

# Go Guide

DINING / WOODFIRE GRILL, 1782 Cheshire Bridge Road, Atlanta, 404-347-9055 ★★★

## Seasons and chefs change, but Woodfire still smokin'

By **MERIDITH FORD  
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Among the weird offerings one can find along Cheshire Bridge Road is one of the city's few true-blue havens for seasonal, local cooking. Woodfire Grill rises like a phoenix from its surroundings, a testament to chef Michael Tuohy, who left last year for a post at the Grange in California.

Tuohy placed the slow food movement front and center at his restaurant and was among the first in Georgia to promote farm-to-table dining, which he stuck by for six years before selling the business last year to Nicolas Quinones and Bernard Moussa.

The two young restaurateurs were wise enough to keep chef de cuisine Kevin Gillespie, a Georgia native who had cooked on and off with Tuohy since 2005. A mere 26, he was a James Beard Award semifinalist this year for the rising star chef of the year, an honor that goes to those under the age of 30.

Gillespie possesses an innate sense of what tastes good together and follows Tuohy's farm-to-table mantra to the letter. He's also extremely smart and well-spoken, telling me by phone last week of his former mentor: "Michael had an extremely formative role in how this city views food."

True. But where Tuohy's greatest asset became his stature as a spokesman

for a movement dear to him, Gillespie's talents are closer to the kitchen. He is, technically, a better chef than Tuohy.

Proof lies in delicately seared Sonoma Valley foie gras, perfectly silky, mated with dried cherry puree that could make shoe leather taste good. Gillespie's touch is graceful (his eye and palate), offering smaller portions presented artfully with wisps of crushed, candied almond delicately strewn in an angle across the plate. This is not coy, cute cooking; Gillespie's efforts are sophisticated, intricately derived and planned, and seasonally motivated.

He delivers wood-grilled duck breast (it's roasted on a spit) in its best, yet rarest,



BECKY STEIN / Special

Roasted California artichokes are served with local arugula, salsa verde and sauce béarnaise at Woodfire Grill.

form: medium rare, delightfully lacking the fattiness and tough texture with which it's so often associated. Prettily dashed across

thin slices of the bird is a carrot-ginger relish. Roasted artichokes — the

► Please see **GRILL, D4**

### MORE DINING, D3-4

**5 Seasons Brewing,**  
Sandy Springs

**Craftbar,** Atlanta

**Holeman & Finch  
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**Leon's Full Service,**  
Decatur

**Marietta Fish Market,**  
Marietta

**Maxwell's on 54,**  
Peachtree City

**Porter Beer Bar,** Atlanta

**R'Jabs Wings,** Mableton

**Sushi City,** John's Creek

**Sweet Auburn Bistro,**  
Atlanta

# Grill: Seasonal farm-to-table fare



BECKY STEIN / Special

Wood-grilled Sonoma artisan duck breast is served with cardamom-spiced cabbage and carrot-ginger relish.

## ► Continued from D1

first sign of spring — are served over local arugula with an herby salsa verde to go with creamy béarnaise.

Inspired by super chef Thomas Keller, a “liquid gingerbread cookie” is the spicy base note of a sauce to accompany pork tenderloin over rutabaga with roasted sunchokes. Gillespie makes a ginger-laced cookie that he crushes in a food processor, then adds liquid. A cleverly bundled, tiny cabbage “dumpling” filled with chicken is a delicious accompaniment.

On one visit I stumbled on a tasting of a few of the wines of northeastern Italy presented by Quinones, who is affably wine-wise, but not to the point of stuffiness. Instead, the tasting was very relaxed and casual — and an insane bargain at \$15 per person (tasting eight wines, including a wonderfully bold Amarone della Valpolicella from Zenato).

Pastry chef Brittany Emerson, a Culinary Institute of America graduate, was experimenting with a new tartlet, which was brought in place of her wonderfully tangy lemon meringue. Instead, a creamy, cheesy mascarpone filling with an exceptionally buttery crust was served with pistachio ice cream.

The meat and cheese selection and cafe in the front of the restaurant are thankfully gone, and Quinones and Moussa have opened a long-shuttered back deck, strewn with tiny lights, for outdoor dining. But the smell of the wood fire still wafts through the night air, from the parking lot through the dining room.

I miss Tuohy — he was one of our city’s greatest culinary assets. But I’m glad to know that his kitchen — and restaurant — are minded by people who care as much as he did about cuisine.

## WOODFIRE GRILL

Overall rating: ★★★

**Food:** Seasonal, contemporary American

**Service:** Very good, though sometimes a little slow between courses

**Price range:** \$\$-\$\$\$

**Credit cards:** Visa, MasterCard, American Express, Discover, Diners Club

**Hours of operation:** 5:30-10 p.m. Tuesdays-Thursdays, 5:30-11 p.m. Fridays-Saturdays

**Best dishes:** The menu is currently changing to reflect spring offerings. On my visits, I enjoyed crisp fried hen-of-the-woods mushrooms, cream of celery soup, foie gras, wood-grilled duck breast and a three-course chef’s tasting.

**Vegetarian selections:** Grilled kale, roasted sunchokes, Anson Mills polenta with mascarpone

**Children:** Yes

**Parking:** Complimentary valet

**Reservations:** Yes

**Wheelchair access:** Yes

**Smoking:** No

**Noise level:** Low

**Patio:** Yes

**Takeout:** Yes, from the bar menu

**Address, telephone:** 1782 Cheshire Bridge Road, Atlanta. 404-347-9055

**Web site:** [www.woodfiregrill.com](http://www.woodfiregrill.com)

**Pricing code:** \$\$\$\$\$ means more than \$75; \$\$\$\$ means \$75 and less; \$\$\$ means \$50 and less; \$\$ means \$25 and less; \$ means \$15 and less. The price code represents a typical full-course meal for one excluding drinks.

### KEY TO AJC RATINGS

- ★★★★★ **Outstanding:** Sets the standard for fine dining in the region.
  - ★★★★ **Excellent:** One of the best in the Atlanta area.
  - ★★★ **Very good:** Merits a drive if you’re looking for this kind of dining.
  - ★★ **Good:** A worthy addition to its neighborhood, but food may be hit and miss.
  - ★ **Fair:** Food is more miss than hit.
- Restaurants that do not meet these criteria may be rated Poor.

