

signa's grille

by melanie m. ward | photography by bonnie dickerson

I am hoping you can get the Eggplant Soup recipe from Signa's Grille in Ridgeland. The soup is delish, made with all fresh veggies. I love Mississippi Magazine!

Joyce Posey
Ridgeland



There is a lot to be said for Delta Italians and their ability to cook and run restaurants that last for generations. And there's not a better example than Frank Signa who opened his Ridgeland restaurant in 2012 at the age of 24.

"My love for the business began at an early age while helping out at the family restaurant, Doe's Eat Place in Greenville," says Frank. "I watched and questioned my cousins Doe and Charles Signa's every move, and that of my grandmother—'Aunt Flo' to most, but 'Noni' to me—and all the lovely ladies working there...This is where the dream of one day opening my own place was born."

The brisk popularity of Signa's Grille's incredible sandwiches, house-made chips, and homemade cannoli grew quickly, and the adjacent space was soon absorbed.

And Signa's Italian heritage is deeply embedded in its menu, from salads like the The Signa or the Cine and Seve among others—lettuce-lovers will find a selection to appease them. And with Signa's homemade dressings, it will be the perfect light lunch or dinner.

"The menu features our spin on several classic Cajun and Italian dishes with a Delta flair," says Frank. Greenville natives who close their eyes and bite into the D'Licious might just picture a Pasquale's roast beef. Anyone will enjoy this amazing sandwich as well as other favorites like the Reuben, the Philly Chicken or Beef, the Dagwood, the Godmotha (roasted eggplant and squash, Parmesan, balsamic caramelized onions, and basil pesto), or the Ricardo (ham, pork loin, fried pickle spears, and provolone). In the mood for a burger? There's a Swamp Burger, Delta-style of course, swimming in chili and slaw, and a 2AM Patty Melt. Here

you'll find traditional po'boys, or spread your wings and try the Fontana made with salami, pepperoni, ham, prosciutto, provolone, and olive salad. All po'boys are served on New Orleans' Leidenheimer's French loaf. And the Creole garlic mayo is one of Signa's claims to fame—slow roasted garlic cloves, mayo, spices, and herbs. "Don't let the words Creole and garlic fool you," he says. "It's got just a subtle hint of spice and a gentle sweet accent of garlic that won't leave you with garlic breath the rest of the day."

And you won't find better side items anywhere. Other than house-made chips with chipotle ranch, there are onion rings, sweet potato fries with a marshmallow cinnamon cream sauce, fried pickle spears with ranch, and fried okra with 8-up Comeback Sauce.

Weekdays during lunch, the \$10 daily specials include Red Beans and Rice with Fried Pickled Okra; Hamburger Steak with Grilled Onions, Parmesan Mashed Potatoes, Italian Green Beans; Fried Pork Chops over Rice with Gravy; Thyme Lemon Roasted Chicken and Mushroom Rice Pilaf; and Fried Catfish, Lemon Slaw, and Fries.

Aside from the daily lunch specials, there's soup. And if you're lucky, it's the Eggplant Soup. "We didn't have a clue what soup to serve one day, and fresh eggplant and roasted red bell peppers popped out at me," shares Frank. "We have had many variations since, but my chef, Alex Oltremari, just recently took this older recipe and re-created it, adding roasted artichokes, and it has become a staple and best-seller."

Stopping in for dinner at Signa's won't disappoint. The nighttime entrées feature everything from Redfish Dyanne to Madeline & Sam's Chicken Marsala and Eggplant Donna. Other amazing Italian favorites include Chicken Ravioli Alfredo, Josephine's Capellini and Meatballs, Primavera Gianna, Ju & Dave's Shrimp & Grits, and another nod to Signa's Greenville roots with Strazi's Chicken Picatta.

"We do this from the heart, and we do what we know and what is the best around. Our staff works passionately and patiently with each customer, giving them an experience like no other," he says. "We are proud doing what we do daily and we think that shows." Stop in, order one of their family favorite dishes, and make yourself at home. As their motto states, "Welcome to the family!" M

651 Hwy. 51, Ste. E, Ridgeland
601.853.0266

Monday-Saturday, 11-2 and Tuesday-Saturday, 5-9



ROASTED EGGPLANT & ARTICHOKE SOUP

3 large eggplants, peeled and diced	¼ cup dried basil
4 red onions, diced	2 tablespoons dried dill
3 minced garlic cloves	2 tablespoons kosher salt
1 (24-ounce) jar artichoke hearts (in water), drained	2 tablespoons black pepper
6 carrots, peeled and diced	2 tablespoons crushed red pepper flakes
2 bunches celery, washed and diced, (use the leaves)	½ cup olive oil, divided
2 (24-ounce) jars roasted red bell peppers, drained and diced	4 quarts chicken stock
¼ cup dried oregano	2 quarts heavy cream
	3 cups grated Parmesan cheese

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a stainless steel mixing bowl, place first 13 ingredients plus ¼ cup of olive oil; mix well. Transfer to a sheet pan and roast for 10 to 15 minutes. Toss vegetables and cook for an additional 10 to 15 minutes. Once vegetables have roasted, set aside to cool, about 20 to 30 minutes. In a food processor, in small batches, begin to pulse all the roasted vegetables until very fine. Place vegetables in a medium-large stockpot with remaining olive oil. Turn stove to medium-high heat and constantly stir vegetables for about 15 to 20 minutes. Once heated through, add chicken stock, keeping heat at medium-high for about 30 to 45 minutes, stirring occasionally. Once stock has reduced, stir in heavy cream, and cook for an additional 20 minutes. Turn off heat, and stir in Parmesan cheese. Adjust seasoning by adding more salt and pepper.

Yield: 12-14 servings

deep south pops

by melanie m. ward | photography by bonnie dickerson

Deep South Pops is a wonderful new addition to the Belhaven neighborhood in Jackson. After my first pop last summer (peach-ginger), I was hooked! It's my favorite place to stop in for a sweet treat, a fresh cup of coffee, or a good visit with a friend. I'd love to know how they make their pops so delicious! Maybe they'd share a recipe?

Claire G.
Jackson



It didn't take long for the Popsicle craze to make its way to Mississippi; Jackson to be exact. In June of last year, Birmingham natives Kristy and Jake Franklin opened up their chic pop-shop in an old service station on State Street, just across from Millsaps College. "There are a lot of great stories about this place, including one about Elvis Presley having his car serviced here when he was en route to Memphis," says Kristy.

Before moving to Jackson in 2013, the couple always loved Steel City Pops. When they moved, they missed those sweet frozen treats. As they decided to create a business, the idea of a shop here enticed them. "The summers here are sweltering and the winters are mild," she says. "It seemed like a pop-shop would fit right into Jackson." Taking this dream and making it new and fresh and theirs, they began perfecting their craft. "Our strawberry pop was one of our first flavors we experimented with. We loved all of our test batches, but it wasn't until a couple of weeks before our opening that we felt like we had perfected it," says Kristy. "We haven't changed it, and it remains one of our most popular fruit flavors."

Unique and creative flavors using only the freshest of ingredients is what Deep South Pops is known for. The daily flavors rotate but can often be found to



include Buttermilk, Blueberry Sour Cream, Cinnamon Roll, Blueberry Lemon Buttermilk, Single Barrel Bristow Gin Cream, Non-Dairy Strawberry, Pineapple Jalapeño, Strawberry Lime Black Pepper, and Orange Vanilla. One of the most popular flavors would be Creole Cream Cheese Cake that, like all of their products, is made with locally sourced ingredients. "It's made with Mauthe Progress Milk Barn's creole cream cheese from McComb," shares Kristy. "Kenny Mauthe is a third-generation dairy farmer, and he believes in responsible farming. He also provides our whole milk and buttermilk." If a plain pop just isn't your style, jazz up a pop with a made-to-order chocolate coating or drop it into a beverage for a delicious float.

Anyone hosting an event will be delighted to learn that they also cater. "We have a beautiful bike cart made in New York by the same company that built the Good Humor carts many years ago," Kristy says. "It is a great addition to wedding receptions, school and church parties, office parties, and more." There's also an adorable antique pick-up truck. If needed, they also offer a mobile coffee, tea, and hot chocolate service.

Creating more than just a Popsicle shop, the store is a place for anyone with a sweet tooth to grab a treat. "Our goal is for our guests to feel at home and comfortable enough to stay and hang-out for a while," she says. Along with homemade pops, they also offer full coffee service using locally roasted coffees, pastries from LaBrioche, beer on tap, and bottled Mexican sodas. Those hoping for a scoop instead of a pop will be delighted with their selection of Sweet Magnolia Gelato that is handmade in Clarksdale. "We hope Deep South is a spot for all ages, a place where adults and kids alike find something that they love to eat or drink while spending time with family and friends." M

STRAWBERRY POPS

$\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar
4 heaping cups fresh strawberries, hulled and halved
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
Dash of kosher salt

Combine sugar and berries. More sugar will provide a softer bite for the pops. Less will provide an icier bite. Allow to sit for 10 to 15 minutes to macerate. Transfer to saucepan. Add water and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 5 to 10 minutes. Remove from heat. Cool. Transfer to blender. Add lemon juice and salt. Purée mixture. Pour into molds. Freeze overnight. Remove pops from molds by placing molds in a warm water bath for a few seconds.

Yield: 8-10 pops

Deep South Pops: Gourmet Pops & Coffee
1800 N. State St., Jackson | 601.398.2174
deepsouthpops.com
Open 7 days per week, 6 a.m. until 9 p.m.

the coop

AT THE GRADUATE

by melanie m. ward | photography by brandall atkinson

I was recently in Oxford and stayed at The Graduate. They have a fabulous rooftop restaurant called The Coop. The catfish taco was amazing, and I hope they will share the recipe.

*Anonymous
Gulfport*



Oxford is a hotbed of delicious dining options, and the offerings at the new Graduate hotel—Cabin 82 and The Coop—do not disappoint. Opened in 2015, the hotel's chic, mid-centuryish, yet Americana-infused décor that is interwoven with the Rebels' red and navy color palette creates a comfortable backdrop. Located prominently on The Square it features comfortable suites, but it also brings two of this college town's best spots to grab a beverage and a bite. Whether stopping by Cabin 82 (named after the Neshoba County Fair cabin of Ole Miss quarterbacks, Archie and Eli Manning) to grab breakfast, a quick lunch, or a lazy dinner or heading to the rooftop Coop, a visit to either means fabulous food and fun.

The Coop, named after Olivia and Archie Manning's eldest son Cooper, provides a bird's-eye view of Oxford's famed Square. "It is a contemporary space with design elements that hint at yesterday's elegance, mingled with industrial touches," shares food and beverage director Gerald Peralta. "We like to say it is sort of a modern-day 'hen house' with custom damask wallpaper and cool concrete floors mixed with crystal chandeliers and farmhouse fixtures. The star though, is really the vintage upright piano." And, every evening, guests enjoy live music, ranging from blues to old-school and modern rock. As one of only two spots with rooftop restaurants, nobody offers a view from this height, which is one of the reasons it has quickly become a place to see and be seen. "We wanted to create an environment that would bring people together, both hotel guests and locals," adds Peralta.

And it isn't just the stellar scenery that is bringing patrons skyward. The Coop's menu allows a light dinner with

friends or the place to enjoy tapas over afternoon drinks. "The Coop's menu is intended to be shareable, small plates that showcase local Mississippi flavors, with an elevated and sophisticated presentation," states Peralta. And the wide array of menu items include everything from fried pickle chips with comeback sauce to New Orleans-style barbecue shrimp, salads, sliders, tacos, and amazing sides. Fry lovers will enjoy the options of Coop Fries (made with house-made seasoning, garlic, and parsley), Queso Fries, BBQ Pork Fries, or favorite appetizer HYDR Tots (tater tots smothered and covered with Monterey Jack Cheddar cheese, bacon, and green onions). Nothing goes better with fries than burgers. The Classic and the Spicy Cajun are great picks, but there are also Buffalo Chicken sliders and Pulled Pork sliders. Chef Ross Wiggers crafts all of the menu items in-house, and aside from the popular sliders and tacos that are menu staples, the menu changes throughout the year. "Our menu changes seasonally to reflect the various ingredients that are available during different times of the year," shares Peralta. "Our goal is to always offer a well-rounded, thoughtful menu that appeals to all of our guests."

When planning a trip, keep in mind that Friday and Saturday nights tend to be their busiest. While you can't make a reservation, The Coop does provide the opportunity to rent half of the patio for larger groups, except on football weekends. "Weather permitting, the patio is the perfect spot to enjoy all The Coop has to offer," says Peralta. "There is truly nothing better than sipping on a Moscow Mule, overlooking the Oxford Square, and reliving the past up at The Coop." M



COOP CATFISH TACOS

TACOS:

1 catfish filet
Salt and black pepper to taste
1 tablespoon olive oil
3 flour tortillas
2 tablespoons Avocado Spread
½ cup shredded iceberg lettuce
½ vine-ripe tomato, diced
Thai Honey Chili Sauce

Pat catfish filet dry and season, top and bottom, with salt and pepper. In a skillet, add oil and heat until smoking. Cook catfish for 3 to 5 minutes per side until done. While catfish is cooking, warm tortillas (a maximum of 30 seconds per side). Remove catfish and allow to rest for 45 to 60 seconds. Divide filet into 3 equal pieces. Spread each tortilla with 1 tablespoon of avocado spread, then place a filet piece on each. Sprinkle with lettuce and tomato, then drizzle with Thai Honey Chili Sauce.

Yield: 3 tacos

AVOCADO SPREAD:

1 cup cream cheese
¾ cup sour cream
2 tablespoons garlic
6 avocados, peeled and seeded
½ cup lime juice
2 tablespoons Cilantro, finely chopped
Pinch of cayenne
Salt and black pepper to taste

In a blender, pulse cream cheese and sour cream until mixed well. Mix in garlic and avocado and blend again. Slowly add lime juice. Add in cilantro; pulse again. Add in cayenne and salt and pepper.

THAI HONEY CHILI SAUCE:

1 cup water
1 cup rice vinegar
1 cup sugar
2 teaspoons ginger, minced
1 teaspoon garlic, minced
2 teaspoons hot chili pepper, minced
2 teaspoons ketchup
2 teaspoons cornstarch
Honey to taste

Pour water and vinegar in saucepan; bring to a boil. Stir in sugar, ginger, garlic, chili pepper, and ketchup; simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in cornstarch and honey. Remove from heat and allow to cool. Refrigerate until needed.

The Coop at The Graduate

Open: Monday-Wednesday, 4 p.m. until 12 a.m.; Thursday, 4 p.m. until 1 a.m.; Friday, 11 a.m. until 1 a.m.; Saturday 11 a.m. until 12 a.m.; and Sunday 11 a.m. until 9 p.m.

400 N. Lamar Blvd., Oxford, 662.234.3031, graduateoxford.com