment is that every plate out of the



Beets of Harmony Ridge Salad - mixed roasted beets with smoked creme fraiche, pickled mustard seed and pistachios



Mimosa Grill's Winter Flatbread with roasted fennel, buffalo mozzarella, prosciutto and parmesan



Waygu Beef Carpaccio with marinated Urban Gourmet Farms oyster mushrooms, quail eggs, pecorino cheese and crispy croutons



Fennel Flatbread with Mimosa Grill's made-in-house sausage, Uno Alla Volta ricotta, sweet peppers and onion

Mimosa Grill kitchen has at least one local product on it, sometimes more. In fact, in addition to local and artisan farm product, lots of what is on the plate at Mimosa Grill is created in the kitchen on site, be it pickles, mustards, sausages and more. It goes without saying that the kitchen is from scratch, and each and every plate is prepped and cooked to order.

All of that to say, it is evident that a lot of love, thought and consideration goes into each and every plate served to a lunch, dinner or brunch guest at Mimosa Grill. We have eaten at Mimosa often, and each and every time we are blown away by the food, the execution and the mix of flavors.

If I had to pigeon hole it, I'd say eclectic Southern cuisine, but Marlow and his team know how to play to the crowd. Both the lunch and dinner menus offer something for everyone, from a mouth-watering cast iron skillet fried chicken to waygu beef carpaccio to a lobster mac and cheese that might just change your life. Creative seasonal salads with a centerpiece of local cheeses to artistically constructed charcuterie plates of meats, cheeses, pickles, mustards and thin sliced toasts bring out the artistic side of the chefs and are almost too pretty to eat.

The made-to-share charcuterie displays are presented on repurposed slats from old bourbon barrels for a very cool presentation indeed. The cheeses are always American made, and there is always a ham and some sort of local or housemade sausage – a medley of meats and cheeses never looked so good.

This winter don't miss the melt-in-your-mouth roasted cauliflower side or the beets of Harmony Ridge salad on a thin layer of smoked housemade

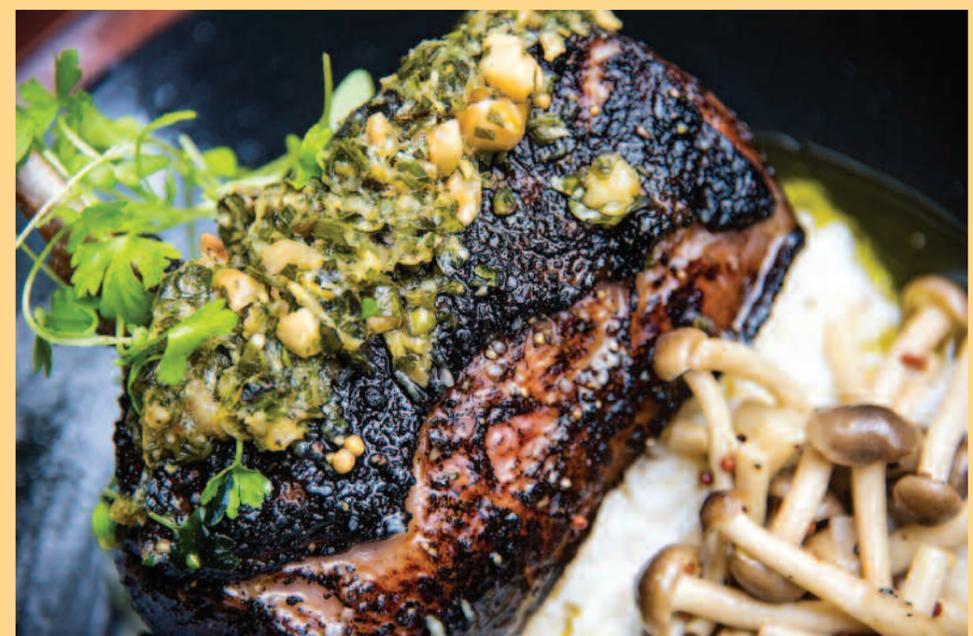
crème fraiche with pickled mustard seeds and pistachios. The lamb, a black onion marinated lamb marinated and then pan roasted served over Anson Mills gold rice grits and petit beech mushrooms, is finished with a hazelnut gremolata, oh my!

The crab cakes at Mimosa are delicious, and the trout is always a great choice, no matter the seasonal preparation.

Weekends and special occasion holidays bring out the biggest brunch display you've ever seen – reservations for the special occasion brunches are a must. No doubt, the restaurant is large with a separate bar area, patio dining and essentially two public dining areas inside and one private dining room. It would be easy for food and service to go by formula; on the contrary the food is well thought out and beautifully presented, and the experience you'll have is quite personable. It's what a chef-driven operation is all about.

Do treat yourself to brunch, lunch or dinner soon. Parking is easy in the building's deck or there is valet parking as well. Reservations are always a good idea, but don't be afraid to drop by on a whim. Marlow and other Mimosa chefs also teach cooking classes on a regular basis – check out the website for details.

Special events at Mimosa Grill coming in 2017 include **Spring Feast: A Low Country Seafood Offering** on Saturday, April 29; **The Waning Days of Summer Food & Wine Event** on Saturday, August 26; the **4th Annual No Kid Hungry Dinner** on September 2017; and the **9th Annual Bourbon Dinner** on Saturday, October 21. For more information on these delicious events or Mimosa Grill visit harpersgroup.com/mimosa.asp. ■



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