

Charlotte's best new restaurants

By Helen Schwab, Posted: Thursday, Jan. 07, 2010

Best new places of '09

1. **Soul Gastrolounge** 1500-B Central Ave.; 704-348-1848; www.soulgastrolounge.com Hipster hangout, neighborhood cubby – resist the temptation to define it and you'll be getting the Soul vibe. Fab sushi; dips, nibbles, rolls and other small-plate goods that shift but stay interesting (slurp-worthy bone marrow; veal fries; chimichurri beef skewers), in a swanky-yet-comfy setup. The music – with local and imported DJs – is also worthy of attention and doesn't drown out flavors.

2. **The Liberty** 1812 South Blvd.; 704-332-8830; www.thelibertycharlotte.com

If you give a chef a lager, he'll probably want a menu to go with it. That's what you get here: a rich lineup in casual digs with prices low enough to go with beer, albeit good beer (so not *that* low). And wine. Lush flavors range from pork rinds and pork belly sliders to burgers to pot roast, with high-end ingredients dotting descriptions.

3. **Crepe Cellar** 3116 N. Davidson St.; 704-910-6543; www.crepecellar.com

Molding itself to a neighborhood takes time and hard work. This place continues both, with smart service to boot, and a commitment to community building with special events, local features and, oh yeah, those really cool windows.

4. **Vivace** 1100 Metropolitan Ave.; 704-370-7755; www.vivacecharlotte.com Housemade orange bitters with Prosecco and a sugar cube is the kind of detail the Raleigh-based Urban Food Group revels in. Housemade ricotta and lemon marmellata (like marmalade) as a first course (with crisp toasts); salty egg pizza; pretty veal saltimbocca; swordfish with lentils braised with guanciale (like bacon but better) and more reside in a contemporary setting with two floors and cool views.

5. **Good Food on Montford** 1701 Montford Drive; 704-525-0881; www.goodfoodonmontford.com

Bruce and Kerry Moffett do the small plates thing with panache and the painterly strokes of chefs having a good time, from those gnocchetti with pancetta to lamb tagine.

6. **Mez** 210 E. Trade St.; 704-971-2400; www.mezcharlotte.com



Patrons can look down on the lounge area at Mez from an upstairs dining area. Mez is located at the EpiCentre on East Trade St. in uptown Charlotte. JEFF SINER - jsiner@charlotteobserver.com

Eclectic, urban, interesting: The EpiCentre got this one right. Klime Kovaceski's food shows lots of influences and it's varied enough for clientele who care about food. Don't miss the black cod.

