

944

FASHION
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EAT. DRINK. THINK.
The Food Issue

Bob Amick's career is one that's well lived. In a rough span of 30 years, he's credited with both spot-on culinary concepts and putting chefs, yet to be discovered, on the map. It's safe to say most top talent in this city has passed through a kitchen in his Concentrics group of restaurants.

Here's 944's attempt at picking apart the creative genius's cranium and peeking at what lies inside.

1. Frontal Lobe / Emotions

944: What are some changes that are most directly impacting and affecting the industry?

BOB AMICK: With the recession, consumers want moderately priced dining options. Because of this, we have seen two responses in Atlanta. First, couponing. It is rare these days to pay full price for a meal in Atlanta. It allows people to still walk through our doors and enjoy the ritual of dining. However, will Atlantans ever eat out without a coupon or discount again? Secondly, burgers, barbecue and tacos! These are everywhere. Again, the industry's response to the recession has been inexpensive places to dine out and consumers' wallets are reaping the benefits.

944: How has your passion evolved throughout your career?

BA: It is as insatiable today as it was 20 years ago. What feeds my passion is the ever-changing public. My passion comes from the game of always staying one step ahead.

2. Temporal Lobe / Smell, Hearing

944: What's the most outrageous thing you have ever heard about yourself?

BA: Most recently, that I was sick and dying. I can assure you I am not going anywhere just yet.

944: What's your favorite kitchen aroma?

BA: Walking into my home kitchen and smelling something on the stove or in the oven. It could be anything, as long as it is at the end of the day and in my own kitchen. This is comfort in itself.

944: What's your favorite meal?

BA: A great old world burgundy. A big ass burger cooked medium rare and great home fries. A little sophistication with a little bit of non-sophistication and a little bit of decadence. There's something decadent about drinking a great bottle of wine and eating a hamburger.

3. Occipital Lobe / Sight

944: What's one of the current trends you're excited about right now?

BA: I think food continues to increase in quality and decrease in pretentiousness, which is what we are all about. You don't necessarily have to spend a lot to get a great meal anymore. I think that will continue. It goes beyond the economy ... it's the way people like to eat, socialize and dine. It really is about community.

4. Parietal Lobe / Touch

944: If you could touch any space with unlimited budget, what would you do?

BA: I would re-open TROIS again and nail it this time around!

944: Whom would you want to work with?

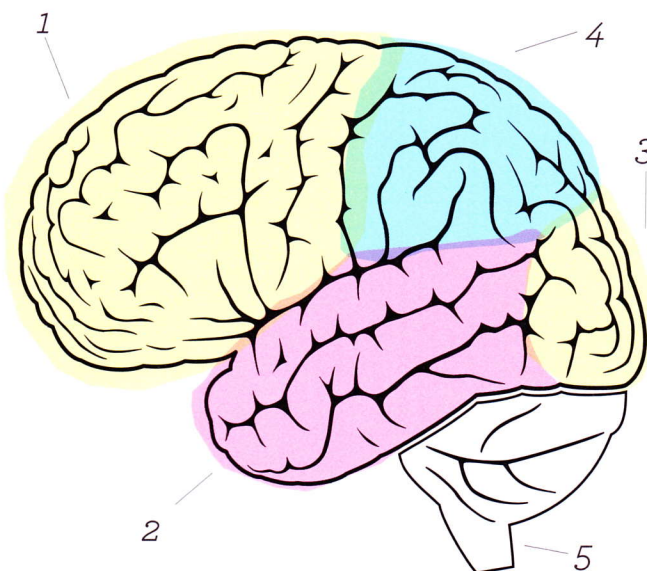
BA: I would love to work with

Danny Meyer. In New York City, he has successfully mastered accolades, as an operator, within a chef-driven community. A lot of folks give us flack for being a restaurant "group." All that means for us is that we have several chef-driven restaurants under the same operator. Meyer's model is this in a nutshell and I appreciate his following.

5. Brain Stem / Connection

944: Do you think it's more about the food or the company?

BA: You always want both because it makes for an exceptional evening. But people trump food. You could be with someone who is incredibly interesting and it doesn't matter that the food is mediocre. You pick at your plate but you are so enthralled with the conversation the food becomes a non-event. Yet you still have a successful evening. Foodies may think otherwise, but maybe that's their problem.



Bob Amick: Inside My Mind

The Westside Boys



In the past 10 years, the westside district has come a long way. These days, everyone who's anyone in the food industry has set up space in the half-mile or so radius of West Midtown, Atlanta, the westside, raising the bar and insecurity in those even thinking of opening doors in that area. The movement westward can be traced essentially to two visionary people and two visionary restaurants — Michael Phillips and Katie Walker, Bacchanalia and Taqueria del Sol, the owners of the Westside Market complex and the first two lease holders in the area respectively. These culinary pioneers put this neighborhood on the map, establishing it as a culinary tour de force.

It begins with the original boy of the westside, Eddie Hernandez, who from day two of opening his doors at Tanqueria del Sol in 2000, had a line outside the door. And he says it hasn't stopped since. "[On] day one, we got more business than we expected. On the second day, the line was out the door like it is today and it's been that way for 10 years."

Antico Pizza's Giovanni Di Palma likens the area and talent to that in Manhattan, saying, "It's SoHo or Greenwich Village in the making and it's smaller, independent operators who have talent and skill and passion to make a high quality product. People will drive great distances just to experience quality in a neighborhood, culture and passion and authenticity."

This month, Bocado turns one, a milestone that in a different economy wouldn't mean as much. Bringing a menu heavy on the

sandwich concept to the forefront, chef Todd Ginsberg says the area is key. "The location is great. You get a skyline of midtown on the back porch. I think it was a lot of things that were happening that kind of came together. It was a collaborative effort among a group of restaurants and the westside itself."

Chef Ford Fry's JCT Kitchen was developed based on the area, the junction of where the train tracks merge. "The approach changed to 'let's find the location and let's come up with what the area needs,' but also fit it into what I am passionate about and what I can get behind and what would be true and authentic to me."

Because of Barry Mills, the burger has become mainstream, but when he was toying around with the notion of his boutique he knew he needed a specific spot to get the Flip concept right, and the original location

on Howell Mill did just that. Mills says, "I was bringing up all these modern elements into the concept so I really wanted it to be in a fine dining type of location. We had a little bit of a discovery effect, a little bit of a destination, but still have the accessibility ... while still having that hip factor."

Abattoir, French for slaughterhouse, comes full circle as Bacchanalia owner Anne Quatrano's latest concept puts Josh Hopkins at the helm, relying on the mindfulness of what the original space was. Hopkins says, "We are located in an old beef slaughterhouse. A lot of people are trying to find a connection with the building or neighborhood they are in. They are trying to find that history and that's basically what the westside is all about."

Westside Legend

Abattoir

Chef Joshua Hopkins
1170 Howell Mill Road, Atlanta | 404.892.3335

Antico Pizza Napoletana

Chef Giovanni Di Palma
1093 Hemphill Avenue, Atlanta | 404.724.2333

Bocado

Chef Todd Ginsberg
887 Howell Mill Road, Atlanta | 404.815.1399

Flip Burger Boutique

Chef Richard Blais, Founder and Concept by Barry Mill
1587 Howell Mill Road, Atlanta | 404.352.3547

JCT Kitchen

Chef Ford Fry
1198 Howell Mill Road, Ste. 18, Atlanta
404.355.2252

Tanqueria del Sol

Chef Eddie Hernandez
1200 Howell Mill Road, Atlanta | 404.352.5811

Indian Food Peppers the City



Food trends come and go. They waft in and sometimes, just as quickly as they arrive, they become so mainstream it's suddenly perfectly acceptable that there's a whole generation of sushi being packed into lunchboxes. But, just like that, yesterday's burger makes way for the jazzed up hot dogs and so on; the wheel isn't being reinvented.

One thing is certain: There has been a considerable rise in ethnic foods, from the fusion of cultures into new forms altogether. The rise of Indian cuisine is apparent; Atlanta alone hosts more than 60 restaurants dishing out Indian food.

From *Slumdog Millionaire* and characters of Indian descent on primetime sitcoms such as Aziz Ansari of *Parks and Recreation* and Mindy Kaling on *The Office*, first comes media and then comes food. Or maybe it's the other way around? Owner of Udipi Cafe, Shyni Sheregar explains, "The visibility of South Asians in

the media and even in music ... I think that's kind of influenced people's interest in Indian food for sure."

For Americans, most Indian food flavors can be traced back to the three regions that are commonly recognized – north, south and east. Here's the breakdown of three restaurants we adore.

One of the oldest Indian restaurants in Atlanta, Raja, Sanskrit for "king," serves simple fare with favorites like tandoori chicken, prepared with a North and East Indian influence. Owner Sam Saha says it's a common misconception that Indian food is only one heat level, adding, "It doesn't have to be spicy food. We serve all types of things from mild to medium, hot, medium hot, it's for everybody."

Udipi is a coastal town in Southern India known for its vegetarian food and Krishna devotees. It's also the town where Shyni's husband, Suresh is from and its influence is seen throughout their three Udipi Cafe locations. They serve an all-vegetarian menu, though their biggest draw is the rise in street food snacks, *chaat*, with a Thursday night focus on the trend. Shyni says, "The whole *chaat* thing was something recent that we did because there was a demand for it. We also added the Indian and Chinese section ... it's called Indochinese, which is really popular in India. It's the fusion of Indian food and Chinese food."

Desi Spice, a popular midtown spot, has witnessed a rise in younger customers, particularly college students, clamoring for that spice. Though Eastern Indian influenced, owner Mani Roy takes the meaning of spice to a whole new level with the ambitious blending of the most recognized flavors, which, he says, incorporates all of India. The restaurant's most popular dishes are the Chicken Tikka Masala entree and the Bhuna Shrimp Puri appetizer. Desi also boasts an addictive Garlic Naan, which is great for scooping up just about anything.

When cooler weather arrives, there's nothing like those warm flavors to tuck into. And here's hoping the popularity in Indian food is one that sticks around for a while.

Desi Spice

931 Monroe Drive NE, Ste. 202, Atlanta | 404.872.2220 | desispiceatl.com

Raja

2955 Peachtree Road NE, Atlanta | 404.237.2661

Udipi Café

1707 Church Street, Decatur | 404.296.6771

3300 Peachtree Industrial Blvd., Ste. J, Duluth | 678.584.5840

2772 Cumberland Blvd., Smyrna | 770.434.6263 | udipicafegeorgia.com