

# Atlanta

The streetcar's future  
is on the ballot

**DREAM IT, PRINT IT**  
Inside the city's 3D printing revolution

## 20 GREAT SANDWICHES

FROM BANH MI TO BLT, WHERE TO FIND YOUR FAVES



Crispy Maine  
Lobster BLT  
from Chops



JAY SWIFT'S  
NOBLE FIN THRILLS

SHOPPING GUIDE  
TO THE WESTSIDE

DWIGHT HOWARD COMES  
HOME TO THE HAWKS

NOVEMBER 2016 • \$5.95







Branzino

REVIEW

# Noble Fin

Jay Swift's fish house in Peachtree Corners offers sophistication without pretension.

BY CORBY KUMMER



➤ Noble Fin, a new seafood restaurant in Peachtree Corners, looks bland and anonymous, as if a developer got halfway through building an Olive Garden and decided to turn over the lease to a local operator instead. But looks, you might have heard, can be deceiving. Noble Fin turns out to be the city's most assured and satisfying fish house since Ford Fry's infinitely more stylish the Optimist. What's more, Noble Fin serves a more succulent New York strip than most steakhouses inside and outside the Perimeter. It's the rare restaurant that delivers more than it promises and makes you glad you walked through the door. A large party of old and new friends stayed and stayed, long after the last spoonful of the second order of sticky toffee pudding had been fought over. The droll, insinuating server who made us

feel like regulars, the bussers who didn't need to be asked for serving spoons or water refills—it all felt no-fuss and familial. Two picky 12-year-old young men, for instance, wound up tasting everything, partly coaxed by the server, partly caught up in the congenial spirits. So, family-friendly it is. Also date-night-friendly, as the couples around us would attest. How did this happen? Jay Swift has certainly carved himself a big slice of Atlanta rep. In July he closed 4th & Swift, which for eight years brought a loose vibe to a neighborhood that badly needed one: across from Ponce City Market and the BeltLine, in the former engine room of the Southern Dairies building. When at last PCM opened and Inman Quarter took off, his business, he told Eater.com, "dived." By then, fortuitously, Noble Fin had been open for two months. »

**RATING**

★★★  
(excellent)

**GOOD TO KNOW**

Why a fish house? With so many New England transplants in metro Atlanta, says Jay Swift, the decision was easy. Of course, a fish house here

means you can dine on the patio more often than if you were in Boston. Noble Fin's patio seats 20.

**VITAL STATS**

5260 Peachtree Parkway, Peachtree Corners, 770-599-7979, noblefin-restaurant.com



Noble Fin draws on Swift's Baltimore upbringing, his first job at a popular seafood restaurant, and his years working with chefs who knew their way around fish, particularly Lydia Shire and Robert and David Kinkead. The Kinkeads went on to open a Boston restaurant they called Sibling Rivalry, with each brother responsible for half of the menu. As it happens, Swift runs Noble Fin with his son, Jeb Aldrich, dividing labor in a more conventional way: father is owner and chef, son is in charge day to day as chef de cuisine. The guiding idea of the restaurant, Swift told me, was a traditional fish house that drew from not just his experience in Boston and Baltimore, but also Charleston and Florida. (Though the emphasis is on the Northeast; much of the fish, the servers will tell you, is flown in from Boston.)

Maybe it's the father-son combination that accounts for the easy mastery of such a wide range of dishes. Doubtless it's due to Swift's pedigree. I certainly haven't had better crab cakes in Atlanta, and would



Chef Jay Swift (center)

have to think where I've had better ones anywhere: big flakes of crabmeat held together with minimal mayo and gently seasoned. I was sure the crisp crust with alluring black spots was a crumb topping, maybe the saltine served with the cakes. Nope, Swift told me: The crust is the little bread cubes that he uses as a binder, an essential component of "the oldest recipe I ever had." Those cakes alone—hot, fresh, greaseless, crumbly—are worth a trip to Peachtree Corners.

Swift also understands texture—particularly important when it comes to fish. Soft: octopus first cooked sous vide (cheating, I know, but excusable for something so

Pan-roasted grouper



usually tough) and then broiled for some char, served with patatas bravas—tiny, irresistible deep-fried potato cubes with smoked paprika and cumin in a spicy mayo. Firm: grouper so white, dense, and cleanly striated when I cut into it that it could have been Dover sole. The grouper

was meaty and compact, pan-roasted with a clean sauce of fresh corn put through a juicer and thickened over heat, served with wilted spinach, lightly cooked grape tomatoes, and roasted cipollini onions. The dish was late summer, distilled. Branzino also seemed like a new fish, with a crackling, fat-free skin and tender white meat I could have sworn had a gamy undertone, something you never find now in the invariably farmed fish. Or maybe it was the smoked eggplant puree hiding at the bottom of the plate, accentuated by the smoky notes of the Oaxaca, arbol, and pasilla negro chiles Swift puts into a homemade harissa and serves with cranberry beans. That combination, with the addition of fire-blistered shishito peppers and chunks of firm pattypan squash, made this one of the best conceived dishes of the year. "It flies out of here," Swift told me.

Sides of wilted spinach and simple butter-braised multicolored carrots are the kind of respectful accompaniment most chefs shy away from charging for; as worth the price as they might be, they come across as too simple for most diners. Swift and Aldrich give their customers credit for recognizing real sophistication.

Not convinced by the vegetables? Steak removes any doubt about mastery. The New York strip, naturally saline and mineral, is served carnation pink inside and jet black outside over a perfectly classic, right-ly sticky red wine-veal reduction. It was as good a steak dish as I've had anywhere in Atlanta, and reasonably priced at \$39.95.

Noble Fin is not without missteps. Scallops were fine, but served over gloppy polenta with uncrisped pork belly "croutons" that seemed like ceaselessly chewy undercooked fat, and with a spiced tomato jam that was way too sweet. Rigatoni with clams was clotted with salty grated cheese that clumped together; combined with the broiled clams and al dente pasta, the dish was a study in rubber bands.

Desserts, while not quite as thoughtful as the sides, are still better than they need

to be, and very satisfying. A thick Key lime tart is served on a thin crust; poached peach slices (not quite enough, truth be told) arrive with a sugar-crusted shortcake. As the server foretold, the toffee pudding—a holdover from 4th & Swift—was what we had to order again. It's little more than a date-thickened batter baked in a cup, served with a caramel sauce. But the sauce, deep with the flavor of burnt sugar, is so thick it could hold up

a spoon—if only there were enough of it to submerge the spoon.

A friend, reaching for a second spoonful of buttery and (very) sweet grits, pronounced this and most of the food at Noble Fin "comfort food." That it might be. It's also semi-spectacular for a place without a hint of pretension, a place that wants little more than to make you feel at home. **D**



New York strip