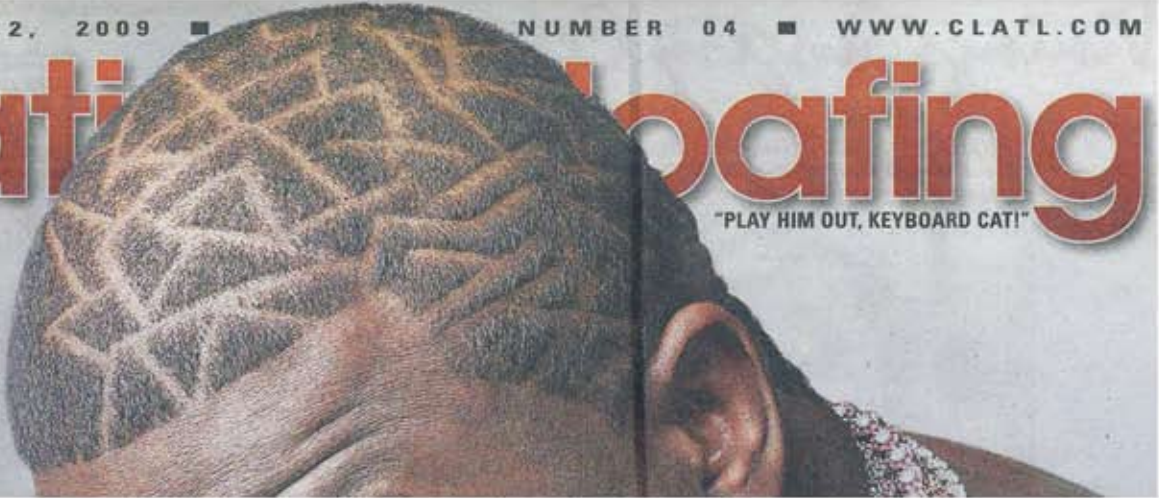


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First Look: 5 Seasons Westside and WaterHaven

The loud and the beautiful

GRAZING

By Cliff Bostock

It's hard to believe that restaurants are still opening in Atlanta. The withering economy has devastated many, especially fine-dining spots, but newcomers keep popping up.

Two such restaurants are **WaterHaven** (75 Fifth St., 404-214-6740, www.waterhavenatl.com) in Technology Square and **5 Seasons Brewing Westside** (1000 Marietta St., 404-875-3232, www.5seasonsbrewing.com). Both feature menus of "contemporary American" cuisine at fairly moderate prices. Both make noises about organic food and sustainability. And both were open less than two weeks when I visited.

I'll save the best for the last. That means I'll start with 5 Seasons, which is the spawn of a popular restaurant and brewery of the same name in Sandy Springs. Owner Dennis Lange and chef/owner David Larkworthy, with the help of brewmaster Crawford Moran, also opened a location in Alpharetta two years ago.

I've always enjoyed dining at the Sandy Springs location. The food has always been smart and, although I don't drink, I've watched plenty of people testify to the magical powers of the house-brewed beers.

But this new location, despite being packed last Friday night, is going to have to make some significant improvements to keep drawing crowds. My first problem with the place was the overwhelming cacophony. I don't know that I've ever been in a restaurant as noisy.

It was so noisy that we literally could not hear our server and he could not hear us unless he squatted between us or bent over. It was so noisy that I screamed obscenities — I'm not kidding — and nobody around us blinked. Unless, like me, you can't handle the stairs, I suggest you dine on the upper level, which includes a terrace and, hopefully, less of a din.

But the noise isn't the only thing that's problematic. The food itself — and I've been back for lunch — was surprisingly mediocre. Further, even when it was good, portions seemed small and overpriced. For example, at dinner Wayne ordered the Kampachi ceviche starter. It was served over half an orange — not a hollowed orange — and was gone in five tasty but quick bites. That'll be \$12.

Similarly, a serving of Georgia Organic Kurobuta pork loin, served with barbecue sauce and a smoked turnip and greens salad, had fairly good flavor that passed quickly into memory. A decent portion at \$15 would be fair. This was not a decent portion.

The same thing rules at lunch. An oyster and shrimp po'boy set me back \$16. The seafood was

nicely fried and the bun was house-made. It was also considerably smaller than the bun for the much better shrimp po'boy not far away at Star Provisions. The sandwich was mainly lettuce and tomato, served on a plate weirdly streaked with honey-Dijon. I have no idea how you are supposed to make use of that.

My dinner entree, a special of two soft-shell crabs, was strangely tasteless. The crabs were fried in a crispy, tempura-style coating, and served over a slaw with lots of orange flavor. That brings up another complaint: excessive use of orange. It seemed to be everywhere — even in my favorite dish of the evening, a starter of fresh spring peas and bacon topped with two "chili-dusted" sea scallops. This time the orange appeared in the form of blood-orange vinaigrette.



PRETTY IN GREEN: The dining room at WaterHaven

Orange was also married to chocolate in a dessert custard with whipped cream, mint and raspberries. I don't generally like fruit flavors mixed with chocolate, so I'm prejudiced.

What did I like besides the peas and scallops? My friend Michael lunched with me and ordered "grilled ravioli," a New Orleans-style concoction of circles of crispy pasta layered with crawfish, andouille sausage, red pepper, onions, asparagus and parmesan cream. Sounds weird but definitely worked.

The worst dish? A Coca-Cola-rum pecan tart with cherry whipped cream and cinnamon.

Honestly, this should have been thrown out. The crust tasted stale, and the filling had only one half of a pecan lodged in a sticky mire of generic sweetness. Loved the wilted mint leaf, though.

Service, I'm sorry to say, was frantic at dinner but quite attentive at lunch (when the restaurant was nearly empty).

This is a first look. I have no doubt that Larkworthy can bring things up to speed ... eventually.

MEANWHILE, IN TECHNOLOGY SQUARE

WaterHaven had been open only one day when we visited last Saturday night. It has taken the spot formerly occupied by the Globe, one of my favorites for lunch, and I have to admit that I find the fresh olive paint an improvement over the formerly stark white walls.

Weirdly, we spent exactly the same amount of money here as we did at 5 Seasons but had a much better meal, with Billie Holiday crooning in the background instead of jets circling inside our skulls.

Joe McCarthy, formerly of the Capital Grille, opened the restaurant with Chris Lee as executive chef. While his menu is mainly a list of tried-and-true favorites, his execution features plenty of surprises.

For example, shrimp and grits came to the table as polenta-like triangles of grits tinged with saffron, accompanying grilled shrimp surrounded by two streams of color — a green chimichurri sauce and a red three-pepper one. The shrimp themselves had a startling flavor that echoed an Indian influence. Indeed, the flavor turned out to be fenugreek. Fennel was also used in the dish.

Fried green tomatoes, which have resurfaced everywhere, are here topped with poblano goat cheese and a pumpkin-seed pesto. They were otherwise the usual crispy, slightly sour delicacies to which a new generation of Southerners have become addicted.

My entree, braised oxtails, was the menu's most unusual dish. As I mentioned to the chef on his round of tables, oxtails could become the new short ribs. These were really succulent, falling off the bone in their own jus, served with super-fluffy herb dumplings, bittersweet turnips,

carrots, asparagus and fava beans. Don't miss the dish. The chef told me I was the first customer to order it.

Wayne ordered Alaskan halibut over white beans with roasted red peppers and capers. There wasn't a single glitch in the dish and the interesting combination of capers with white beans was new to me.

We ordered two desserts — a strawberry shortcake and chocolate icebox pie. Go for the pie.

What didn't I like? The name. It sounds like a cemetery.

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