

charleston

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December 2010

The Sweet Life

*The Lowcountry's got great taste—
no matter how you slice it*

50 Foodie Faves

Our picks for the best in local culinary delights, from bakeries and barbecue to the ultimate dinner out

Winning Recipes

Meet the top cooks from our second annual cook-off event and get their recipes (see special tear-out cards on page 97)

Plus! Dinner with Daniel Boulud, the Lee brothers on oysters, bets for holiday entertainment, wines perfect for gifting, & handmade toys

\$4.95 US



food & wine

EAT, DRINK, & BE MERRY

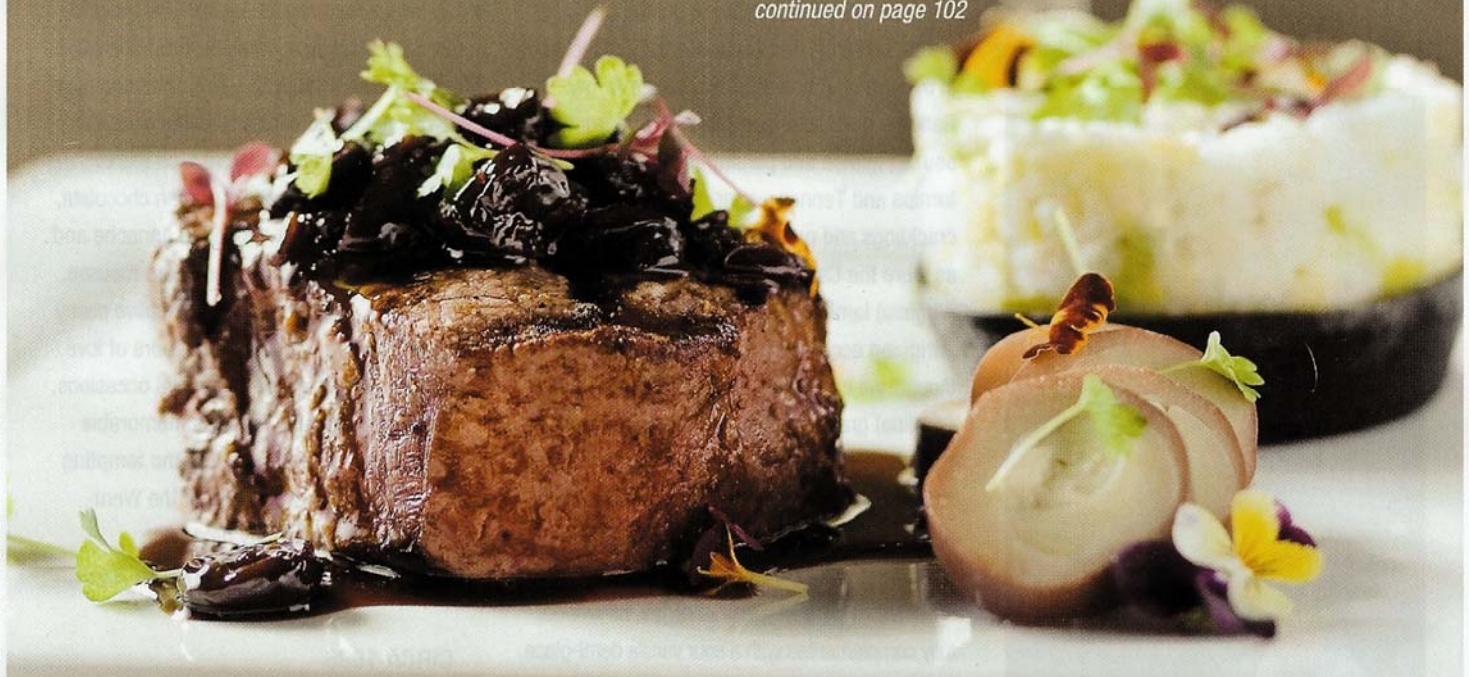
THE REVIEW: Circa 1886

These days, classic seasonal dishes are glowing with good nutrition at Circa 1886 in the historic Wentworth Mansion thanks to executive chef Marc Collins and his interest in building a healthier lifestyle. Luxurious flavor pairings and seasonal ingredients are still the order of the day, but in some instances butter and cream have given way to alternative thickeners, essences, brighter vegetarian options, and hearty whole grains. These dishes have a lighter finish that doesn't sacrifice the bold taste or Lowcountry influence long associated with Collins' cuisine. The best-of-both-worlds result makes this restaurant more special than ever.

Long one of the city's most elegant properties, Circa 1886 offers a sophisticated dining experience in this former carriage house named for the year it was built. The soothing approach along the arbor walk reveals an appealing courtyard. Inside, lush garden views frame comfortably intimate dining rooms, where superbly executed service delivered with warmth and personality creates an *continued on page 102*

Love Me Tender:

Grilled Maple Farms grass-fed beef tenderloin with cherry-braised hearts of palm, Carolina Gold rice and leek casserole, and sour vanilla demi-glace



PHOTOGRAPHS (3) BY CHRISTOPHER SHANE

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easy atmosphere much like that of dining in a graceful private home. The quality and consistency of the Circa 1886 experience has earned the restaurant numerous accolades, including AAA Four Diamond, Forbes Four Star, and the *Wine Spectator* Award of Excellence.

Chef Collins' presentations are intricately rewarding and tastefully complex, utilizing unexpected blends that surprise and delight. Our recent evening began with a favorite Bordeaux Supérieur and demitasse of exquisite mushroom bisque that was the very essence of the forest, with a splash of white truffle oil, distinctive porcini mushrooms, and a hint of cream to bind. Plantation rice-flour rolls with a tender crust and velvet center were served with whipped olive oil, a pleasant alternative to butter that enhanced the lovely rice flavor of the fragrant bread.

The immensely satisfying truffle-infused "one-pot" appetizer included *sous vide* of duck leg confit simmered for 24 hours in chicken broth with baby limas and black-eyed peas, accompanied by unusual whole wheat combread and micro-cilantro garnish. Corn-glazed local shrimp



Executive chef Marc Collins has gradually reinvented the Circa 1886 menu, putting a healthier spin on much of his Lowcountry-inspired fare.



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served with creamy Anson Mills grits, wood-smoked tomato coulis, and julienned asparagus "knots" provided a refreshingly lighter contrast.

Circa 1886's dedication to sustainable American farms and oceans is truly reflected in the entrée offerings. Both Broken Arrow Ranch (Texas) antelope loin with butternut squash quinoa and parsley-rosemary poached turnips and Tennessee farm-raised duck with cracklings and parsnips purée were tempting, as were the Carolina bass and Border Springs (Virginia) lamb loin presented with a host of intriguing accompaniments. Given the season, though, we chose the grilled Maple Farms (South Carolina) grass-fed beef tenderloin ingeniously paired with a petite iron skillet of Carolina Gold rice and leek casserole lightly flavored with cream and parmesan. The combination was amazing, including fresh hearts of palm, braised and crowned with slightly sour cherries, all wonderfully complemented with a sour vanilla demi-glace.

Equally incredible juniper-brined pork tenderloin was a brisk winter's day delight, served with a chestnut sauce and fig-glazed garlic on a bed of split peas and with a John's Island quail egg, over easy, on top. We also noticed

a welcome vegetarian tasting option that is on our must-try list for the next visit.

Among the desserts, sweet potato crème brûlée was a favorite. Its soufflé-like custard, homemade blackstrap molasses marshmallow, and crispy cinnamon frills were quite addictive, creatively accented with fresh chocolate mint. Flourless "Origine" chocolate cake, on this evening made with *terroir*-intense Tanzanian chocolate, was finished with dark chocolate ganache and paired with Grand Marnier chocolate mousse. Both desserts, the handiwork of executive pastry chef Scott Lovorn, were clearly labors of love.

Not to be savored just on special occasions, this local treasure also features memorable wine dinners, valet parking, and the tempting opportunity to take advantage of the Wentworth Mansion's proximity next door.

—Patricia Agnew

CIRCA 1886

149 Wentworth St., (843) 853-7828,
www.circa1886.com
Monday-Saturday, 5:30-10 p.m.
Average entrée: \$28