

**Friday, January 12, 2007****Your Top 25?**

Well, what do you think? I just published my **first-ever Top 25 list of the Triangle's best restaurants**, and I'm dying to hear your opinion. For those who didn't catch the list in this morning's N & O, here it is:

FINE DINING

1. Bonne Soirée
431-10 W. Franklin St., in The Courtyard, Chapel Hill
928-8388
Cuisine: French

Few restaurants in the Triangle can claim as romantic a setting as Bonne Soirée; fewer still boast a culinary talent who can cook on a par with owner/chef Chip Smith; and you can count on one hand the restaurants where service is as polished and welcoming as that headed by Smith's wife and partner, Tina Vaughn. How many restaurants achieve the trifecta of absolutely topnotch food, service and atmosphere, all under one roof? How many are the sort of place you can recommend to the couple celebrating their 50th anniversary, and be confident that they'll enjoy one of the most memorable meals of their lives? There's only one: Bonne Soirée.

2. Fins
7713-39 Lead Mine Rd., Greystone Village, Raleigh
847-4119
Cuisine: Pacific Rim, seafood
Chef/proprietor William D'Auvray's instincts for seafood and Asian flavors are so good it's almost scary. Trust me, in this case courage is richly rewarded.

3. Nana's
2514 University Dr., Durham
493-8545
www.nanasdurham.com
Cuisine: contemporary Mediterranean
A decade and a half after Scott Howell opened his landmark restaurant, it's as distinctive and inviting as ever.

4. Bin 54
1201-M Raleigh Rd., in Glen Lennox Shopping Center, Chapel Hill
969-1155
www.bin54restaurant.com
Cuisine: Steakhouse

The steakhouse of the 21st century - it doesn't get more deluxe than this.

5. Frazier's
2418 Hillsborough St., Raleigh
828-6699

About N&O Blogs



Greg Cox is the restaurant critic for The News & Observer. He was born in El Paso, Texas, and grew up in North Carolina on a diet of

Southern fried chicken (the real thing, cooked up in a big, black cast iron skillet), fried okra, sweet sliced summer tomatoes and the best biscuits on the planet. He has cooked, catered, waited tables and dined in Europe, Canada, Mexico and much of the U.S. (especially the South, Southwest and Midwest).

Though not a graduate of a professional culinary institute, he has been a passionate student of the world's cuisines for more than three decades. He learned to make a soufflé from Michel Pasquet, erstwhile owner of a Michelin two-star restaurant in Paris. He explored Moroccan cuisine with Paula Wolfert, long before couscous was cool. Jean Yueh, author of "The Great Tastes of Chinese Cooking," taught him a few chop sticks tricks. Biscuits, of course, he learned from his mom.

Read Greg's [restaurant reviews](#), as well as [Specialty of the House](#), a recipe request column, and [Epicurean](#).

Contact Greg at gqcox@bellsouth.net.

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www.fraziersbistro.com

Cuisine: Contemporary

Don't let the understated bistro setting fool you. There's some fancy cooking going on in Frazier's kitchen.

ETHNIC

1. Lantern

423 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill
969-8846

www.lanternrestaurant.com

Cuisine: Pan-Asian

Andrea Reusing raises traditional Asian dishes to heights they've rarely seen, even on their home turf.

2. Jibarra

7420 Six Forks Rd., in Peachtree Market, Raleigh
844-6330

www.jibarra.net

Cuisine: Mexican

So you don't think the words "Mexican restaurant" and "gourmet" belong in the same sentence? Allow Jibarra to show you the error of your ways.

3. Red Palace

Beacon Plaza, 3945 New Bern Ave., Raleigh
231-3788

<http://redpalacenc.com/>

Cuisine: Chinese

Szechwan cuisine that's out of the way, but well worth seeking out.

4. Waraji

5910 Duraleigh Rd., Raleigh
783-1883

<http://warajirestaurant.com/>

Cuisine: Japanese

Ask any sushi aficionado where you can find the best sushi in the Triangle, and nine times out of ten the answer will be "Waraji." Go with those odds.

5. Saffron

4121 Davis Dr., in McCrimmon Corners shopping center, Morrisville
469-5774

www.saffronnc.com

Cuisine: Indian

In a region that's blessed with excellent Indian restaurants, this newcomer moves to the head of the class.

LOCAL FLAVOR

1. Magnolia Grill

1002 Ninth St., Durham
286-3609.

Cuisine: Contemporary with a Southern accent

More national awards than you can shake a stick at, every one of them deserved. If Magnolia Grill were a college basketball player, we would have retired its jersey years ago.

2. Crook's Corner

610 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill
929-7643

www.crookscorner.com

Cuisine: Southern (traditional and contemporary)

Trademark shrimp and grits are just one of many reasons that Crook's is a culinary landmark not just for Chapel Hill, but for the entire South.

3. Allen & Son

6203 Millhouse Rd., Chapel Hill
942-7576

Cuisine: Barbecue

The best barbecue in the area, and among the best in the state. No arguing allowed.

4. Big Ed's

220 Wolfe St., in City Market, Raleigh
836-9909

Cuisine: Southern

The dining room kitsch may say "tourist trap," but the food that comes out of the kitchen says "the real deal."

5. Kemp's Seafood House

115 Page Point Circle, Durham
957-7155

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Cuisine: seafood.

Definition of Calabash style seafood: Southern fried, plentifully piled and accompanied by hot hushpuppies and sweet tea; for illustration, see Kemp's Seafood House.

BARGAIN BITES

1. The Barbecue Joint

630 Weaver Dairy Rd., Chapel Hill
932-7504

Cuisine: barbecue, American bistro

A chalkboard menu crammed with dozens of scratch-made dishes, everything from barbecued pork to duck confit salad, practically everything under eight bucks? Are you kidding?

2. Skipper's

1001 E. Williams St., Apex

303-2400

www.skippersfish.com

Cuisine: seafood

New England style fish fry proves that Southerners aren't the only ones who know how to fry seafood.

3. Taqueria Mi Pueblo

1000 Holloway St., Durham
688-3461

Cuisine: Mexican (taqueria)

One of the first of the area's authentic taquerias, and still the one to beat.

4. Abbey Road

1195 W. Chatham St., Cary
481-4434

www.abbeyroadgrill.com

Cuisine: Burgers and sandwiches

Best burgers in the Triangle (they're grilled to order, wink wink); killer fries and onion rings, too.

5. Carrburritos

711 W. Rosemary St., Carrboro
933-8226

www.carrburritos.com

Cuisine: Southwestern

Maybe not the biggest Southwestern burritos in the Triangle, but definitely the best.

WILD CARD

1. Enoteca Vin

410 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh
834-3070

Cuisine: Contemporary with a European accent, wine bar
The perfectionist cooking of Ashley Christensen and one of the best by-the-glass wine lists in the Southeast: a match made in heaven.

2. Vin Rouge

2010 Hillsborough Rd., Durham
416-0406

www.vinrougerestaurant.com

Cuisine: French

With Matt Kelly's authentic bistro fare just around the corner, who needs Paris?

3. Rue Cler

401 E. Chapel Hill St., Durham
682-8844

www.ruecler-durham.com

Cuisine: French

Another impeccable French bistro? Oui, oui! Our cup runneth over.

4. Maximillians

8314 Chapel Hill Rd., Cary
465-2455

Cuisine: Contemporary, fusion

A world of flavors, all on one plate. If how they all work together seems a miracle, you'll quickly become a believer.

5. Underground

861 W. Morgan St., Raleigh
664-8704

Web site: www.comeunderground.com

Cuisine: tapas

Little plate by little plate, talented owner/chef Daniel Taylor will win you over – or is that under?