Farmhouse at Serenbe continues to thrive under Bour

By MERIDITH FORD
The Atlanta Journal-Constitution
Published on: 07/10/2008

Walking through the parking area at Serenbe, it's easy to get lost in lantana, mint and butterflies on your way to the Farmhouse at Serenbe's dining room. I hadn't been back to this hamlet of hospitality tucked into the 900 acres of Chattahoochee Hill Country since reviewing this time last year, when Tony Seichrist was chef. Not long after my review, Seichrist left to go to Italy on a culinary "sabbatical," and returned to take the helm at Holeman & Finch Public House.

His place in the kitchen at the Farmhouse is now worked by Nicolas Bour. Bour chef-owned a lovely restaurant in East Atlanta called Iris — one of the city's best neighborhood gems before it closed in 2005 — where he made a name for himself creating innovative, but simple dishes based on flavor, not form. He resurfaced as executive chef at Midcity Cuisine before it faltered and closed in 2006.

Sean Drakes/Special
(ENLARGE)
Nicolas Bour had a stint in the Blue Eyed Daisy Bakeshop kitchen before moving to the Farmhouse at Serenbe.

Then he arrived at Serenbe, where a stint at the Blue Eyed Daisy Bakeshop eventually led to the Farmhouse kitchen, where he's serving fried green tomatoes, sauteed soft shell crab with a watermelon relish and arugula, and tarts of Granny Smith apples with ice cream.

The Farmhouse was once home to Serenbe founder and former Peasant restaurant owner/founder Steve Nygren and his family, so the kitchen looks like it was flown in from Martha Stewart la la land. But it's not the kind of kitchen a chef like Bour is used to spending time in. It's a cook's kitchen, not a professional chef's kitchen. A six-burner stove with an oven. No fryolater. Not a lot of prep space.

And yet from Thursday to Sunday each week Bour turns out stellar meals. On a recent evening he was particularly concerned about his fried green tomatoes. "You're not going to believe this," he told me, "but I've never made them before." Cut thick, they were a scrumptious first attempt.

Bour's cooking seems an odd fit for Serenbe's setting — all the pastoral offerings of the countryside, including vegetables fresh from Serenbe's organic farm — seem so far away from his inner-city beginnings in Atlanta.

But he fits. He seems like the guy who claimed to never want children, but loves the role of daddy once it happens. During dinner, I noticed him laughing with his two line/prep

cooks as if they were brothers; he tells nearly every one of his guests in the small dining room goodnight with a hug before they leave. It feels like family when you are there, and his lovely farm-to-table food is only a part of it.

Green market in Old Fourth Ward

Studioplex, located at 659 Auburn Ave. in Atlanta's historic Old Fourth Ward, will begin hosting a weekly green market starting July 12 (rain or shine). The market will be held from 8 a.m. until noon every Saturday through the fall across from the main entrance to Studioplex on Irwin Street, near the corner of Auburn Avenue (at the water tower triangle). A portion of the profits from the market will benefit City Church-Eastside, and vegetables not sold during market hours will be donated to Open Hand, an Atlanta-based nonprofit organization.

"In following the farm-to-table concept, our goal is to efficiently bring an abundance of fresh produce from farmers in Habersham and Rabun counties in North Georgia to the heart of Atlanta. We are all eager to do our part to promote sustainability," said Dillon Baynes, principal of Studioplex LLC and one of the three partners in the in-town development. Danneman's Coffee in the Old Fourth Ward will be on hand, too.

Get into the conversation: Visit my blog at www.ajc.com/tabletalk. If your restaurant is new, closing or undergoing changes, or you have a food-related event, we want to hear from you. Send the information — including your name, phone number, e-mail and Web site if you have one — to mford@ajc.com.