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Introducing Our New Fall & Winter Menu



agave



Bob Amick

COURTESY OF TRG

INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS

Restaurateur awarded for creativity and success

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

For the first time in its history, members of the Georgia Restaurant Association recognized outstanding members with the Georgia Restaurant Association Crystal of Excellence (or GRACE) Awards at a gala event that was held on Nov. 11, 2007. The Innovator Award went to Bob Amick, founder and managing partner of Concentrics Restaurants and Hospitality Solutions, which includes One Midtown Kitchen, Two Urban Licks, Trois, Lobby, Room and more in its portfolio. The Sunday Paper met with Amick to talk about his past accomplishments and future plans.

WHAT'S COOKING

Q Congratulations. What does this GRACE Award mean to you?

A I think any time you get industry recognition it's always nice. You toil away at what you do and the immediate recognition is if you're successful in what you're doing from a consumer perspective. The No. 1 goal is to be successful. Secondly is recognition. We're not out there doing cookie-cutter concepts but bringing new concepts to the Atlanta market. It's nice for the industry to stop and say "thank you."

What inspires you?

I'm a heavy right-brain kind of guy. I enjoy the creative process. I enjoy doing research behind concepts; it's the fun part of the job. We keep reinventing ourselves with different concepts, and it keeps me challenged and mentally strong and also keeps us at the forefront. The restaurant industry is fast-paced and always changing. You have to adjust to stay successful, and that's certainly what we're trying to do.

We spend a lot of time traveling to other marketplaces in the world looking for inspiration. We look at what's going on in other places to see if there's any adaptability back in the Atlanta market. Every idea doesn't work marketplace to marketplace. We're not necessarily looking for concepts but interesting ideas and interpretations, confirming where

our head is at and if we're ahead of the game or behind the curve.

Does every detail support one big idea?

There are certainly some details that need to be carried out to be true to what the concept is when you create a restaurant. It has to be clear. Yet obviously there are innovations within a concept, for instance the wine program at Two Urban Licks. Wine in barrels wasn't part of the initial concept but something that evolved out of the concept. Wines are actually shipped to us in barrels, then, by gravity flow, we serve wine in five different size containers out of the barrels. We're the first in the United States to do that. It was something great and dramatic that people responded to, although at first some people said it would never work.

It's like a field of dreams: "If I build it, will they come?" And not only that, but will they come back again? It's a legalized gambling on our part in the restaurant industry. It takes a huge capital investment, and there's great risk if people are going to respond to your vision and interpretation. It's a risky, scary business.

What's ahead in 2008?

Dining in our society is becoming so much more casual and accessible. The quality of food gets better. Fast food is trying to reinvent itself. Sustainable, organics, green and farm-to-table are all getting bigger on a national level—being responsible human beings and making that work in the marketplace is a continued challenge not just for us in hospitality, but for those producing food in America.

I think food doesn't need to be complicated, just quality ingredients simply done. At the same time, I think people are more adventuresome in what they're willing to eat. The level of sophistication grows every day and we have to adjust accordingly. People today like to eat less entrées and more small plates so they can try different things and experience more flavors.

We have a restaurant opening in early 2008. Parish is a New Orleans market/restaurant concept. Then we're taking a deep breath and taking a year off to evaluate what we need to work on in 2009 and beyond. **SP**