

BEST

Throughout the year, we scour Acadiana in search of the latest crop of eateries striving to uncover new favorites and those

NEW

poised to stand the test of time. Our 2017 picks will keep you well-entertained and, better yet, well-fed for months to come.

RESTAURANTS

BY Cheré Coen AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY Denny Culbert



Fried chicken at the Acadian Superette in Lafayette.



White Fox of Breaux Bridge offers authentic Chinese cuisine in the heart of Cajun Country. Dishes include, from left, shredded pork in garlic sauce, Sichuan water-cooked fish, Kung Pao chicken, crispy tempura shrimp, Sichuan spicy chicken and a black pepper beef.

The dishes at White Fox reflect the influence of co-owner Yaoling Zheng's Henan province in China.

White Fox owners, husband and wife team Michael Verret and Yaoling Zheng.



a given that those born and raised in Acadiana will learn how to cook and carry the culinary knowledge passed down to them throughout their lifetime, in turn passing it along to future generations. For some, their culinary soul pulls them into the business, allowing them to share that love with the world. The following are new restaurants that have opened in Acadiana, helmed by folks who started out in other industries only to be drawn into the culinary fold. The dishes, styles and price points vary but one thing's for certain — visitors are sure to be served a distinctive and delicious meal.

WHITE FOX

WHEN MICHAEL VERRET traveled to Japan, he never imagined going to China. But while in Japan he visited an Internet website for travelers and met Yaoling Zheng, a Chinese English teacher hoping to practice her English skills. It wasn't long before the two met, fell in love and eventually married. The only problem was, when Zheng finally arrived in Breaux Bridge, after two and a half years through the visa process, Verret had lost his high-paying oilfield job after a surgery.

"We thought 'what could we do?' because we needed to make money and we joked about opening a restaurant," Verret explained. They did open a Chinese restaurant, in 2015, featuring dishes more authentic to China than typical American-Chinese fare, but soon outgrew that space and moved across town this year near the intersection of highways 31 and 94. "We try to do only real Chinese dishes," Verret said. Zheng hails from the Henan province so many dishes reflect

that region's culinary styles, although there are sugary and rice dishes on the menu more typical of south China and spicy Hunan flavors from the southwest. Ask the couple to explain the differences in Chinese food styles and you'll receive quite an education. It's what comes from skipping the buffet. "Everything she (Zheng) cooks here is the way she would cook it at home," Verret explained. One food style from Zheng's province is the use of spice, something that fits right into the Cajun culinary scene. Zheng makes her own chili pepper sauce. The couple also create their own stocks and almost all the sauces from scratch.

The restaurant's name originates from the first song Zheng sang to Verret in Chinese. "White Fox" speaks of a supernatural woman who is part fox, part human, who changes a man for the better, although they can never be together. "It's an old romantic love story, a famous story from a Chinese book," Verret said. "She (Zheng) is like my White Fox because I'm supposed to help her be successful and she ended up making me successful."

**648 S. BELLE CIRCLE
BREAUX BRIDGE
337-442-1295
WHITEFOXRESTAURANT.COM**





FROMAGE

IT'S LUNCHTIME AND KARL

Boudreaux slaps buttered bread on the grill, then checks the beverage refrigerator, talks to a customer and brews a pot of tea, all while wearing a Jane's Seafood shirt for his second job as waiter at the long-standing New Iberia restaurant.

It's non-stop for the young entrepreneur, who started in the restaurant business when he was 15. Boudreaux owns Fromage, a grilled cheese eatery in downtown New Iberia that's only open for the lunch-time crowd, but he continues at Jane's in the evening to supplement his income.

His hard work and determination is what earned him a "20 Under 20" nod this year from the Daily Iberian.

Boudreaux came up with the idea of a restaurant serving innovative spins on grilled cheese when a fire shut down Jane's and he was unemployed for a spell. He had helped friends start an antique business on Main Street in downtown New Iberia and noticed that part of the building was open, a perfect spot for a small restaurant. After a year of careful research, he opened Fromage on April 26, 2016.

Tuscan grilled cheese with tomato basil soup.



"I just started with an idea and it flourished from there," he said.

The menu, naturally, focuses around cheese and white buttered bread but it's not your mama's grilled cheese. The bread comes flavored with Boudreaux's herb-infused butter and includes cheeses such as goat, Havarti, muenster, gruyere and brie, to name a few.

In addition to his grilled cheese entrées, Fromage offers salads, soups and desserts, including a sweet fig and brie grilled cheese. Boudreaux loves tea and sells that as well, featuring flavors such as coconut crème and grey lavender.

Fromage is also a family affair. Boudreaux's mother, Sarah Boudreaux, works the front counter.

"I've had lots of help and a good base," Boudreaux said of his new adventure. "It's definitely been interesting and fun. It's been a learning experience."

**145B W. MAIN ST.
NEW IBERIA
337-321-9543
FACEBOOK.COM/FROMA-
GENEWIBERIA**



A change in employment prompted young entrepreneur Karl Boudreaux to open a lunchtime restaurant dedicated to varieties of grilled cheese sandwiches, among other menu items. All sandwiches are enhanced with his special herb-infused butter.



Right: Sloppy's Downtown in Lake Charles is known for its innovative tacos and other styles of global street cuisine, plus a popular pizza owners call the "greatest pizza ever."

Chef and owner Brett Stutes works in the open kitchen of Sloppy's Downtown of Lake Charles, the second brick and mortar shop for Stutes' take on international street cuisine.



SLOPPY'S DOWNTOWN

FOR THE PAST TWO YEARS Brett, Derek and Amanda Stutes served up what they called "globally-inspired tacos" on the streets of Lake Charles from The Sloppy Taco food truck; Brett Stutes had started the business when he was between jobs. In early 2016, the street food found a storefront.

This past January, the trio opened its second brick

and mortar shop, Sloppy's Downtown at 329 Broad St., next to the Lake Charles Children's Museum. Sloppy's still offers street cuisine but the new establishment branched out with international flavors.

"Same owners, different concept," Amanda Stutes said. "We're still doing global street food — that's our cuisine. We're trying to pull in from different

Sloppy's
Downtown
ribeye
sliders and
fries



places and how they're doing street food."

In addition, diners will find traditional American dishes such as the ribeye slider, oyster poboy and "the greatest pizza ever," Stutes said.

This summer, Sloppy's Downtown expects to open a brewpub serving its own craft beers, as well as selections from other Louisiana breweries such as Great Raft of Shreveport, Bayou Teche Brewing of Arnaudville and Crying Eagle, which is also located in Lake Charles.

**329 BROAD ST.
LAKE CHARLES
337-602-6365
SLOPPYS-DOWNTOWN.COM**



One of Acadian Superette's most popular plate lunch special combines a fried egg with smothered seven steak, petit pois, butter beans, and rice.



ACADIAN SUPERETTE

TOBY RODRIGUEZ GREW UP in a Poché Bridge household where food wasn't something you discussed and the word "foodie" was never mentioned, but what was served was heavenly.

"Everyone in my family are amazing cooks," Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez is a visual artist and carpenter but his culinary heritage led to traveling the country showcasing the Cajun butchering style known as boucherie in his Lache Pas Boucherie et Cuisine business.

This spring Rodriguez came home to reopen the Acadian Superette in Lafayette's Freetown neighborhood, serving

up plate lunches indicative to Cajun Country.

"I was raised on rice and gravy and always dreamed of opening a butcher shop," Rodriguez explained. "It seemed natural to have a restaurant attached."

The butcher shop is coming; Rodriguez and partner Dr. Robert Autin have renovated and reopened the Superette in phases with the first phase being breakfast and plate lunches. In addition to the future butcher shop, Rodriguez hopes to open a bar in the back of the Superette, what was once a Lafayette speakeasy.

For now, the Superette's all about the food — fried chicken,

Chef Toby Rodriguez, a native of Poché Bridge, was raised on rice and gravy. He serves up plate lunch specials at the Acadian Superette, a landmark in Lafayette that Rodriguez recently adopted. At top, Rodriguez's chicken, a popular dish, is seasoned before being battered and fried.

shrimp étouffée, smothered cabbage and naturally lots of meat dishes, fresh from local slaughterhouses. The Superette's former owner, Lynn Derenthal, remains as well as the personal atmosphere of a corner grocery store.

It's all about making a meal feel like home, Rodriguez explained. "I want people to come in and feel like family. I want that essence to extend beyond the food. You walk in and feel like you're in grandma's house. I don't want it to be any different from what they eat at their house."

**600 LAMAR ST.
LAFAYETTE
337-237-4509**



CINCLARE

MICHAEL DALMAU OF BATON

Rouge worked in the restaurant industry for 12 years, then morphed into medical and surgical sales, with the last five years in Thibodaux. A friend who owned a building in the heart of downtown Thibodaux was looking to sell and Dalmau found himself veering back into the culinary world, what he calls his “dream.”

He opened Cinclare on West Third Street in February 2016, serving up what he and Chef Quinnton Austin label “Southern Bistro.”

“This one was dumb luck and good fortune,” he said of finding the right property. “It was started as a fine dining restaurant, which Thibodaux could use more of.”

The cuisine is upscale but not too upscale, he insists, incorporating elegant presentations and techniques with a more rustic flavor. Louisiana farms and companies are used as much as possible, such as locally produced hydroponic lettuce, microgreens from Mossy Ridge Farm and shitake mushrooms from Dulac.

“We try to source as locally as we can,” Dalmau said. “We’re kinda like a Louisiana bread basket.”



Appetizers such as Cinclare’s mushroom toast accented with sherry and a smoked catfish dip with crostini and house-pickled jalapeños, are perfect small dishes to share.



Right: Executive Chef Quinnton Austin, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of New Orleans, heads up the kitchen at Cinclare, serving contemporary Southern cuisine with a rustic flare. Much of the cuisine is produced using Louisiana farms and companies.

He and Austin change the menu every three months — with some popular dishes remaining — and adjust flavors for the seasons. Tomatoes, for instance, will be incorporated into heirloom dishes for the summer.

Cinclare also serves up signature cocktails, some classics such as the Old Fashioned, one of Dalmau’s favorites, and some original. The Robichaux, for instance, marries Bayou Satsuma Rum, ginger ale, lime, Angostura bitters and simple syrup, a drink inspired by a friend.

The restaurant is open Wednesdays through Saturdays to allow Dalmau time with his young children.

“We’re blessed to open four nights a week and have our Sundays free,” he said.

**601 W. 3RD ST.
THIBODAU
985-227-9507
CINCLAREFOODANDDRINK.COM**

Cinclare’s Old Fashioned cocktail is owner Michael Dalmau’s favorite. “I adhere to the classics,” Dalmau said. “I think we did it the right way.”



Alligator and andouille cheesecake with a crawfish cream sauce.