



Chef Ryan Smith

## » CHEF TALK

# The South Rises Again

Rock star chef Hugh Acheson opened his first Atlanta-based venture, Empire State South, last fall. The four-time James Beard Foundation nominee, who owns Five & Ten, The National and Gosford Wine in Athens, Ga., tapped Ryan Smith to head the kitchen at the highly anticipated restaurant where fresh, local, seasonal ingredients get transformed into contemporary Southern cuisine. Smith, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., has worked in some of Atlanta's most renowned restaurants including Bacchanalia, Canoe and Restaurant Eugene. We talked to the rising star to learn more.

### **What's it like working for another chef?**

I'm excited to work with Hugh and the concept of what this restaurant is; I think there's a lot of potential here, not a whole lot of boundaries. Hugh and I talk about dishes and work really well together. We look at things the same way.

### **What's your approach to cooking?**

I like to do things a little different than traditional, taking the ideas of old Southern food and putting a twist on it. For example, instead of traditional chicken and dumplings we

made celery root dumplings and paired them with local chickens that were braised then roasted in the oven for a combination of crispy and tender-soft textures.

### **What's your take on the Atlanta dining scene?**

I think the next movement for Atlanta dining is very casual with focused service and chef-driven food. We're steering away from fine dining—I have a deep love for fine dining, but when I go out I don't want to feel stuffy and pretentious, I want to wear comfortable clothes.

### **What's the most popular thing on your menu?**

At lunchtime it's soup. For dinner people are really going after the pork chop and a dish called "In Jars" which is a variety of preserved meats and vegetables and is extremely popular.

### **What's your favorite thing to cook?**

I really like charcuteries and have already put my stamp on a lot of things by incorporating charcuterie into dishes.

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