



It's a dream to get specialty items like strawberries and chanterelles locally.

-MICHAEL STOLZFUS



# Coquette

## CHANGING THE PARADIGM IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTHERN CUISINE

BY KATY DANDS | PHOTOS BY JAMES GAFFNEY

Coquette, housed in an elegant two-story townhouse on Magazine Street in the Garden District, is the kind of restaurant that true foodies love. The menu is not pretentious, the dishes innovative with perfect execution, and the high beam is on the ingredients. In a city known for fantastic food, partners Kristen Essig and Michael Stolfus have gained a loyal following for what they call a food journey. The imaginative menu, which changes several times a week, is fully inspired by locally sourced and seasonal farm-fresh products. It's an ambitious approach for sure, but one that keeps the chefs on their

seriously creative toes and delivers quite a food adventure for diners. With a spectacular wine list, impeccable service, and many off-menu nights, it is easy to see why both locals and visitors alike place their trust in these capable hands.

The setting is casual with an authentic New Orleans vibe. Beautiful wood floors, walls of old brick, a pressed tin ceiling, and a chandelier or two deliver just the right amount of old school bling. The gleaming bar seats fourteen and many regulars consider that to be the best perch in the

house. Local companies, farms, and growers deliver harvests weekly, Coquette has their own little herbgarden, and everything including bread, pickles, and ice creams are house-made. The ingredients are flavorful and almost require no dolling up, but the elevated preparations and lively combinations served are delicious and you will savor every morsel.

Vegetables such as rainbow carrots, napa cabbage, and purple mezuana come from Covey Rise Farms, a fifty acre farm in Husser; Paradigm Gardens, an urban garden in Mid-City; and Pelican Produce, a grower on the edge of the Upper Ninth Ward. With strong relationships between the farmers and the restaurant owners (Kristen was once the market manager of the Crescent City Farmer's Market), everyone wins. The



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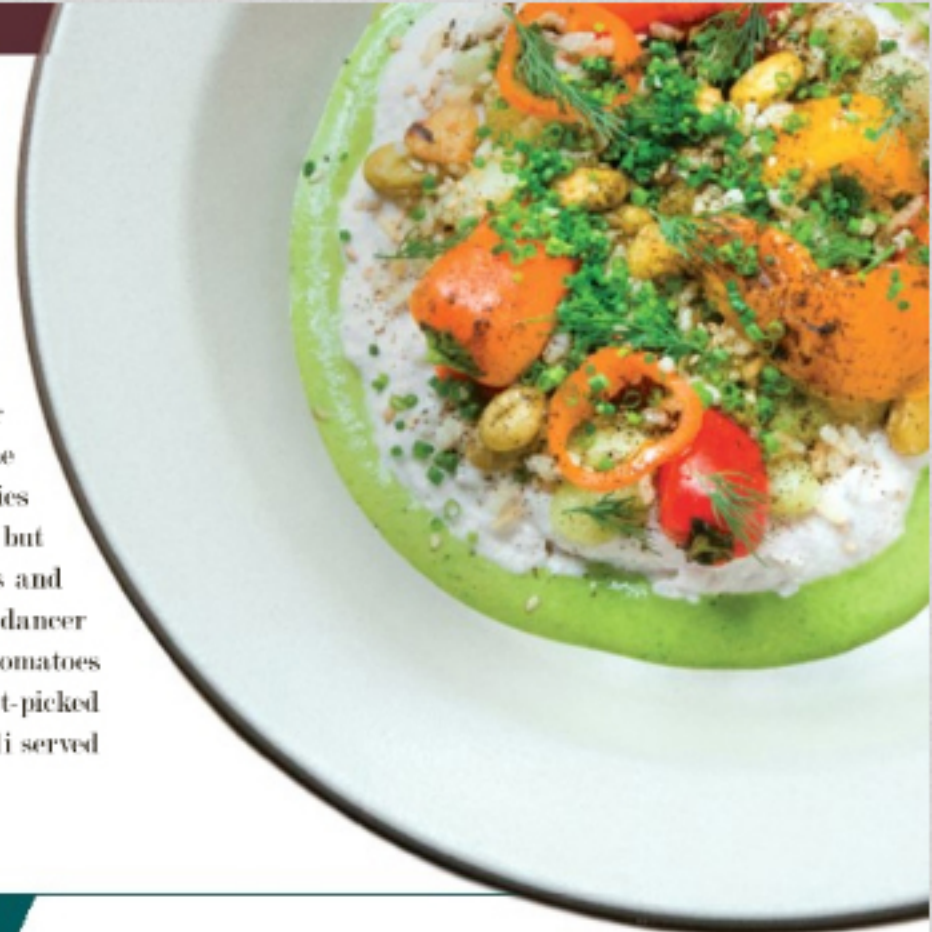


farm is sustainable, talented chefs don't have to look far for special ingredients, and with crop planning meetings chefs know exactly what they will have to work with each month and everything about the quality. This more direct route from farm to fork, with less packaging and less transport, increases profits for everyone involved and the pay-off for the diner is obvious with each and every bite.

Coquette summer desserts like peaches and shiso are made by pastry chef, James Kubie, featuring Alabama peaches, shiso



from Paradigm Gardens, and house-made sunflower seed pralines. It bursts with zesty flavor. Okra, a down home favorite from Covey Rise, is charred and treated to a tasty charred corn remoulade and ricotta salata topped with pickled lunchbox peppers; basil from their own garden is freshly picked to order. There is genuine excitement in the kitchen when the Monday deliveries happen. Smoked Catfish Dip is always on the menu, but Chef de Cuisine, Cesar Nunez, changes the variations and garnishes depending on the day's crop. Crates full of dancer eggplant, artisan varieties of squash, and heirloom tomatoes make their way into late summer dishes in all their just-picked glory. Humble lima beans from Covey Rise become aioli served with puffed rice and the catfish dip.



Fresh food sparkles. It has its own energy that inspires the work we love.

KRISTEN ESSIG

## CHARRED CORN REMOULADE

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| 3/4 CUP CHARRED CORN        | 2 TABLESPOONS CHOPPED CILANTRO                 |
| 3/4 CUP SOUR CREAM          | CRYSTAL HOT SAUCE, TO TASTE                    |
| 3/4 CUP MAYONNAISE          | SALT AND FRESHLY GROUND BLACK PEPPER, TO TASTE |
| ZEST AND JUICE OF TWO LIMES |  |
| 3 GREEN ONIONS, DICED       |  |

Mix all and store in the fridge. Yields about 2 cups.





Even the drinks are fully on board the farm-fresh bandwagon. For example, bar manager, Christopher Brian, uses just ripe cantaloupe to create a garden to glass cocktail, the Tequila Daisy. A hint of smoky mezcal is perfect with the juicy goodness of the exuberant melon flavors. And of course, Kristen and Mike eagerly look forward to Fall. "In collaboration with Patois, we've planned crops with Paradigm Gardens; they have their concert series coming up in their outdoor event space; and we can't wait to see the beets, turnips, and radishes," they both explained. "It's going to be a very good season."



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