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# Eat your way through Charleston, South Carolina's oldest city

By Christina Valhoul June 2, 2014 | 7:29pm

When most people think about eating in Charleston, they think of the stick-to-your-ribs-stuff: the fried pickles, the fried green tomatoes and the fried oysters.

While many restaurants still serve up such heart-attack-inducing food, Charleston's dining scene has been undergoing a renaissance.

Chefs are embracing farm-to-table cuisine, small-batch distilleries are popping up, and humble Lowcountry ingredients are being used in innovative ways.

Those beloved Southern grits? You're just as likely to find them whizzed and frozen into a parfait as you are accompanying shrimp.

"The restaurant scene here has just exploded in the past few years," says Matt Lee, co-author of "The Lee Bros. Charleston Kitchen," along with his brother Ted. "Charleston is subtropical, so we have everything from bananas and asparagus to ocean critters available here. People are energized by all the possibilities."

One of Charleston's key driving forces is the James Beard-award-winning chef Sean Brock, the man behind restaurants *Husk* and *McCrary's*. When he opened Husk in late 2010, his credo was, "If it ain't Southern, it ain't walkin' in the door." Less poetically, he told the Charleston City Paper, "F-k prosciutto and red wine. We've got bourbon and country ham."



SPOON ME: A colorful soup dish at Husk. Photo: Andrew Cebulka

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-Matt Lee

While it can be hard to snag a prime time table at Husk, visitors should make a beeline to McCrary's, which also showcases local, artisanal food. The menu highlights the restaurant's suppliers, including heirloom grains from Anson Mills, artisan bread from *Butcher & Bee* and vegetables from Dirt Huger Farm. Herbs and vegetables are grown on the rooftop garden and some of the dinnerware is made by local artists; one glaze incorporates dirt from the restaurant's own woodburning oven.

Go for the tasting menu (\$65 for four courses) and tuck into a winter green salad topped with charred pecans, apple and turnips followed by aged duck served with sweet potatoes and oats. If you still have

room for dessert, don't miss the frozen parfait of grits, served with a huckleberry sauce.

For equally delicious food but in a funkier setting, head to *Two Boroughs Larder*. Don't be put off by its location on a slightly sketchy-looking street. Two Boroughs has a small retail shop selling homemade charcuterie, as well as locally made, small-batch cocktail mixers from *Jack Rudy* and *Bittermilk*; try the Tom Collins mix with elderflower and hops.

The décor is pure Brooklyn, complete with reclaimed wood and exposed light bulbs. Go for the homemade pork scrapple or a bowl of pork ramen; if you're craving something sweet, finish up with a chocolate budino, drizzled with olive oil and topped with sea salt and pistachios.

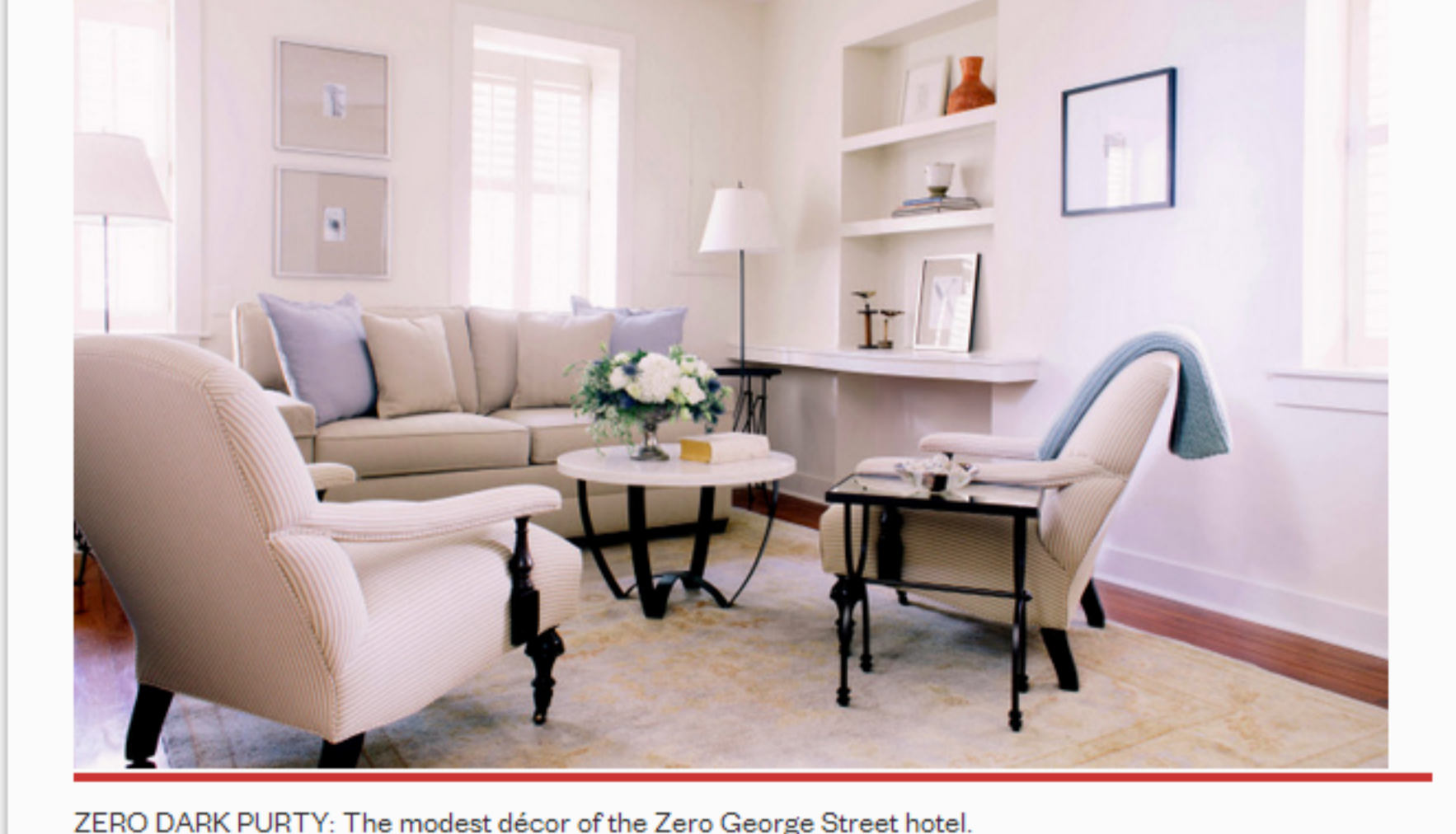
Less achingly hipster is the *Grocery*, where the menu showcases local ingredients as much as possible. The Piggy Plate lets you sample the homemade charcuterie, which can all be washed down with house-made ginger beer or a pickled green tomato martini.

Visitors with a pork craving should head to *Cypress*, led by two-time James Beard nominee Craig Deihl. Deihl makes over 80 types of charcuterie in-house, while locals can participate in an Artisan Meat Share; think of it as a CSA for bacon-related products.

For seafood, head to the *Ordinary*, which opened last year in a restored 1920s bank building. Like Brock, Ordinary chef-owner Adam Lata espouses a gills-to-tail ethos and appreciation for architectural authenticity. His hefty shellfish towers, oyster sliders, amber-jack pâté and trigger-fish schnitzel are served amid 22-foot ceilings, enormous Palladian-style windows and furnishings by local artisans.

If you need a quick sugar fix, pop into *Christophe Artisan Chocolates*, which sells handmade truffles and chocolate bars in flavors including Earl Grey or lavender caramel. Looking for a tasty souvenir? Pick up a bar of beautifully packaged, handmade chocolate from *Sweeteeth*. Owner John Eric Battles is known for his innovative flavor combinations, such as the PB & C, a blend of peanut butter and chipotle, or Cinnapsis, which includes dried apples, candied pecans and cinnamon. Sweeteeth bars are available online or in Charleston stores including *Caviar & Bananas* and *Old Road Mercantile*.

**Stay:** The new *Zero George Street* (from \$299) is an 18-room boutique hotel, spread over a series of historic buildings. The décor is understated and streamlined. A small bar menu features Meyer lemon olive oil cake and cocktails.



ZERO DARK PURTY: The modest décor of the Zero George Street hotel. Photo: Corbin Gurkin

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