



FARM FRESH

Newly minted Miller Union proves sustainable and local are palate-pleasing terms

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

When a trend becomes mainstream, embracing it is no longer a way to stand out among competitors. Now that cooking with local, seasonal ingredients is no longer considered innovative—sad to think it ever really was—the co-owners of Miller Union, now open on Atlanta's Westside, are distinguishing their business by focusing on sustainability.

“Our original idea was to focus on local and sustainable as much as possible, and everything in the business plan came back to that,” says Neal McCarthy, co-owner and general manager, who most recently worked as general manager at Fritti and Sotto Sotto. The goal is to create a seamless dining experience defined by sustainability. Thus, not just food ingredients are sourced locally, but interior finishes as well, such as tabletops made from Georgia heart pine. Heck, even the building and the

restaurant name are recycled: Miller Union Stockyards formerly occupied the space.

Sustainability “just seemed like a natural progression to me,” says Steven Satterfield, co-owner and executive chef, who most recently worked as executive sous chef at Watershed and is a member of Slow Food, Georgia Organics, Southern Foodways Alliance and Green Foodservice Alliance. “Working with local farmers means a lot to me; it makes you feel better about your work.” Thanks to the restaurant's full-scale recycling and composting program, Miller Union has “already diverted more than three tons of waste since we opened eight weeks ago,” says Satterfield. “We're making more of a difference. Restaurants do generate quite a bit of waste, and a lot of it is recyclable or compostable; it's nice to see it diverted to proper channels. Completing the cycle is rewarding on a certain level that's unexplainable.”

“We're 94 percent landfill-free,” says McCarthy. “That's huge. We have a very small dumpster outside, and we don't use

it because of our composting and recycling programs.” Vegetable, fruit, fish and meat scraps are composted. Bottles, cans, paper products and most packages are recycled. (Plastic wrap and metal bottle tops are among the few items that currently can't be recycled.) Not using tablecloths saves water and eliminates the need for detergent.

At present, such moves can be less beneficial to the bottom line than environmentally unfriendly alternatives. “As far as profits go, it does cost more,” says McCarthy. “But in the grand scheme of life, it's the best thing to do and that's our focus.”

Doing the right thing may mean compromising on profits, but trade-offs aren't routinely on the menu. “The food that I like is very fresh, light and prepared in the best sense,” says McCarthy. “We're not about big farms and the cheapest food, but about the best quality we can put on the plate.”

Georgia is the preferred but not exclusive source. “It's sometimes unrealistic, especially this time of year,” says McCar-

DINING ESSENTIALS

MILLER UNION

999 Brady Ave.
678-733-8550
www.millerunion.com

Hours: Dinner: Mon.-Thu., 5-10 p.m.; Fri. and Sat. 5-11 p.m. On Tuesdays, family-style three-course Harvest dinner is offered in addition to regular menu.

Reservations: Recommended but not required

Dress: Business casual to whatever's comfortable

Cost: Entrées range from \$16 to \$32

Alcohol: Full bar

Parking: Valet

thy. “With the cold snap, Georgia produce has come down a lot in terms of quantity.” The goal is to buy as locally as possible; for example, to choose seafood from the Southeast instead of Alaska.

“I approach the menu thinking about what I would want to eat if I went out to dinner,” says Satterfield. “It's as simple as it gets.” Popular menu items include slow-braised rabbit with wild mushrooms and grits, egg baked in celery cream with rustic bread, chicory lettuces with grapefruit and shallot vinaigrette, and griddled chicken with roasted carrots and braised cabbage. Food seasonality, availability and quality inspire frequent menu changes.

“I'm a creative person and want to express locally raised foods including produce, meats and cheeses,” says Satterfield. “That parameter forces you to be creative on a daily basis, depending on what you can get your hands on. It's kind of an old-fashioned idea before the industrialization of food, and it's near and dear to my heart. I think it's important to support local agriculture.” **SP**