

PHOTO BY KATHY KEENEY

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Vintage Tavern, On Pointe

BY MARISA MARSEY

SAM MCGANN IS A MAN SECURE IN HIS SOUTHERN ROOTS. At his new venture, Vintage Tavern, the Norfolk-born-and-bred chef-restaurateur isn't afraid to slather on the pimento cheese, plate up the deviled eggs, or dip into the larder for spoonbread fixin's just because he's been lauded in the likes of *Gourmet* and *Wine Spectator*. He sautés local shrimp to bed down on Carolina red rice and crams ham into buttered biscuits. But the ultimate litmus test of his culinary allegiance? Above the bottled water options on the menu: Sweet tea.

He labels Vintage Tavern, the restaurant at the mouth of the burgeoning Governor's Pointe development in Suffolk, as seasonally Southern and, indeed, it reverently heeds Mother Nature.

She responds, "Call me Mama, *sugah*."

But make no mistake, while the fare hits below the Mason-Dixon belt, that belt from this angle looks like a Ralph Lauren or Tommy Hilfiger. Sumptuously-appointed Vintage is a long way from your humble covered-dish affair. Bye-bye Mason jar, hello Riedel crystal.

Beyond the accoutrements, though, and there are plenty, including a geometry of plates that could elucidate Euclidian theory, it's Vintage's accent on freshness, meticulous sourcing of products, and a "food forward" quest to continually improve that ramps up country cooking to the field of cuisine.

Brian Mullins, a developer of this neighborhood on the Nansemond River sprouting 141 homes and a crescent of shops that could have been lifted from Colonial Williamsburg, and his wife Teresa partnered with McGann and his wife Cindy after a mountain bike accident sidelined Meredith Nicolls from the project (as the astute restaurateur recovers from serious injuries at home with wife Kathy, the

team looks forward to consulting with him in the future).

They've fashioned a looker of a restaurant. *Architectural Digest* might just get there first to snap pics of the stunning masonry, two-story tall tapestries, and mighty wood beams plus sections of wood ceiling salvaged from the property's original homestead before *Bon Appétit* has a chance to swoon over the griddled (not fried) jumbo lump crab cakes. It feels like a *haute* mountain lodge in the Adirondacks or a rustic-chic retreat in northern California. Thoughts of noble England and hunting parties surface, too (especially in the tavern room where a light menu is served, and Brian Mullins's trophies of elk, fallow deer, and caribou keep watch).

Wherever it takes you, it's a place called "the good life."

Your table might be next to one of two stone fireplaces, or ringside at the divine 1,300-bottle wine cellar (Vintage has wines so thrilling they'll give you goose bumps including an Opus One vertical that doesn't skip a beat and big name Bordeaux; the elegant, egalitarian list ranges from reasonable by the glass pours and nice \$20 bottles to Château Pichon-Longueville-Lalande 1982 Pauillac for \$825). Or you could be tucked into a raised, U-shaped booth, complete with



Classic southern fare goes upscale at Vintage Tavern. The sampler showcases Sam McGann's use of quality local ingredients that elevate traditional dishes into culinary gems.



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