



Lâche Pas

*Sustaining and spreading
the tradition of Cajun boucherie*

By Melanie Warner Spencer & Photography by Denny Culbert

ALIGHT MORNING FOG LIFTS OFF THE FIELDS IN THE distance, as a resident black barn cat ambles into the gravel driveway. About 15 yards away from the white wooden farmhouse, four tents are planted in a row near the fence. The sun begins to rise, as four indistinguishable figures emerge from the tents, their silhouettes receding into the dim light of daybreak. The men step into dewy grass to shake off sleep and get to the day's business. Nearby the peaceful rustling and snorting sounds of a 258-pound hog drift out of a small black stock trailer. A version of this scene has become commonplace for the men of *Lâche Pas Boucherie et Cuisine* – those guys filing out of the tents—who now are quite well-known throughout Acadiana and beyond, because they have made it their mission to carry on the tradition of and educate people about the practice of Cajun boucherie.

On this day, the boucherie is in St. Bernard Parish, about two and a half hours from Lafayette, at Docville Farms (a culture and learning center project of the nonprofit Meraux Foundation). Attendees range from culinary students and chefs to members of Slow Food New Orleans and their children, with proceeds from the event benefiting both the upcoming Slow Fish 2016 and a memorial fund for victims of the shooting in Lafayette and their families.

At dawn, before the arrival of curious attendees, *Lâche Pas'* Brian Kyzar burns sage and performs a private Native American pipe ceremony and Sun Dance with prayer songs. Kyzar says he began the practice at age 14 and it seemed fitting to incorporate the ceremonies into the boucherie. Soon, artist, carpenter and *Lâche Pas'* resident butcher and chef Toby Rodriguez – whom many are familiar with from his appearances on the popular “Cajun Country” episode of the Travel Channel’s “Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations,” and Bravo’s “Top Chef” – begins the ritualistic process of laying out on a wooden picnic table and artfully arranging the tools of his trade, including an immense collection of all manner of knives (some antique; some made by Rodriguez; and some gifted or heirlooms from his father and grandfather), mallets, saws, antique ivory handled strait razors (also a gift) and a hatchet. For 30 minutes, the long and lean Rodriguez, clad in a plaid pearl snap shirt and Levis with a red handkerchief dangling out of his back pocket and brown work boots sharpens the blades that need it and loads his Ruger .22 caliber, single six-shot revolver.

“I pray for an easy passage,” says Kyzar, as Rodriguez makes his way to the stock trailer. “That the pig accepts it and dies very easily. There’s always a prayer; I just take it up a notch or two.”

Rodriguez enters the trailer. His voice mingles softly with the snorting and vocalizing of the pig. Outside, Kyzar lights a bundle of sage.

“We really like to push [the ceremonial] side of things, to let people know how special it is,” Kyzar says. “It’s life and death.”

Rodriguez exits the trailer as attendees quietly gather around it. Chris George of George Family Farms in Montgomery, Alabama, who raised the pig, offers a blessing. Rodriguez opens the trailer door ever so slightly and makes shushing noises as the hog approaches the door to have a bite of food from a pan. There is a faint black “X” on the animal’s forehead. A shot rings out and the pig falls sideways into the trailer.

The *Lâche Pas* team quickly pulls the animal toward the door. Rodriguez draws a knife across her throat, beginning the process of draining the blood into a pan for use later in making the boudin. The sound of Barrett Dupuis scraping a metal whisk on the sides of a stainless steel bowl to combine salt into the blood and keep it from coagulating mixes with the stifled sobs of a few of those in the circle around the trailer. Kyzar and Chris McIntyre stroke and comfort the animal until the end.

“There she goes,” says Kyzar.

Swiftly, the pig is transferred from the trailer to a wooden platform with handles. The men carry the platform and its cargo to an area closer to the house and hoist it onto a pair of sawhorses. Kyzar hands Rodriguez a bottle of Buffalo Trace Kentucky Bourbon, and he takes a swig. He then passes the bottle to each member of *Lâche Pas*, and they each have a pull. The animal is covered with burlap next, and Rodriguez douses the temporary wrapping with boiling hot water.

“When you are there at a boucherie, or any time an animal is killed, they put it on the table and there is a pathos,” says Kevin McCaffrey, Louisiana Folklife Program Commissioner and the documentary film producer behind “No One Ever Went Hungry: Acadian Food Traditions Then & Now.”

“At some point, an animal turns to food.”

McCaffrey says the experience of the boucherie historically is about survival, community and sustainability.

The 268-pound hog was raised at George Family Farms in Montgomery, Alabama. Rodriguez of Lâche Pas Boucherie et Cuisine and his team work to keep the animal comfortable and calm throughout the morning. A blessing is conducted prior to the slaughter, to show gratitude and honor to the animal and to mark the solemnity of the occasion.





“The family raised it and the animal gave its life,” McCaffrey says. “But, it’s what you do with preparations, especially in the Cajun sense – you try to use it all. The boucherie itself was a kind of sustainability.”

In the early 1900s, the use of the French language was banned in schools, setting off a chain reaction that would send Cajun culture into decline.

“Where they found that Cajun-French culture was in the music and food,” McCaffrey says. “You had guys like [musicians] Marc Savoy and Michael Doucet who carried on a tradition of boucherie.”

As Rodriguez and the culinary students begin shaving the pig to remove the hair, the faint sound of music is in the air. Roddie Romero of Roddie Romero and the Hub City All-Stars and a couple members of the band are providing the day’s musical entertainment. They are warming up in the covered picnic area. It’s announced that cowboy coffee and homemade blueberry cornbread are available on the patio, the bar is opening soon, and as Romero and his bandmate quietly play a few songs on the accordion and guitar, the earlier solemnity gives way to festivity.

Suddenly, a Ford F-150 rolls up, and an imposing man sporting a moustache and overalls yells out the window in Cajun-French. Several attendees respond in kind. The newcomer is Tom Crosby, and he’s here to make the cracklins or grattons.

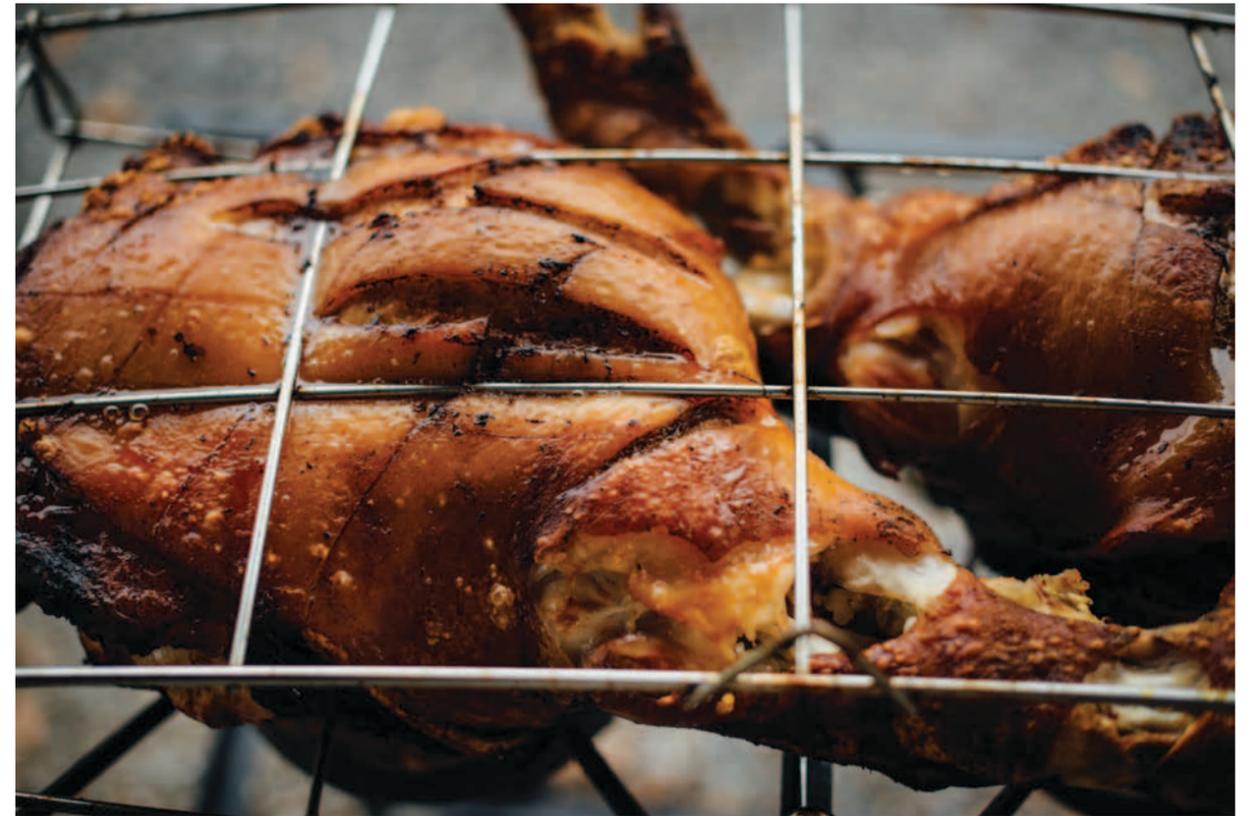
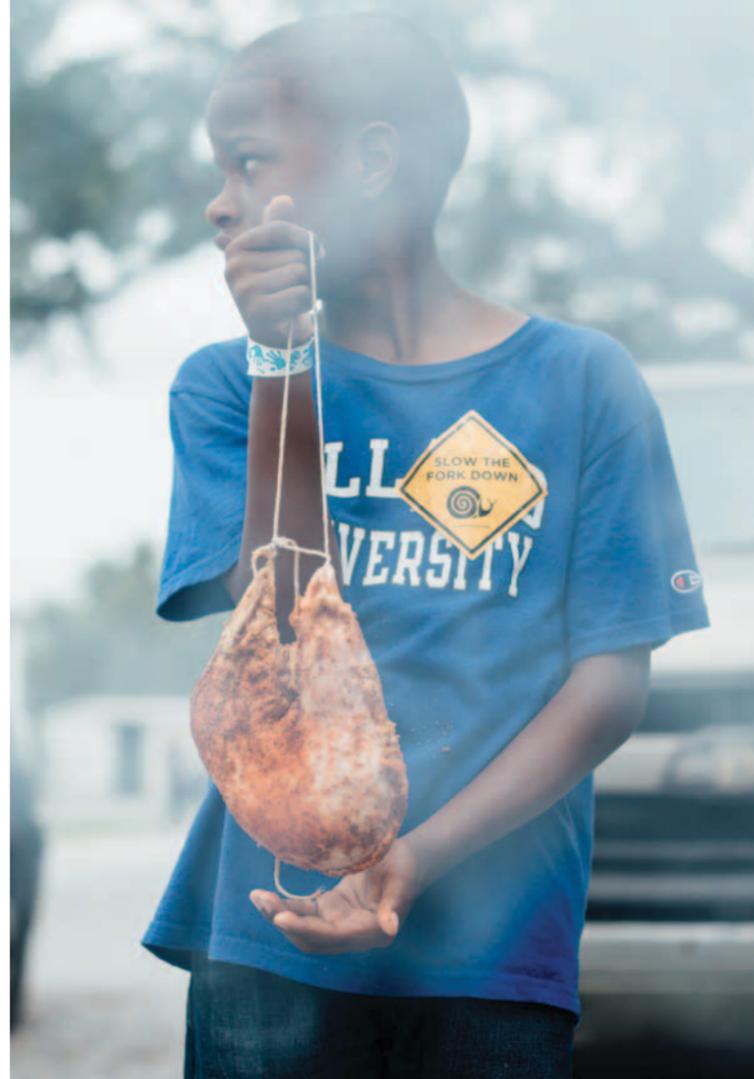
Toby Rodriguez of Lâche Pas Boucherie et Cuisine walks toward the butchering station as members of his team and attendees move the pig. Culinary students then assist at shaving the pig and finally Rodriguez runs a blowtorch over the skin to make sure there are no stray hairs. A chef cuts organ meat for the fraiseurs. The Vaucresson’s Sausage Company team mans the sausage station.

Crosby jumps out of the truck, walks over to the table and slaps the pig saying, “Me and you gonna be good friends for the next four hours!”

Once the students, Kyzar and Rodriguez finish shaving the pig, Rodriguez makes a final pass at it with a blowtorch to ensure that it is clean and free of fuzz.

“There’s nothing worse than hairy cracklins,” jokes Chris Haines, a member of the board of directors for the Meraux Foundation.

The pig is turned onto its back. Rodriguez, ever the showman, says that as an artist he’s aware of subtle nuances that open people’s minds and allow them to absorb what’s in front of them, resulting in a strong sense of presence. He leaps onto the table with one foot on each side of the animal. A long white apron is tied around his waist and hovers above the smooth belly of the pig.



A hatchet hangs from one side of his belt in a leather holder and an orthopedic mallet and other tools swing from the other side. He begins to explain the butchering process.

"Usually this would be done by hanging the pig nose-down," Rodriguez tells the group. "This is the way I grew up doing it."

The goal, Rodriguez explains, is to keep all of the parts clean, since they want to use as much of the animal as possible. He makes the first cut from the chin down through the neck then splits the sternum with the mallet and hatchet as a person holds each leg.

Quickly, Rodriguez begins butchering the hog. With a sculptor's precision, he carves and shapes the sum down to its preferred parts. He is assisted by Ryan Hughes, chef and owner of Purloo, located in the Southern Food and Beverage Museum in New Orleans. Hughes, who often takes road trips throughout the South and Cajun country to farms, restaurants and

other culinary events and destinations, is dedicated to learning about the region's culinary traditions and educating culinary students and the public at large about the culture and history behind the cuisine.

The band is in full swing and the bar is slinging beer from 40 Arpent Brewing Co., located in nearby Arabi. Cornbread and red beans and rice are offered up on the patio to pacify growling bellies while the butchering is completed, the cracklins sizzle in a big black cauldron under Crosby's watchful eye and the meat is prepared for cooking.

Vance Vaucresson of Vaucresson's Sausage Company starts getting sausage ready for the barrel smoker and the other stations are prepped by their respective captains for the grilled meats, hams cooked in the "Cajun microwave," (a large charcoal-heated Dutch oven) and fraiseurs or organ meat stew.

Chris McIntyre, who assisted earlier with the slaughtering of the pig and some of the butchering, is now sipping a beer near the fraiseurs station.

"Typically I do the fraiseurs," McIntyre says, explaining that he relinquished his captain status to a local chef for the day.

He didn't experience boucheries growing up. After architecture school in Lafayette, McIntyre worked with Rodriguez on building projects and was introduced to it.

"Every night someone was cooking," McIntyre says. "That's how [Lâche Pas Boucherie et Cuisine] sort of started."

Over the past two years, the Lâche Pas group has done more than 40 events all over the United States in keeping with their mission to educate people and keep the boucherie custom alive.

Each station is tasked with preparing a different part of the animal. From smoking sausage in a barrel smoker, to grilling and manning the "Cajun Microwave," or large Dutch oven, the goal is to use every part of the animal that's possible. In the pre-refrigeration days, the meats would be prepared for storage and used in the coming months. The tradition of Cajun boucherie is handed down generation to generation through a mentoring program, says Louisiana Folklife Commissioner, Kevin McCaffrey. Rodriguez says he has taken part in boucheries his entire life and has done it professionally for about seven years.



Traditionally the many fruits of the day's labors would of course be set aside for the coming months, since in pre-refrigeration days when the tradition started the purpose was to preserve meat for winter. These days however it has become more of a celebration of culture and community – and in this case education – so by days end all of the meat is heartily consumed by ravenous attendees.

Not long after the lines die down and everyone has their crack at pork chops and loin, sausage and stews – and Crosby's creamy, crispy cracklins – Rodriguez bellies up to the bar for a well-earned break and a cold beer.

Slaughtering and butchering a pig is of course physical work, but also emotional, spiritual and creative. McCaffrey says the performance element is cultural, traditional and ritualistic. The artist and adept performer in Rodriguez are on full display during the boucherie and for several reasons, including those McCaffrey cites.

"There is an element of theater," Rodriguez says. "If you can get people to connect emotionally, they'll be more affected by it. There is an emotional detachment to where people's food comes from. When people are close to the source, you think twice about throwing away a half plate of food. The boucherie becomes a vehicle for someone to feel emotional toward their food source, which starts out as a living creature."

Rodriguez writes poetic prose on the Lâche Pas Boucherie et Cuisine website and blog about his other inspirations for keeping

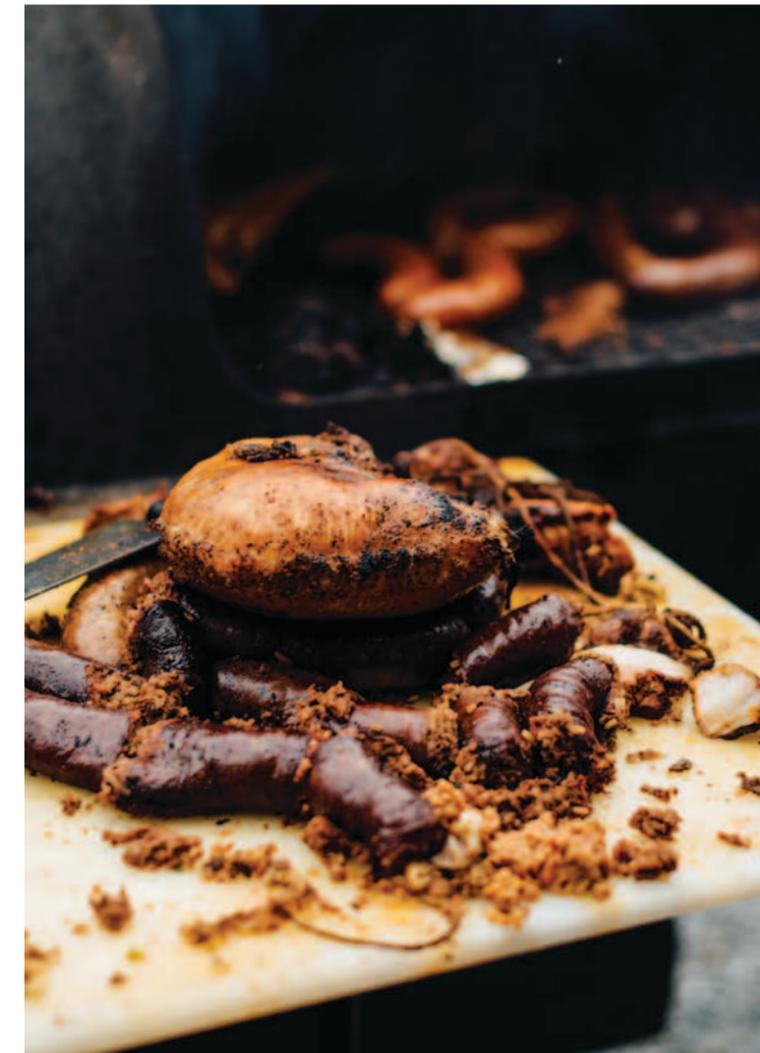
Community, sustainability, spirituality and ritual are all integral elements of the Cajun boucherie. It's important to honor the animal for its sacrifice and sustain the bounty by limiting waste. For the Slow Food New Orleans boucherie, the waste amounted to less than a third of a five-pound bucket. It would have been less had someone agreed to make chitlins with the intestines, a challenging and messy endeavor. (L to R) Barrett Dupuis, Chris McIntyre, Toby Rodriguez and Bryan Kyzar of Lâche Pas Boucherie et Cuisine have done approximately 40 boucherie events across the United States over the past two years. They hope to educate people about the tradition and keep it alive in Acadiana.

the tradition alive. He writes that it's about family, friends and community, but most importantly about preserving the culture and sharing the heritage with his daughter. Getting people to connect with their food source however, is a large part of the public message.

"It's absolutely essential these days," Rodriguez says. "We have no guilt or remorse. It's just a patty or a sausage. It's not a cow or a pig."

Echoes of these strongly held sentiments are driven home again and again by the Lâche Pas team.

"It's a spiritual thing," McIntyre says. "It's very emotional and special. You're taking the animal and turning it into food. There's no waste. It's the most honorable way an animal can go out. That's what it's about. And community. •"





6 SPORTING SPOTS for football fever

GET YOUR GAME DAY VIBES ON AT THESE ENERGETIC,
TRIBAL ENCLAVES THROUGHOUT ACADIANA

BY LISA LEBLANC-BERRY // PHOTOS BY DENNY CULBERT



Pondering a new place for the coin toss? We've got you covered with a list of six diverse venues to accommodate your personal viewing style. Our suggestions range from lively sports bars filled with cheering fans to the laid-back little neighborhood "Who's ya daddy?" joints with bayou food and sporting Cajun camaraderie. Chances are, you'll have more fun feeling the spirit of a high-octane football showdown at places where regulars welcome you into their inner realm like old friends – unless you're wearing the other team's colors.



Walk-On's Bistreaux & Bar

1795 Martin Luther King Blvd.
Houma // 985/262/8501

Since the New Orleans Saints handed the Atlanta Falcons their first defeat of the season in October (31-21) and theirs is the oldest rivalry in the NFC South division, you may want to see the Jan. 3 game, when the Saints challenge the Falcons in Atlanta (for the close of the regular season) at an upscale sports bar filled with Who Dat fans and flat screens aplenty. The snazzy new Walk-On's Bistreaux & Bar in Houma, which is co-owned by Saints quarterback Drew Brees, is a prime spot for viewing the face-off. It will also no doubt be hopping for Super Bowl 50.

Drew and his wife, Brittany, announced they were buying into Walk-On's Enterprises as co-owners last May. The company caught their attention when the New Orleans Walk-On's was voted ESPN's "Best Sports Bar in North America." Locations to date are in Baton Rouge, New Orleans, Lafayette, Houma and Shreveport, while Lake Charles is underway.

Brees foresees a national franchise. Saints fans may recall when "Hurricane Drew" reigned as the King of Bacchus XLII in 2010, just a week after he led the Saints to victory in Super Bowl XLIV, and was named MVP. Although the Saints won't be marching into the upcoming Super Bowl 50, it will be held Sunday, Feb. 7, and coincides with Bacchus, which rolls at 5:15 p.m. Since the kick-off will be at around 3:30 p.m., Super Bowl fans and parade revelers may catch the last half on a mobile device (for the first time, NBC will be live streaming the Super Bowl halftime show, which will feature Katy Perry and special guest Lenny Kravitz).

EAT THIS DEVILS ON HORSEBACK: Jumbo Gulf shrimp stuffed with cream cheese and pickled jalapeno, wrapped in bacon and lightly fried **DRINK THIS DEATH VALLEY:** Served in a whopping 32-oz. glass with Svedka vodka, Bayou Silver rum, Triple Sec, DeKuyper Raamatazz, orange juice and pineapple juice

Brees recalls visiting Houma the summer after winning the Super Bowl, and commented "how great the fans are." The sprawling Houma Walk-Ons, which has an 8,000-square-foot restaurant and a large enclosed patio and beer garden, opened Sept. 8 with no less than 70 TVs, 48 beers on tap and an extensive menu. "It was voted the 'Best Sports Bar in Terrebonne Parish' less than a month after it opened," general manager Brett LeBlanc pointed out.

"We're not just passive investors," Drew stated. "Brittany and I are committed to working closely with Brandon and the team to do whatever we can to contribute to Walk-On's success going forward." Brandon Landry and Jack Warner, the founders, were former LSU basketball teammates. Best bets among the starters: The seared Ahi Tuna medallions served over Asian mango slaw, spicy boudin balls with a side of Dijon horseradish, and the duck and andouille gumbo. There are specialty cocktails galore, plus burgers, poor boys, great salads, wraps and Louisiana specialties, the best of which is the blackened catfish Atchafalaya, topped with spicy étouffée and a pile of crisply fried crawfish tails, a favorite of Brees and his family.



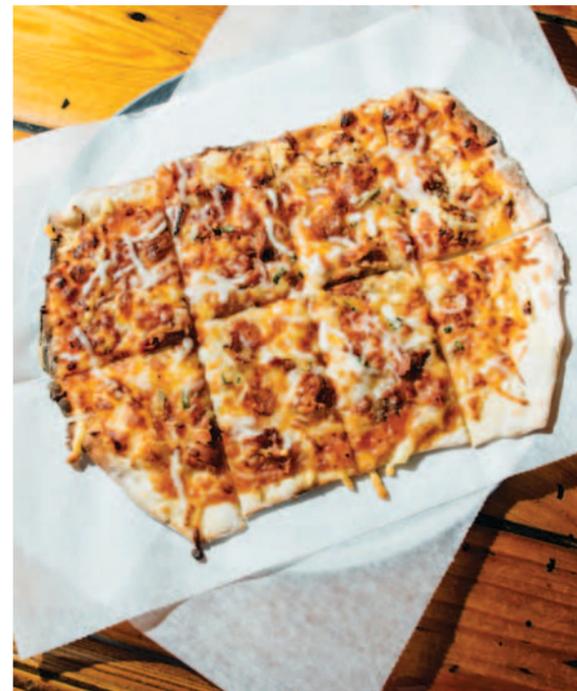
EAT THIS THE APPETIZER PLATTER: Includes drunken shrimp, praline chicken laced with local Steen's syrup, fiery wings, stuffed mushrooms and fresh catfish bites **DRINK THIS TIGER BAIT:** Curaçao, cranberry juice & vodka



Buck & Johnny's

100 Berard St. // Breaux Bridge
337/442/6630

Whether you're a newcomer or a longtime regular, chances are you will feel at home at Buck & Johnny's in downtown Breaux Bridge. Owner Coatney Raymond, who took over in 2013 after her husband Johnny passed away, recently expanded and renovated the lounge, which now seats 60, and is adorned with deep leather chairs. It opened during Mardi Gras, 2015 and is flanked by a small courtyard that opens through garage doors. Named the Filling Station Lounge, it's where fans gather for team spirit and handcrafted cocktails named after cars. "We stay open as late as the games are playing, and it's always packed," she says.



The property was originally a car dealership, so there's plenty of antique car memorabilia, including the recently installed gas pump in the lounge, plus quaint lighting and signage throughout the restaurant, with its cathedral-height ceilings and fetching loft. The special events hall next door, the Glass Room (popular for weddings and political events), is located beside a large antique mall that is just down the street from Café des Amis, known for its weekend zydeco breakfast.

Although the lounge is normally jamming during both college and NFL games, the restaurant side is where most fans gather for football viewing, while simultaneously enjoying the delectable Cajun cuisine prepared by Chef Tony Savoy. He was formerly the head chef of Mulate's in Breaux Bridge and New Orleans.

Buck & Johnny's previously focused on gourmet pizzas, and then added several Italian specials. Since Chef Savoy came on board, it has become the most popular restaurant in town, offering an expanded menu of authentic Cajun dishes and creative specials. Live music adds to the allure and so do the excellent martinis.

The pizzas are tops. For starters, order the crab portabella brie soup, made with a rich, creamy broth, or the award-winning zydeco gumbo. For the main course, try the blackened tilapia finished with a smooth shrimp basil cream, the zesty crawfish enchiladas with plenty of pepper jack, or the pan-fried crab cakes that melt in your mouth, enveloped in a fragrant pesto cream sauce. Be sure to grab a quart of gumbo from the freezer on the way out.



The Tap Room

202 Settlers Trace Blvd.
Lafayette // 337/984/9280

A popular gathering spot among the 20s and 30s crowd in Lafayette is The Tap Room in River Ranch, where you can play Monday fantasy football to your heart's delight and watch the games with fellow fans without going downtown. The large windows give it an open feel. You can play shuffleboard, watch the game, and order a large variety of beers in addition to hand-crafted cocktails. Food selections include flatbreads and gourmet hot dogs served with kettle chips, but there are oyster-on-the-half-shell specials when available.

General manager David Savoie creates drink specials tied to the seasons (he was formerly with Social Southern Table and Bar, known for their superb hand-crafted cocktails). He is rather proud of the Tap Room's extensive selection of beer, which includes international lagers and pilsners, American crafts and ciders, and international ambers, ales, porters and stouts, plus a design-your-own flight of 4 draught beers. Upscale yet casual ambience; it can get a tad loud evenings.

Among the array of cocktails, try the bold and spicy Buzzy Bayou made with Agave Loco Pepper Cured Reposado Tequila, Cathead Hoodoo Chicory Liqueur, jalapeno honey simple syrup and sour mix, garnished with a lemon wedge or the refreshing Ruston Grove designed with Ruston peach infused bourbon with Chinese 5 spice, orange peel, Bitter Truth Pimento Dram and El Guapo Polynesian Kiss bitters, peach amaretto simple syrup and an orange peel for garnish.

EAT THIS FRIGGIN' FIG-N-PIG: Flatbread made with fig preserves or the **LOVE YOU, LONG TIME HOT DOG:** Beef frank topped with spicy mayo, pickled carrots, jalapeños, cucumbers and fresh cilantro **DRINK THIS THE RUSTON GROVE:** Peach-infused bourbon and Chinese 5-spice



Black's Oyster Bar

319 Pere Megret St. // Abbeville
337/898/2597

In Vermilion Parish, if you want to catch a college game and enjoy some excellent seafood among major LSU fans, stop by the recently reopened Black's Oyster Bar across from the "big" church, just a half-block from picturesque Magdalen Square. Fighting Tiger die-hards continue to watch the college games with spirit, even though LSU's star running back Leonard Fournette's grip was loosened on the Heisman Trophy when he was overpowered by Alabama's Crimson Tide defense in November. There are always the playoffs.

Black's 44-foot bar, frequented by ultra-friendly locals, is flanked by a couple of large flat screens and several dining tables, which are taken once the adjacent, cavernous restaurant fills up on weekends and during Thursday karaoke nights. The new owners, Corey Gardener and Chance Thomas, have gone all-out with renovations and the food, so just about everything is tops on the menu, and the lunch specials are always generous and reasonably priced. Of course at Black's, you should start with their pride and joy, the plump, salty Grand Isle bivalves on the half shell that you can also order in three styles of chargrilled (they're a sure match for Drago's in New Orleans).

The Bloody Marys are legendary, good for any time of the day or night, and the bartenders are skilled at whipping up whatever cocktail you desire. Drink specials run throughout the week. Starters to nibble on during the games include the spicy etouffee balls, crispy fried frog legs, tender strips of fried rabbit laced with Hebert's Specialty Meats seasoning, and the shrimp en brochette. The earthy, dark chicken and sausage gumbo will warm you up on a cold winter's night. The oyster poor boys, seafood platters, salads topped with grilled shrimp and tuna, crawfish or fried oysters and juicy steaks topped with crabmeat are all sure bets.

EAT THIS RAW OYSTERS: Enjoy a dozen salty, plump oysters on the half-shell fresh from Grand Isle.
DRINK THIS THE MOSQUITO BITE: a refreshing mojito made with Bayou Silver Rum and fresh mint



Loggerhead's Bar

3748 Hwy. 3059 (Old Town Road)
Lake Charles // 337/491/6794

If you'd like to catch the NFL games off-the-beaten path overlooking the water, and sit beside a roaring fire, head to Loggerhead's Bar in Lake Charles on the Calcasieu River. This casual spot is a big Saints hangout, but they also tune into the college football games.

You can get there by car or by boat and pull up right to the dock, where the Lady of the Lake three-decker 102-foot yacht, rented for evening dinner cruises and private parties, is parked. It usually goes out once a month but is especially popular during the holidays. Live music on Sundays usually starts around 4 p.m. on the patio, and there are live local bands several times during the week, from Cajun French bands to jazz ensembles. Although it's not a full-service restaurant (you order at the concession stand and bring it inside), the staff occasionally has prepared specials such as chili,

gumbos or pig roasts for parties. Pizzas and above-average burgers are served, as well as boiled shrimp, pulled pork and chicken wings, served in baskets lined with fleurs-de-lis in honor of the Saints.

Inside the bar, there are a couple of fireplaces where you can warm up on a chilly winter night, while the outside deck offers splendid sunsets, gorgeous views and a patio with a tiki bar. Locals often drive up to the dock on their boats, and use the bait stand that sells fuel, ice, tackle and supplies. Some beautiful yachts pass by at night. This small, casual bar is popular among locals who prefer watching the game at a non-sports bar, with the added allure of a water view just about 15 minutes from downtown Lake Charles. Owner James Mistretta has mentioned that he may be planning an expansion of Loggerhead's bar to include an eventual restaurant and resort with cabins, so stay tuned.

EAT THIS BURGERS: Big and juicy with onion rings and fried seafood spiced just right. **DRINK THIS GATOR BITE COCKTAIL:** Refreshing yet powerful and containing three kinds of rum distilled in nearby Lacassine: Bayou Rum's Silver, Spiced and Satsuma rums are blended with orange and pineapple juices and Grenadine, served on the rocks

EAT THIS FAT BOY MILE-HIGH BURGER: A two patty burger with an option to pile on the toppings **DRINK THIS MARGARITAS:** powerful and will have you rooting for the home team in no time.



Fat Pat's Bar & Grill

626 Verot School Road // 337/504/4288
117 Westmark Blvd. // 337/706/8882
Lafayette

If you're a fan of the college football bowls (Dec. 19-Jan. 2) and plan on following the Jan. 11 College Football Playoff National Championship (which Dr. Pepper has paid a whopping \$35 million for sponsorships through 2020), you'll want to watch the games where the casual college fans geaux. Fat Pat's Bar & Grill on Verot School Road is the spot. Both college and NFL fans gather at this iconic sports bar for team camaraderie. You'll find plenty of flats screens, and also an individual TV in every single booth, which allows you to watch any game that's on. Younger fans tend to gather at the second, newest location on Westmark Blvd., where there are six TVs on the patio.

Specialties are the burgers (ask for the unusual but surprisingly good peanut-butter-and-bacon burger or the signature Mile High burger, which is layered with pepper jack cheese and a trio of grilled yellow, red and green peppers, then dressed) and the hot dogs (try the Dome dog, made with andouille, and topped with red beans and Creole mustard). If you're not in the mood for dogs and burgers, order the shrimp grilled in garlic butter, dressed and served on a sweet bun. Good bar food, but the main attraction is the atmosphere that includes sports memorabilia, fans and especially those booths with individual TVs.

THIS PAGE:
Chef Kevin
Thompson
of Favorites
Southern
Kitchen
presents
his seafood
cioppino.

Acadiana's diverse culinary scene grows by leaps and bounds every year. Lafayette alone has seen new restaurants opening monthly, but it's the variety that gives us foodies pause, from the traditional Cajun and Creole to a fusion of flavors and farm-to-table cuisine. There are even those eateries, such as The Duke in Houma, daring to not only cook outside the box but also batter and fry the box itself.

Here are a few new restaurants contributing to the vast culinary landscape of Acadiana.

BEST NEW

RESTAURANTS

SUGGESTED DINING: ASIA

▲ **STARTER:** The Rock-N-Shrimp serves up crispy fried shrimp accented by a spicy mayo sauce, so good you might want to enjoy it as an entrée. For sushi, try the Lake Charles roll that consists of crawfish, avocado and that delicious spicy mayo.

▲ **MAIN COURSE:** The crispy duck slices up roasted duck with scallions and steamed rice topped by Hoisin sauce. For something more on the wild side, try the Hunan shrimp served with baby corn, broccoli, carrots, mushrooms, snap peas water chestnuts and a spicy sauce.

▲ **DESSERT:** Asia doesn't serve desserts, but the aptly named Desserts store is only a few feet away, serving up a wide variety of gelato, chocolates and pastries, all house-made.



Abita beer and the spinach and frisée salad topped with a poached egg that's breaded in Panko crumbs and flash-fried so it's crispy on the outside and gooey on the inside.

"It allows us to be more cutting edge," Thompson says of the 24-hour restaurant, which now follows a bistro style. "We run the gamut with what we offer but we still offer the comfort foods you enjoy."

Asia opened with the resort in 2005 as a small restaurant serving up Asian-fashion specialties. Because of its popularity, the resort soon expanded the restaurant to increase seating.

"We had already expanded once, and it still wasn't big enough," says Stephanie Miller-Vincent, director of L'Auberge food and beverage.

Its latest expansion increased seating to 122, plus a private dining room and sushi bar, Miller-Vincent says. The recent renovation, which opened in December, also allowed the resort to increase the kitchen capacity to allow Chef Vilavong Prasith to enhance the Asia menu.

Favorites Southern Kitchen // Asia // L'Auberge Casino Resort // Lake Charles // lakecharles.com

SUGGESTED DINING: FAVORITES SOUTHERN KITCHEN

▲ **STARTER:** New on the menu are seafood beignets, a portion of five beignets comprised of shrimp, crawfish and crabmeat topped with a chipotle aioli. "It gives us a chance to showcase what Louisiana has to offer with its seafood," Chef Kevin Thompson says.

▲ **MAIN COURSE:** The Louisiana-style seafood cioppino combines lobster, shrimp, grouper, redfish, mussels, clams and crabmeat in a saffron-tomato seafood broth. The dish is accompanied by steamed red potatoes and crusty bread for dipping into this goodness.

▲ **DESSERT:** Choose between the key lime cheesecake topped with either a mango purée or a raspberry purée or the bananas Foster sundae: bananas cooked in Myers rum and cinnamon until they are glazed, then served over homemade banana gelato and topped with fresh whipped cream.



THIS PAGE:
Asia's
Lobster
Roll

CLOCKWISE:
Favorites'
seafood cioppino
// Asia's crispy
duck // Favorites'
buttermilk
pancakes
Foster

FAVORITES SOUTHERN KITCHEN/ ASIA

THE DINING SCENE AT

L'Auberge Casino and Resort in Lake Charles continues to evolve.

In December, the café morphed into Favorites Southern Kitchen, while Asia expanded both its kitchen and floor space and added a sushi bar.

The casino café has long been known for its breakfast and several down-home dishes such as the crawfish grilled cheese sandwich, but now Favorites Southern Kitchen offers an expansive menu, updated décor and seating in the newly opened terrace overlooking the resort's lazy river.

"It was like a breakfast destination," Chef Kevin Thompson says of the original café. "Now we're pushing it as a destination for not only breakfast but for lunch and dinner as well. The ambiance is very different."

The breakfast everyone loved is still there, Thompson explains, though there are now quiches, casseroles and freshly made cinnamon rolls. The expanded dinner menu now includes wine service and dishes such as the short ribs braised in

THIS PAGE:
Chef/owner
Ryan Trahan
adds strawberry
snow to his
brûléed
cheesecake
dessert.



LEFT:
Chef Cory
Bourgeois
plates the
catch of the
day. **RIGHT:**
Dark
Roux's root
vegetable
salad.

DARK ROUX

RYAN TRAHAN HAS LONG advocated farm-to-table cuisine, promoting locally produced food products of Acadiana. He opened Lafayette's hip Brick & Spoon with Bryan Jewell but wanted to get back to his core ambitions of keeping everything Louisiana.

After selling his interest in Brick & Spoon, Trahan opened Dark Roux Dec. 29, 2014, in the same restaurant space on Kaliste Saloom Road in Lafayette. His menu features dishes by Trahan and Chef Cory Bourgeois that incorporate produce and meats from local growers such as Gotreaux Family Farms, Mary Mary Markets, Urban Naturalist, Inglewood Farms and Bread & Circus Provisions.

In fact, except for his organic corn grits that hail from California, everything on the menu begins in Louisiana. "Almost everything is purchased in Louisiana and about 75 percent comes from the Lafayette area," Trahan says. In addition, produce such as oregano, chives and collard greens is grown in the restaurant's gardens, in the surrounding parking lot and even throughout

the eatery. Items such as bacon, sausage and even the kombucha tea are all made in-house. The alcohol also has a local connection, Trahan says, including Louisiana-produced beer and wine from France, Spain and German, three countries with cultural ties to Louisiana. Trahan is a self-taught cook from Lafayette while Bourgeois cut his teeth in New Orleans.

Both are in their 20s and collaborating on a new, burgeoning food scene. "We are very similar culturally but have different food backgrounds," Trahan explains of the team.

3524 Kaliste Saloom Road, Suite 101 // Lafayette // 337/504-2346 // darkrouxla.com

SUGGESTED DINING

▲ **APPETIZER:** The root vegetable salad topped with an arugula pesto with locally produced goat cheese is a prime example of Dark Roux's commitment to serving only Louisiana-grown products.

▲ **ENTRÉE:** Dark Roux's catch of the day arrives fresh from Gulf waters and served with locally grown sides. For instance, the pan-seared red snapper with ham consume is served with charred bok choy and crispy shallots.

▲ **DESSERT:** A blood orange flavors a cream mixture that's frozen with liquid nitrogen to produce a powder that looks like snow. This "snow" then tops an ice cream-stuffed marshmallow that arrives on a stick to enjoy like in the good ol' days.

CLOCKWISE:
Funky dining
atmosphere
// co-owner
Renée Gary //
crispy catfish
appetizer



**SUGGESTED
DINING**

▲ **APPETIZER:** Very thinly sliced catfish that's lightly battered and fried make up the catfish fries appetizer that comes with a creamy artisan tartar sauce. The cream and perfectly seasoned corn and crab bisque is a favorite among customers.

▲ **ENTRÉE:** Fresh Louisiana bluepoint crabmeat makes up the crab croquettes that are panko-battered and fried and served on a toasted croissant with a house-made New Orleans-style tartar sauce.

▲ **DESSERT:** All desserts are made in-house but the pistachio cake is one hailing back to co-owner Renée Gary's roots, a cake flavored with crushed pistachios in both the cake and whipped cream-powdered sugar frosting that's finally topped with coconut.

FRICASSÉE CAFÉ & BAKERY

OPENING A RESTAURANT

seemed a natural fit for Acadiana natives Eddie and Renée Gary. "Eddie and I both love food and we love to cook, and we've entertained guests for years," Renée Gary says. "People always said, "You all should open a restaurant." Suggesting is one thing; doing is quite another. The

restaurant business is not for the faint of heart. But the Garys, who have run Nanny's Candy Company in Carencro for 26 years, envisioned the prospect as a retirement job, one with limited hours. They opened Fricassée Café & Bakery in Carencro last summer, in the house once belonging to Eddie's grandparents. The building

also contained the office for Nanny's Candy Co., but that operation has since moved next door (restaurant patrons will get a delicious whiff of pralines upon arriving). Fricassée serves Creole and Cajun lunches weekdays, offering fresh produce, meats and fish dishes. The kitchen is helmed by Chef Larry Nico Jr. of Lafayette. "Everything we do is fresh," Renée Gary says. "Nothing we do is frozen."

Popular items include the creamy corn and crab bisque, the stuffed shrimp appetizer, catfish fries with an artisan tartar sauce and the housemade chicken salad. Seafood platters and poor boys are offered as well as the old-fashioned Angus beef burgers. Café Fricassée has become so popular with the locals that the Garys now offer dinner hours Fridays and Saturdays, featuring boiled crawfish

during the season, crab cakes with a horseradish aioli and lots of fried seafood and beef options. "The place takes on a completely different ambiance at night," she says. "We really kick up the menu as well."

3823 N. University Ave. // Carencro // 337/886-6353 // facebook.com/fricassée



THIS PAGE:
Crab
croquettes
served on
a toasted
croissant with
housemade
tartar sauce

TOP: Rustic modern dining room of Urbano's.
BOTTOM: Argentino Taco with sliced steak.



THIS PAGE: The Homeboy Taco features Panko breaded shrimp, cabbage, raw radish, green onion, cilantro and sweet Thai chili sauce.

URBANO'S TAQUERIA

AS A CHILD GROWING up in Honduras, Ricardo Valerio was ambitious, selling fruit on the streets at age 12 and cooking steaks streetside at 14. Even though he later owned a bar and worked in the hotel industry in his native country, his father, a USL graduate, encouraged him to come to Lafayette to study.

Valerio graduated USL (now the University of Louisiana at Lafayette) in engineering but found it difficult to get a job since he wasn't a U.S. citizen. He reinvented himself once more and opened Urbano's Taqueria, a hip Latin American taco eatery.

"I've always wanted to bring something different to Lafayette," Valerio says.

Urbano's is a "world inside a tortilla," Valerio explained, incorporating the tastes of Latin America within its cuisine and not just Mexico. "We're urban; we're street food."

The menu remains simple: 28 tacos with names and corresponding flavors such as the Jamaican Surf with grilled shrimp pineapple, rotisserie corn, jerk sauce and lettuce and tomatoes; or El Cubano with honey ham, pulled

pork, sweet sauce, spinach, queso fresco and corn. For those who want to remain closer to home, culinarily speaking, there's the gringo taco with Angus beef or shredded chicken and lettuce, tomatoes and cheese.

Tamales are made with plantain leaves, Valerio's grandmother's recipe, and he recently introduced rice and salad bowls.

The restaurant has taken off so well, Valerio has purchased the two Bullrito's franchises in

town and plans to open the second Urbano's soon. He also runs a food truck and offers party planning.

Valerio chalks up his success to ambition, perseverance and sweat.

"Nothing is impossible," the 30-year-old

said. "I came here without a single penny and now I have all this. It's about hard work."

2023 W. Pinhook Road //Lafayette // 337/534-0529 // facebook.com/Urbanostaqueria



SUGGESTED DINING

▲ APPETIZER: Nothing starts a meal better at Urbano's than their homemade margaritas coupled with fresh guacamole or fried salted plantains. Natural or Mexican sodas are available for non-alcohol drinkers.

▲ ENTRÉE: You'll want to tango enjoying the Argentino Taco that combines sliced steak that's been marinated for 48 hours and coupled with queso fresco, spring mix and chimichurri inside a six-inch corn tortilla.

▲ DESSERT: Urbano's version of the tres leches cake - a sponge cake with three types of milk - is owner Ricardo Valerio's mother's recipe but topped with a shot of Kahlua. Because of that alcohol infusion, Valerio calls the dessert tres boracho, or "three drunks."

THE DUKE

THE LATEST ADDITION to the Houma culinary scene is an eclectic diner that doesn't shy away from innovation, though your cardiologist may have some concerns.

The Duke on Main Street in downtown Houma serves up hearty and innovative fare such as The Hangover Burger, which starts with an eight-ounce beef patty topped with a fried egg, grits, cheese and bacon and served with a helping of gravy fries.

"It's a heart attack on a plate," kitchen manager Rick Voisin says with a laugh. "It's pretty messy. You need a lot of napkins."

The buffalo fries are a top seller: fries loaded with cheddar cheese, chicken bites, blue cheese crumbles, bacon and two dressings, The Duke's homemade buffalo sauce and basil blue dressing.

"It's just stacked up in a giant plate," Voisin explains. "It could probably feed four people."

Other dishes include the "Meat-A-Butter Sandwich," an eight-ounce patty topped with peanut butter and bacon on toast and the pulled pork nachos that combine shredded pork, buffalo sauce, bacon, jalapenos, onions, tomatoes, cheddar cheese and avocado ranch dressing. For something truly unique, try the American sushi, a hot dog with blue cheese, onions and bacon inside a bun that's battered and fried and then cut up like sushi and topped with sauces.

Make sure to save room for dessert – again, don't tell your physician. Choose from the fried Oreos topped with ice cream or the fried cheesecake or bring in your own sweet dish, from candy bars to cakes, and The Duke will batter and fry them.

"We will fry anything for roughly two bucks," Voisin says.

7819 Main St., Houma
// (985) 262-0203 //
thedukerestaurant.com



SUGGESTED DINING

▲ **APPETIZER:** Big enough to feed several people are the buffalo fries which starts with French fries, then cheddar cheese, The Duke's homemade buffalo sauce, chicken bites, blue cheese crumbles, homemade basil blue dressing and bacon on top.

▲ **ENTREE:** Get out plenty of napkins for the Hangover Burger, eight ounces of beef on a biscuit with grits, a fried egg, cheese and bacon with gravy fries on the side.

▲ **DESSERT:** The Duke will fry anything you bring them for \$2, but for something fried on the menu we suggest the fried Oreo cookie with vanilla ice cream on top that's topped by a drizzle of chocolate syrup.



THIS PAGE:
Deep fried
Oreos
drizzled with
chocolate
syrup.

CLOCKWISE:
The
Hangover
Burger //
buffalo fries
// pop art
wall in dining
room

LE PETIT GATEAU

MARY BERGERON WORKED in the oilfield regulatory compliance for 30 years, but when her company went under, she started considering a new career. Marrying her love of baking with Acadiana's lack of a tea salon led to her opening

Le Petit Gateau bakery and tea parlor in Sunset. At first, she considered opening a place in Lafayette, but competition was stiff and she worried about getting lost in the busy culinary scene.

"In Lafayette, I would have been just another bakery," she says. "Sunset, it's a good fit."

Bergeron opened Le Petit Gateau in Novem-

ber, selling items one would find in a French bakery – éclairs, palmers, croissants and cookies, even a traditional French king cake during Carnival with a religious medallion inside. Jumping over the Channel, so to speak, Le Petit also serves up English tea service beneath crystal chandeliers and among comfortable chairs and chaise lounges. There's

even a "hat tree" filled with exquisite handmade hats for those who want to dress the part, a favorite with young girls.

Le Petit serves up both the traditional English High Tea and a Royal Court Tea by reservation. High Tea consists of three courses of tea sandwiches such as cucumber, egg salad and chicken-almond croissant plus scones and

desserts. The Royal Court Tea includes soups and salads and the sandwiches are "more involved," Bergeron explains. "The last one we did was a roasted duck sandwich."

The bakery is open from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays through Saturdays with Sunday reserved for private parties. Bergeron hopes to expand hours and services as the bakery finds its legs, and include events such as storytime, holiday parties and larger food offerings for the lunch crowd.

829B Napoleon Ave. // Sunset // 337/662-3000 // lepetitgateau.co

CLOCKWISE:
Chicken-almond salad on a croissant // Seven Princes Flowering tea // owner Mary Bergeron



SUGGESTED DINING

▴ **MAIN COURSE:** Chicken-almond salad on a croissant is one of the many sandwiches served at High Tea, but many times patrons may purchase a larger sandwich for lunch.

▴ **DESSERT:** The white chocolate cranberry pecan cookies offer something chunky in each bite and the restaurant's scones are moist and soft, a perfect accompaniment to tea.

▴ **TEA:** The Mother's Day Tea is naturally decaffeinated but carries a delightful taste of spearmint and the China Milky tastes of cream after being brewed, a "surprise tea" says owner Mary Bergeron. The flowering teas sink to the bottom of the glass pots and open as they brew. "It makes this beautiful display," Bergeron says.



THIS PAGE:
White chocolate cranberry pecan cookies