

# LEATHER BOUND

Baton Rouge's Damien Mitchell BY JEFFREY ROEDEL PHOTOS BY ROMERO & ROMERO

At first glance Damien Mitchell's workspace, nestled in one of Baton Rouge's older residential districts, could be mistaken for the home base of just about any creative in the newly surging, social media-fueled makers movement. A smattering of Apple products lay about the clean lines of

Damien Mitchell dedicates his time to creating timeless, functional and stylish leather goods.



a Mid-Century modern couch. Alabama Shakes and Tame Impala record covers rest on the wall. And tacked above piles of schematics, drawings and work-in-progress are hand-written goals, polished sketches and tangential inspirations on a mood board of sorts aimed like a Nerf gun at the year ahead.

Clad in a red flannel shirt with lumberjack check and burgundy-brown leather boots, the 25-year-old pours herbal tea for his guest.

One of his own creations, not for sale unfortunately, is an image of old-school Air Jordan sneakers levitating above the ground and subverted with a sharply succinct caption: "Vanity." *Swoosh.*

It's no surprise then that the maker label has not sat well with Mitchell until very recently.

"I struggle with the 'maker thing,' because it kind of gets a bit cliché," Mitchell says. "A lot of times it's just traditional patterns, nothing unique, nothing original to the design, but it's nice materials and it's handmade the maker can charge an extreme amount of money for it."

Where many makers are devoting themselves to preserving practices that are in some cases long lost, Mitchell's goal is innovation. He studied industrial design at the University of Louisiana-Lafayette where he worked on projects for new electronics, clothing, automobiles – one of his professors was on the team that designed the very first Ford Mustang – and even pitched futuristic conceptual designs to director Rian Johnson (*Star Wars: Episode VIII*), for the filming of Johnson's 2012 thriller *Looper* in New Orleans.

Mitchell keeps a day job as a designer at a local engineering firm, but this son of a seamstress who grew up around his aunt's tailoring shop has a real passion for working with his hands.

"Any time there's a pen in my hand, I'll be drawing a shoe," he says.



## [2016 Baton Rouge Area Louisiana Edition]

*Louisiana Life* is featuring the leaders of various industries in our bi-monthly advertising series called, "Faces of Louisiana". This section will showcase those who make a powerful impact in their field. Throughout the year, *Louisiana Life* will focus on all major areas of the state, and in our May/June issue we focus on the Baton Rouge area of Louisiana.

For more information regarding this series, please contact Donna Childress at [Donna@LouisianaLife.com](mailto:Donna@LouisianaLife.com) 504.830.7250 • [Louisianafaces.com](http://Louisianafaces.com)



In college, Mitchell apprenticed at Musso Shoe Repair where he learned how to make footwear from men twice his age. For the past two years, he has worked almost exclusively with leather. His slim wallets reveal a love for Japanese minimalism and all things Apple. They look a bit like two U-shapes spooning each other and are perfect for the man that doesn't want a cheeseburger-thick back-buster in his pocket.

Mitchell sources his material from Tandy Leather Factory in Metairie, making the trip there twice a month to flip through hides and brush his hands over each piece.

"I like to make sure I'm getting the best ones," he says.

Though he has notebooks filled with more complex handbag and backpack designs and even some completed shoe prototypes, he knows he has to take things slow. He's a one-man operation – for now.

"The challenge is to create products simple enough for me to manufacture on my own but good enough for people to want," Mitchell says. "That's the struggle.

How do I get past that roadblock? Continue to make better designs. Good design will get me there." ♦

## Q&A

**THERE ARE SO MANY SMALLER BRANDS OUT THEIR TAKING A MORE HAND-MADE APPROACH TO THEIR PRODUCTS. BUT WHO DO YOU SEE BEING INNOVATIVE?** Tanner Goods in Portland is great. I like a lot of their products. I'd say their leather turntable slip mat is my favorite of theirs, because it's such a simple product that typically wouldn't get much attention, but because of Tanner's execution you want to show it off. There's also a French company I like called Côte Et Ciel. Their approach to backpacks is unorthodox but still completely functional. I like their Isar rucksack.

**DO YOU HAVE ANY INSPIRATIONS THAT MIGHT SURPRISE PEOPLE?** I find graphic design inspiring. Massimo Vignelli basically revolutionized advertising and graphic design in the States when he came over from Italy. Women's fashion is inspiring. I don't know if it shows up in my work, but I look at it a lot. I follow Anna Wintour, Vera Wang and Chanel on Instagram.

**LET'S SAY YOU CAN ONLY OWN AND WEAR THREE PAIRS OF SHOES FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE. WHAT DO YOU CHOOSE?** Clarks Desert Boots, a pair of Air Jordan 1s, and some Vans Authentics.

**WHAT DO YOU DO FOR FUN WHEN YOU'RE NOT WORKING?** When I'm not working, I'm working. I'm always drawing and trying to make new things. I play darts at Radio Bar. I have a motorcycle, and I work on that a lot, ha ha. I probably work on that more than I ride it.

**WHAT'S THE BEST PIECE OF ADVICE ANYONE HAS EVER GIVEN YOU?** "Don't try to figure everything out before you start. Learn along the way."

More information, [damienmitchell.us](http://damienmitchell.us)



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## IN STITCHES

New Orleans designer Sigourney Morrison has her colorful brand of cool all sewn up

BY JEFFREY ROEDEL PHOTOS BY ROMERO & ROMERO

"I can sew for six or eight hours a day and feel happy at the end of it," says LSU alum Sigourney Morrison.



In Frankfurt, Germany, there's a young woman. She could be known for many things, but there in the birthplace of Goethe, Louisiana ex-pat Kristen Aul is known for one thing. People recognize her as the girl who always wears the jean jacket emblazoned with a custom chain-stitched Popeyes logo. Meticulously crafted by Louisiana designer Sigourney Morrison, from whom Aul purchased the item, this same jacket caused a joyful stir inside the Popeyes Louisiana Kitchen on St. Charles Avenue. Aul had returned to help her family with flood recovery in Baton Rouge and had stopped into the restaurant wearing the jacket.

"It's the piece I'm most proud of because it's the one that has given the customer the most joy," Morrison says. "That's why I do what I do. And I hope Popeyes reads this — maybe I can get some chicken out of this deal, ha."

Born in New Roads, Morrison grew up in rural Fayette, Alabama, an hour from the closest movie theater and mall — but she never missed a Mardi Gras. Her father, a New Orleans native, always rode in krewes with his side of the family. And though she felt detached from larger creative movements out in the country, Morrison's youth provided her with a foundation for her future craft.

"Football was king," she recalls of her small conservative town. "But I definitely found a way to express myself in a unique fashion. I got the art and culture from New Orleans, and I got my respect and love

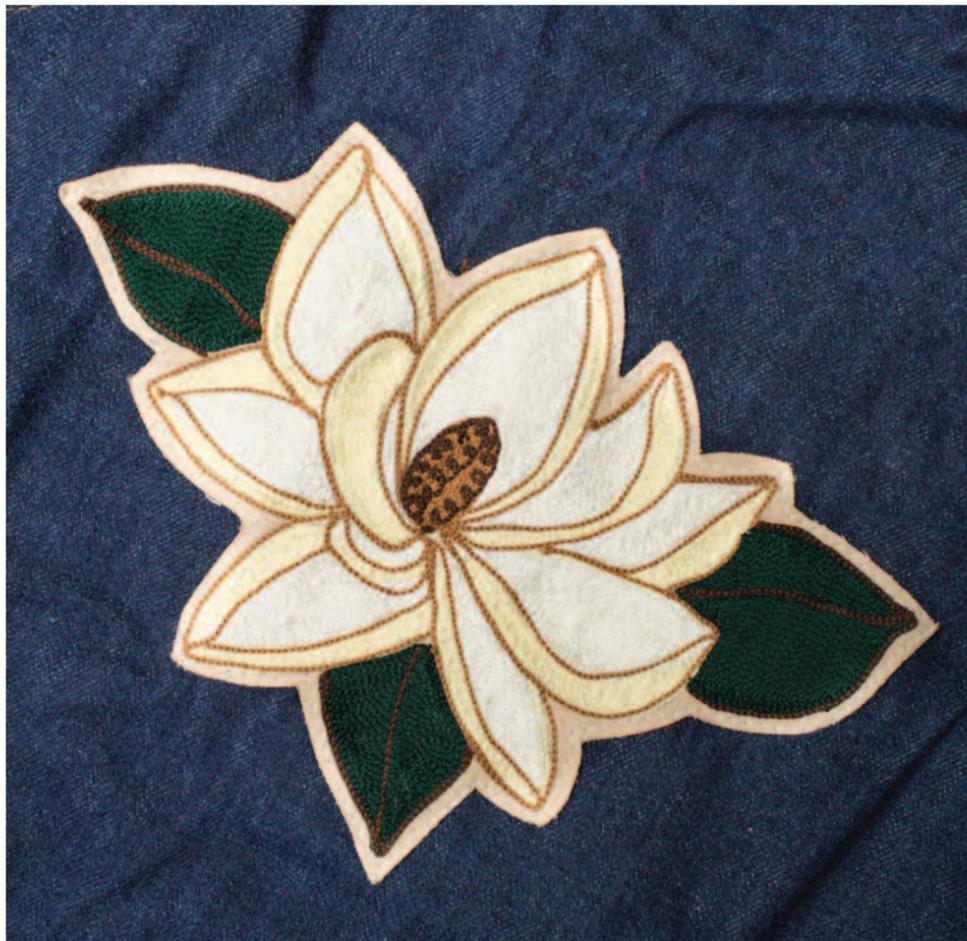
**"It was the first time I was doing something that didn't feel like work or a chore. I can sew for six or eight hours a day and feel happy at the end of it."**

for nature and the outdoors from home."

Now 30, the LSU alum grew up cross-stitching with her grandmother and learning to sew as a practical craft that could also be a creative outlet. She still has more than a dozen dolls stitched for her by the family matriarch. After switching her major to fashion design at LSU, Morrison developed her sewing skills and began making hats.

"I think when I actually started making things that I love and hearing some positive feedback from people, I actually thought this would be viable as a business," Morrison says. "It was the first time I was doing something that didn't feel like work or a chore. I can sew for six or eight hours a day and feel happy at the end of it."

After graduation, she relocated to New Orleans, and when her run with Goorin Bros. Hat Shop ended, she bought a circa-1941 chain stitch machine and launched her



own design business called Dressed New Orleans. The name is a playful reference to the Big Easy's love of loaded poor boys and the rich history of the sandwich has with the people of the city.

"They're so unique, not unlike the people here," Morrison says.

A blend of folk and pop art, graphic design and fashion, Morrison's work is often color-rich or playful and can be found on eye-catching patches, stitched lettering slogans or accessories like a "double sided necktie thingy" she recently posted to Instagram.

She calls her art "thread painting," and it fulfills her knowing that she's adding bold beauty to the world in her own distinct way.

"I get lost sometimes," she says. "I definitely have some carpal tunnel damage creeping up on me." ♦

## Q&A

**What do you do for fun when you're not working?** I'm in a shuffleboard league. We play once a week. I also am in the Organ Grinders. It's a local dance troupe. That occupies my time. It's great to get out there and dance and let loose and be around other inspiring women.

**How do you stay inspired to keep progressing?** I'm always inspired by New Orleans. It's my home, and I have deep roots here. My inspiration can come from so many different places. I really like vintage signs and the art of sign painting. There's a great one on St. Charles on the side of a building. It's for a moving company and has a momma cat carrying her kitten in her mouth. It's one of my favorites.

**Are there any unexpected influences in your work?** Well, I get requests sometimes for some weird stuff. And I have always honored those requests. No curse word or risqué image is off limits. But I will never do anything that is racist or sexist. And that's pretty much my only rule.

**If you could design clothing for anyone who would it be?** That's easy. Dolly Parton. She seems to like butterflies, doesn't she? I would make her the most glorious butterfly jacket the world has ever seen. Dripping with rhinestones and fringe.

**OK, now I hope Popeyes and Dolly both read this.** Me too! I would die so happy. And full of chicken.

Connect with Morrison at @dressedneworleans on Instagram.

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### CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**NOVEMBER 2016**

- 4 The Country Revolution Tour  
Paragon Mart Center  
800.740.3000
- 5 Moreauville Farmer's Market  
Moreauville Town Hall | 9am - 1pm  
318.306.3078
- 5 Open Roads Ch Run  
Cottonport, Louisiana  
www.openroads.org
- 19 Avoyelles Falls De Do  
Featuring Brass, Big Band & Band  
Bardoniaville Community Center  
7pm (Dance begins at 8:30pm) | 318.264.0382
- 26 Brian McKnight  
Paragon Mart Center  
800.740.3000

**DECEMBER 2016**

- 3 Moreauville Farmer's Market  
Moreauville Town Hall | 9am - 1pm  
318.306.3078
- 3 Noël dans les Avoyelles  
Progressive Tour of Homes  
Town of Cottonport | 3:00 pm  
318.764.0000
- 10-11 Christmas on The Bayou Festival  
Town of Cottonport  
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# OH, SHUCKS!

*Oyster shucker Becky Wasden cuts her own path in New Orleans*

BY MEGAN HILL PHOTO BY ROMERO & ROMERO

In a field dominated by men, Becky Wasden is working to turn the oyster industry on its shell.

Wasden and her partner in life and business, Stefani Sell, launched their oyster-shucking business two years ago after spending nearly a year shucking casually at backyard parties. One evening, a friend piped up.

“He came to the table and said ‘You girls shucking oysters, why don’t you have a tip jar,’” Wasden says.

At the time, Wasden was busy finishing her Master of Education. Originally from Salt Lake City, Wasden admits seafood hasn’t always been her specialty. She taught art and music for six years in New Orleans after visiting in 2001, when she “instantly fell in love” with the city.

Wasden learned as she shucked and the duo started the company, Two Girls One Shuck, in 2014. She gave up teaching full time.

“I miss the kids, but I don’t miss the politics of being in a school,” she says.

Two Girls One Shuck is a roving oyster bar, specializing in both raw and chargrilled oysters. They’ve catered birthday parties, weddings, TV sets and other events and parties.

Most of the oysters Wasden shucks are harvested in St. Bernard Parish; others come from Bayou La Batre, Alabama and prime beds on the east and west coasts.

Wasden says she aims to be an ambassador for Gulf oysters and hopes to educate the public about growing methods and subtle flavor variations that come with growing oysters in different regions — a concept similar to terroir in wine-grape growing. Oyster-shucking classes are in the works, too.

“It’s so much fun to watch an adult pop their first oyster and just snack,” she says. “An oyster will never taste the same.” ♦

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**Favorite New Orleans Restaurant:** High Hat Cafe

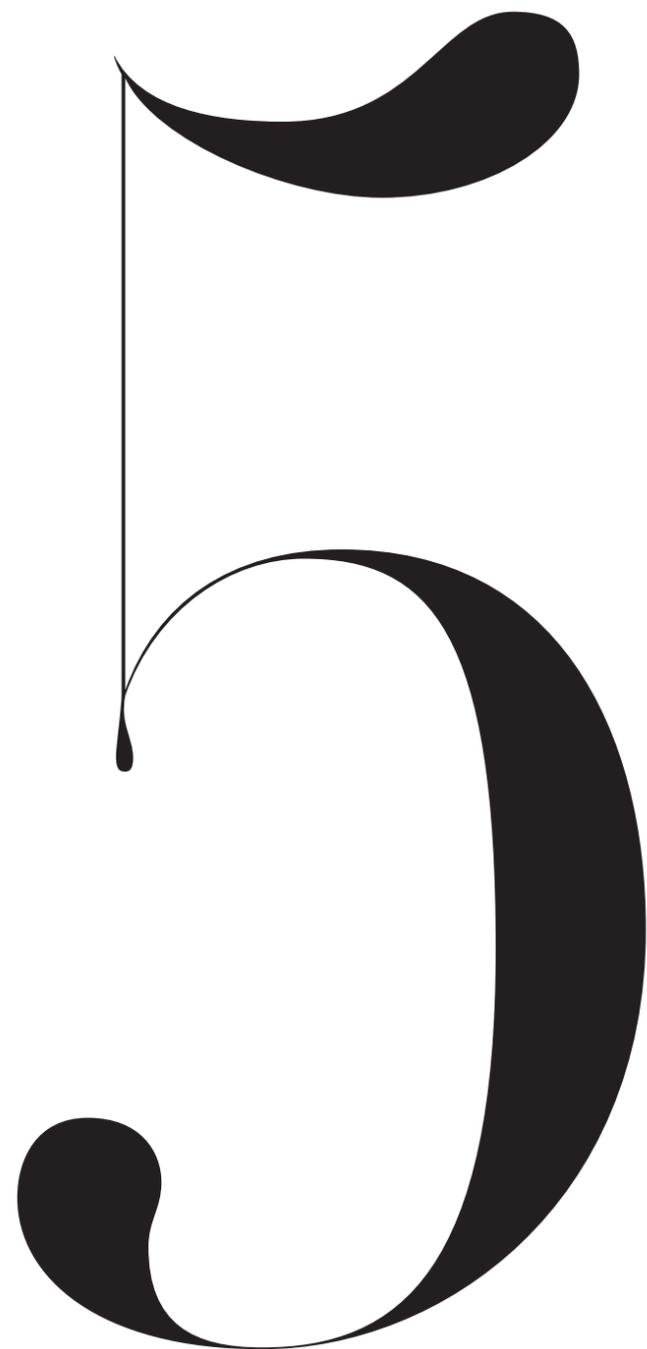
**Favorite Live Music Venue:** Old U.S. Mint (Third Floor)

**Favorite New Orleans Visual Artist:** Tony Nozero

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*Becky Wasden was asked to shuck oysters behind the scenes during the filming of HGTV’s “Brothers Take New Orleans,” a four-part series airing this month starring twins Jonathan and Drew Scott of the popular show “Property Brothers.” Wasden also shucked and served oysters at the show’s wrap party.*





# course feast

LOUISIANA CHEFS SHARE THEIR SECRETS

**W**e're proud to present this collection of recipes from some of Louisiana's greatest professional chefs and cooks. Hailing from diverse backgrounds, these five individuals live in different regions of Louisiana and prepare vastly different cuisine. But together, they represent where we are today on the culinary landscape. In the following pages you may read their stories and prepare their recipes, resulting in a delightful five-course feast that exemplifies the best our state has to offer.

BY JYL BENSON PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROMERO & ROMERO

1ST COURSE: APPETIZER

## Mrs. Alzina Toups

*Oyster Beignets with Tartar Sauce*



The windowless metal building where Alzina Toups feeds the throngs of people who seek her out was once a welding shop; the letters that once spelled “Alzina’s” have crumbled almost completely off in the 40 years she has been serving countless priests and nuns from her regional church community, international travelers and regulars who drive in from hours away. She will celebrate her 88th birthday this August.

Toups learned how to cook thanks to her Portuguese-Cajun mother, and she hails from a long line of skilled cooks. Toups entertains only one party of no less than 10 diners at a time – and no more than 30

per meal – and accepts no walk-ins. Customers eat family-style at two long communal tables beneath images of the Virgin Mary, and they share the same fluorescent-lit room as the open kitchen where she prepares straightforward five-course Cajun meals based on the seasons. Her vast culinary canon spans two published cookbooks and numerous composition notebooks stacked in the corner of her kitchen. Favorites include Brown Sugar Shrimp, Crabmeat and Shrimp Lasagna made with handmade pasta, Smothered Cabbage and Braised Pork Loin, Black-Eyed Pea Jambalaya, a magnificent Walnut Tart, lofty cakes

and pies, heavenly dinner rolls and freshly baked bread with every meal.

“This recipe is well over 100 years old,” says Toups. The recipe was passed down to her from another lady in her community who, knowing the end of her life was near, asked Toups to document the treasured, secret recipe. Not long after the lady’s death, Toups was able to share the recipe with the lady’s mourning family. It was an act that cheered them and keeps their loved one alive. It is one Toups has recreated countless times throughout her life within her Cajun oil-and-fishing community in Galliano.



**BEIGNETS** Heat vegetable oil to 350 degrees in a deep fryer or Dutch oven, preferably cast-iron. In a mixing bowl, combine **1½ cups flour**, **1½ teaspoons baking powder**, salt and pepper to taste. Set aside. Melt **¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter** in a skillet set over medium-high heat. Add **1 medium onion (finely chopped)**, **1 bell pepper (finely chopped)**, **1 rib celery (finely chopped)**, **4 cloves minced garlic**, **¼ cup minced flat leaf parsley** and **⅓ cup finely chopped green onion** and cook until the onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Scrape the mixture from the pan into the mixing bowl and stir thoroughly to blend.

Add **4 dozen oysters, drained and diced** (reserve the oyster liquor for another use) and **2 large beaten eggs** and stir thoroughly to blend. Drop tablespoons of the oyster mixture into the hot oil and cook until golden brown, about 4 to 5 minutes.

**TARTAR SAUCE:** This sauce is best made the night before you plan to serve it so as to allow time for the flavors to marry.

Combine **1 cup mayonnaise**, **1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice**, **½ cup drained sweet pickle relish**, **1 tablespoon drained small capers**, **1 tablespoons chopped flat leaf parsley**, **1 teaspoon grated onion**, **⅛ teaspoon salt** and **⅛ teaspoon Tabasco**. Blend thoroughly. Serve chilled. Serves 6

Though featured here as an appetizer, AlzinaToups says these savory puffs also work as a side dish to red or white beans cooked with ham.

SECOND COURSE: SALAD

## Chef Holly Moore Schreiber

### *Duck Confit Salad with Chopped Greens, Herbs and Pepper Jelly Vinaigrette*

Holly Schreiber is a graduate of the French Culinary Institute (now the International Culinary Center) in New York City. She worked in recipe testing and development for publishing companies, television, grocery stores and chefs – Alain Ducasse among them – before she and her New York-bred husband, Derek, moved back to her native northern Louisiana to be closer to family, with the hope of opening a restaurant of their own.

"We really wanted to be a part of growing Shreveport/Bossier's culinary scene, but our plans were sidetracked when a family friend who ran a local community kitchen fell ill," Holly says. "I stepped in initially on a temporary basis to keep it operating but fell in love with the people and ended up running the kitchen for four years. During that time, we developed the program into more of a 'restaurant' for families in need. We prepared high-end dinners packed with nutrition for 100 guests per night that were served right to the table – all completely free of charge."

In 2014 Holly left the Shared Harvest Community Kitchen to open Sainte Terre, her gracious special events venue. "We work to create bespoke experiences for each of our brides and their families – even with the menu. We develop each menu to reflect the bride and groom's personality, families and stories. To this day, no two wedding menus have been the same."

They also host special dinner events, cooking classes and wine pairing experiences. "We are not tied to a specific menu day after day, which really fuels my creativity in the kitchen," she says.

Through her new project, the Pineywoods Supper Club, she creates dining experiences throughout northern Louisiana with an ever-changing roster of chefs. "We are also creating a culinary internship program with Bossier Parish Community College's culinary program and a scholarship fund for young people in the culinary, hospitality industries and farmers-to-be."



**GREENS** In a large bowl, shred **2 handfuls of hearty greens** (collard, mustard, turnip) washed with ribs removed by rolling the greens into a tight cylinder (like a cigar) then cutting crosswise into thin ribbons (aka a chiffonade). With your hands, rip **3 handfuls of washed tender lettuces** (Bibb lettuce, arugula, dandelion greens, watercress, etc.) into bite-size pieces. Repeat this process with **a handful of fresh mixed herbs**

(basil, mint, cilantro) washed with stems removed. Add to bowl.

Add **4 green onions, thinly sliced** and **¼ medium red onion, thinly sliced** to the bowl. Sprinkle the salad mixture with a **Salt to taste**. Toss to blend thoroughly

**DUCK CONFIT** Preheat oven to 250 degrees. Pulse **3 tablespoons salt, 6 cloves smashed garlic** and **2 sliced shallots**, in a food processor to form a paste. Rub **6 duck leg**

**quarters with skin** with paste. Place the duck pieces, skin-side up, in a single layer in a high-sided baking dish. The pieces should fit snugly together in the dish with no space between them. Pour **6-8 cups of melted duck fat** over the duck (enough to completely cover the pieces).

Bake, uncovered, until tender and the meat of the lower leg has pulled up slightly on the bone, about 2 to 2 ½ hours.

Remove the baking dish

from the oven and allow it to cool completely. (At this point the duck legs may be stored in the refrigerator for several days in the duck fat until ready to use. Bring the duck back to room-temperature just prior to serving.)

Remove the duck pieces from the duck fat and set aside. **Reserve the duck fat.**

Melt one tablespoon of fat in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the duck pieces in batches, skin side down, and cook until skin is dark brown and crisp, about 3 minutes. Flip the pieces and continue to cook until warmed through, about 2 to 3 minutes more. Serve at once.

#### **PEPPER JELLY VINAIGRETTE**

Place **½ cup white wine or rice wine vinegar, ½ cup pepper jelly, 1 clove garlic (roughly chopped), 2 fresh basil leaves, 2 tablespoons fresh lime or lemon juice, 1½ teaspoons salt** and **¼ teaspoon pepper** in a blender. Blend on high until thoroughly combined. Reduce the speed to low, add **½ cup extra virgin olive oil** in a slow, steady stream until the mixture is emulsified.

The dressing may be kept for 3 to 4 days in an airtight container in the refrigerator. Shake well before serving.

**TO SERVE** Toss greens in vinaigrette, reserving 6 tablespoons. Place a generous handful of the dressed greens on each of six chilled salad plates and top with a piece of warm duck confit. Drizzle 1 tablespoon of vinaigrette atop each piece of duck. Serve immediately.

Serves 6

"It's difficult to measure greens by the cup – or even by the pound – so, I typically just do it by the handful," Chef Holly Schreiber says. "When planning your shopping list, you can estimate that each of your guests will eat about one large handful of greens per person."



THIRD COURSE: SOUP

## Chef Aaron Atchison

### *Gulf Crab & Summer Corn Bisque*



Two tours of duty in the Iraq War left Aaron Atchison ready for culinary school. Following graduation from Le Cordon Bleu Culinary Academy in Austin, Texas and training under Chef Harvey Harris, owner and chef of Sienna in the Texas Hill Country and Chef Fumiharu Hirose, executive chef of the Okura Hotel in Japan, Atchison returned to his native central Louisiana in search of a place to ply his trade. He and his father came upon an old cotton gin in a field in Boyce. Thinking it was interesting, he inquired about a rental rate. But the elderly owner wanted to sell.

"What's your bottom line?" the chef asked.

"Twenty-four thousand," the man answered.

"Deal!" the chef cheered.

"It took us four years to get that sucker open. It was more of a mess than it seemed ... We actually got opened with the help of Chef David Adje who was, at the time, doing a cooking show for Food Network International called 'The Opener,'" Atchison says. "We were at our wits' end with not being open, so I Googled 'restaurant show casting' and the rest is history."

The efforts paid off. The rusted tin exterior (that he wisely left alone) gives way to the surprise of rustic elegance within – a 12-table space of natural wood offset by bursts of color and touches of fine art, polished concrete floors, smooth, bare hardwood tables, strings of white lights and small vases of fresh flowers. It's a fitting backdrop for Atchison's thoughtful, passion-driven menu: seabass with coconut mango risotto and yuzu caviar; truffle cheese canapés with fresh thyme, jumbo lump crabmeat and silken berre blanc; cheesecake with blueberry compote, ground cardamom and grated lemon zest.

Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.

Use 1 tablespoon of olive oil to rub 6 ears fresh shucked corn then dust with salt and pepper to taste. Roast corn, turning every 5 minutes, until it a deep golden

brown, about 15 minutes. Allow to cool until it can be safely handled then scrape kernels from cobs. Discard the cobs and set the kernels aside.

Add 2 tablespoons olive oil to a heavy pot or Dutch oven,

preferably cast-iron, set over medium heat. Add half of a medium onion (roughly chopped) and cook until translucent, about 4 minutes. Add 2 cloves garlic (roughly chopped). Cook until fragrant, about 2 minutes. Add

corn and stir to blend thoroughly. Reduce the heat and cook until heated through, about 4 minutes. Add 2 cups chicken stock and 1 quart heavy cream and stir. Bring the mixture to a boil then add 1 cup cooked white rice and 1 cup packed

Gulf crab claw meat. Bring to a boil again then remove the pot from the heat. Puree the soup thoroughly with and immersion blender or in batches in a traditional blender. Taste and season as desired with salt and pepper. Serve at once.

"I love food," says Chef Atchison. "Our food literally becomes us. It becomes our mind, our eyes, and our souls. Food is life ... and to live is to love. There is a fundamental connection there. People ask what my secret is, and it's simple: love."



FOURTH COURSE: ENTÉE

## Chef Hieu Than

### Gulf Snapper with Spiced Rice, Flash-Cooked Summer Vegetables & Cashew Butter Sauce

Hieu Than was in his mid-20s and working on degrees in biology and chemistry at Xavier University when his then-girlfriend, Mei Duong, brought him along to celebrate a birthday dinner for a friend at Gautreau's, one of New Orleans' most celebrated restaurants. "Both of my parents worked and I grew up eating fast food," Than says. "I had never been in a fine restaurant before. I was fascinated when someone pointed out the chef, Sue Zemanick, as she crossed the dining room. She was not what I expected. The place was not what I expected. The experience changed my life."

Humble, bespectacled and New Orleans-born to Vietnamese immigrants, Chef Hieu Than trained at New York's French Culinary Institute (now the International Culinary Center) before interning at Corton and Craftbar. He then returned home to work under Zemanick at Gautreau's.

Last year, Than, now 30, opened the diminutive Kin in Gert Town, a neighborhood not accustomed to fine dining restaurants. Mei, now his wife, is the general manager.

The dining room is about 400 square feet; the open kitchen about 200. There is one communal table with 10 chairs, most of which are branded with the names of friends and relatives (hence, kin). The rest of the seating is at two bars. You can feel the passion Than poured into the place and sense how he labored over the little things that make the space come to life: a dark ink-blue ceiling adds dimension. The subtle pearl finish on the silver-hued walls gleams in the sunlight and glows behind a candle. Wine crates carefully nailed to the wall behind the bar create cases for the cookbook collection and storage for the lovingly polished wine glasses.

A splurge here, a scrimp there and a constant reliance on skill, raw talent, flavors and creativity to make a dream come true. The result is an elegant, polished gem.

Than operates Kin like an experiment in democracy, crediting everyone on his kitchen staff except himself at the bottom of his crisp, ivory fold-over menu. His kitchen comrades, classically trained chefs Matt Engle and Tim Cox, are perched on the same technical cutting edge as Than, and he empowers them to take risks.



**GULF SNAPPER** Preheat the oven to 450 degrees. Score the skin of **six 6-ounce skin-on filets Gulf snapper**. Dry the filets with a paper towel and season with **salt and pepper**. Add **2 tablespoons canola oil** to a large cast-iron skillet and heat over high until the oil simmers. Add filets, skin side down, and cook until skin is seared, about one minute. Place skillet in oven and cook for and additional two minutes. Turn fish and cook until it is just done

and flakes easily with a fork, another one to two minutes, taking care not to overcook. Remove filets from skillet and set aside in a warm place.

Drain oil from the pan, leaving the fond (bits that may have stuck to the pan) behind. Set skillet over high heat and allow it to get very hot before adding **¼ cup (½ stick) unsalted butter**. Once butter has melted and has stopped sizzling, add **1 tablespoon fish sauce, 2 tablespoons chopped and toasted**

**cashews, 1 teaspoon minced garlic, 1 teaspoon minced shallot, and leaves picked from 6 sprigs of fresh thyme**. Stir the sauce, scraping the bits from the bottom of the pan. Remove the skillet from the heat and add **juice of half a lemon**. Stir.

**SPICED RICE** Lap cheong are cured, dried raw-meat sausages which are quite hard in texture, and require cooking before eating. Lap cheong is the Cantonese name for wind-dried Chinese

sausages, and literally means "wax sausages," referring to the waxy look and texture of the sausages. They are commonly available at Asian markets.

Add **2 tablespoons canola oil** to a Dutch oven, preferably cast-iron, set over high heat. Add **2 lap cheong (diced small)** and cook, stirring, until crisp, about 5 minutes. Add **1 medium orange bell pepper (diced small), half of a medium onion (diced small), 2 tablespoons minced shallots, 1 tablespoon minced garlic, 2 Roma tomatoes (diced small), 1 tablespoon tomato paste, 1 cup tomato sauce, ¼ teaspoon turmeric, ½ teaspoon paprika**

**½ teaspoon dried oregano, ½ teaspoon dried thyme and 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley** and cook, stirring frequently, until the vegetables sweat, about 8 minutes.

Add **3 cups short grain rice** and stir to coat. Cook until the rice toasts just a bit, about 2 minutes. Add the **9 cups chicken stock, ¼ cup fish sauce, ½ tablespoon salt and ¾ teaspoon pepper**. Bring to a boil. Cover, reduce the heat to low and cook until the rice has absorbed all of the liquid, about 40 minutes. Remove the Dutch oven from the heat, stir the rice and allow it to rest, covered for 10 minutes before serving.

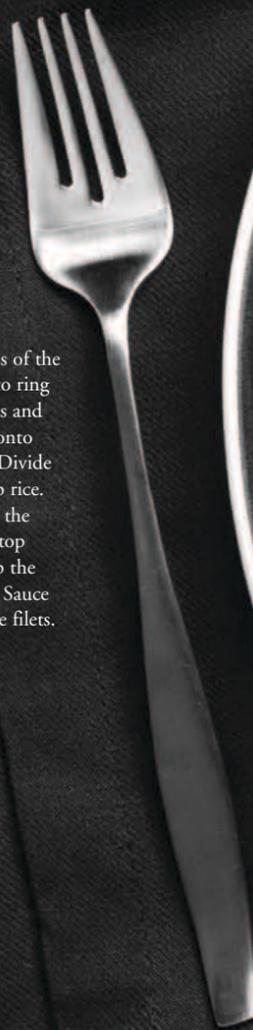
**FLASH-COOKED SUMMER VEGETABLES** Set a large skillet, preferably cast-iron, atop high heat. Add **1 tablespoon canola oil**. When oil is shimmering add **1 cup sliced fresh okra**. Cook, stirring constantly, until the color brightens, about one minute. Add **1 cup fresh zucchini (quartered lengthwise and sliced), 1 cup yellow squash (quartered lengthwise and sliced), 1 teaspoon minced garlic, 1 teaspoon minced shallot, salt and pepper to taste**.

Cook until vegetables are bright and the garlic is fragrant, about one minute more. Serve at once.

**TO SERVE** Press serving portions of the Spiced Rice into ring or square molds and unmold them onto serving plates. Divide Vegetables atop rice. Carefully place the snapper filets atop vegetables. Nap the Cashew Butter Sauce over each of the filets.

Serves 6

The Asian influence is the only constant, however faint, in a sea of flavors and techniques that encompass, French, Italian and Louisiana heritage cuisines at Kin. "We're multicultural, not fusion," Than says.



FIFTH COURSE: DESSERT

## Chef DeWitt Ginn

*Southern Summer Peach & Cognac Sorbet*



Chef DeWitt Ginn worked in high-volume Medicaid pediatrics for 22 years before tossing in his suit for a toque. "In 2010, my wife took me to the Louisiana Culinary Institute for our wedding anniversary – she had it all set up as a surprise. She said she wanted me to enroll. She knew it

was all I had ever wanted to do," he says. "I enrolled two months later in August."

Now 49, he is a relative newcomer to the never-ending demands of a restaurant kitchen. Prior to taking over the helm at Table Kitchen & Bar, he worked in the kitchen at Beausoleil, Chef Nathan Gresham's

Cajun-country-meets-Provence-bistro, also in Baton Rouge.

He approaches his work with a lack of ego rare for one in his newly chosen profession and passion wild game that he incorporates into his house-made charcuterie boards – look for rabbit boudin and a foie gras and sweetbread sausage.

Though the chef's greatest passions may lie in working with wild game, he is clearly just as talented in working with sweets. The elegant perfume of this light summer dessert offers the perfect ending to a warm weather meal.

Add 5 fresh, fully ripe Southern peaches (peeled, seeded and sliced), 2 quarts water and 1 1/2 cups granulated sugar to a heavy pot or Dutch oven, preferably enameled cast-iron, set over medium-high heat. Bring mixture to a boil then reduce heat to medium-low to maintain a simmer for 15 minutes. Add 5 fresh mint leaves and 5 tablespoons Cognac. Return mixture to a simmer for five minutes. Puree with an immersion blender or work in batches to puree it in a traditional blender. Strain through a fine mesh strainer or chinois. Process the sorbet in an ice cream maker according to manufacturer's instructions. Freeze until ready to serve. Serves 6

