

A Taste of Atlanta's Rising Restaurant Scene

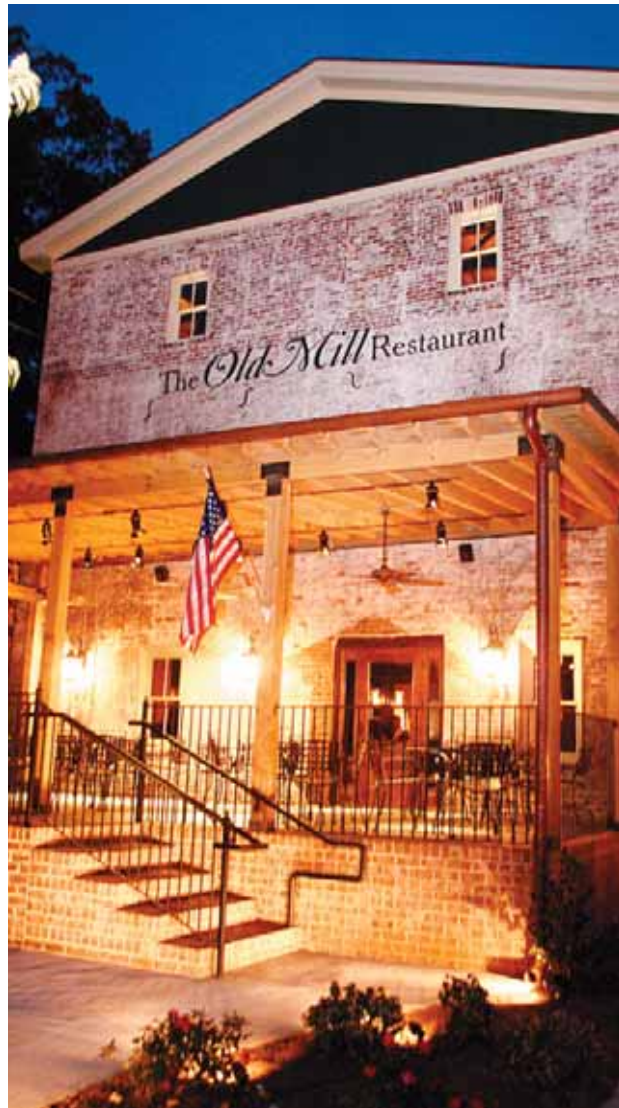


PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OLD MILL RESTAURANT

The Old Mill Restaurant

Country Cookin'

You had a bad day, and cooking dinner seems like the most daunting task in the world. You just want to go somewhere nice — but you don't want to dress up, and it must be nearby because you can't face the thought of fighting any more traffic. You're craving comfort food and a nice glass of wine to erase your stress. Too much to ask? Not anymore!

The Old Mill Restaurant, located in historic Downtown Acworth, provides "a bit of the Old South" without the touristy vibe characteristic of many Southern-style eateries. Housed in an old, triple-level flourmill that mysteriously burned in 1992, the restaurant showcases much of the mill's original structure and manages to find harmony between homey and upscale.

Light wood floors and white tablecloths strike a delicate balance against the rough brick walls and high, unfinished ceilings. Pictures, maps and sketches of the old mill and its founder John Cowan, one of the infamous Four Georgians, hang in the lobby and in the smaller of the two dining rooms. In the main dining room, also used for weddings, corporate luncheons and special events, tall booths are lit by antique-style lamps. Smaller tables fill the center of the rectangular room, and vibrant blue water glasses add color to the otherwise neutral décor. Flour barrels sit above the ceiling beams and trains can be heard in the distance, but smooth jazz music and valet parking make diners feel relaxed and pampered.

Owner and Chef Steven Dudley, also owner of the award-winning Capers restaurant in Kennesaw, uses his 25 years of experience to create a Southern-style menu that offers more than the traditional mac 'n cheese and pulled pork. Expect calamari, Mississippi catfish, grilled rib eye, salmon salad and more.

You may want to start by ordering a cocktail at the bar because once you're seated, the bread basket may captivate your attention. Corn bread and buttery rolls whet your palate for the sizzling skillet of stuffed mushrooms that come next. These

steaming 'shrooms are stuffed with shrimp and crabmeat and are the Old Mill's signature starter. If you don't like mushrooms, order the fried green tomatoes with roasted red pepper sauce and goat cheese; you can't go wrong.

Next, choose from an assortment of seafood, meat, chicken and pasta dishes. (The lobster casserole is a favorite.) Each comes with two Southern sides, like Savannah cheese grits and mashed sweet potatoes. The grits had a thicker consistency than typical but were curiously pleasing. The mashed sweet potatoes were so sweet they could be eaten as dessert! Portions are large, but many come in half-sizes, and there is a selection of salads and sandwiches for those with smaller appetites. Either way, you must save room for dessert; freshly made each day by a special pastry chef, the peanut butter pie tasted like heaven. Creamy, rich and sweet, it was the perfect end to a rough day.

The Old Mill Restaurant
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Acworth
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www.acwortholdmill.com

—Reviewed by Carly Felton



Londzell's Jazz & Blues Café

I never expected to find what was waiting for me behind the door at Londzell's Jazz & Blues Café in Roswell. I approached the restaurant with a slight reservation because it had been quite some time since I last found a place that successfully blended great food, amazing jazz and a warm, friendly atmosphere; however, that's exactly what I found when I opened the door.

When I stepped inside the dimly lit dining room and the first note of traditional jazz touched my ears, I was instantly transported back in time to the old jazz clubs of New York and Chicago. As I looked around the restaurant, several pictures of jazz and blues greats lining the wall greeted me, as did everyone I passed on the way to my table. A large statue of the Blues Brothers was positioned in the bar area as well as a classic picture of the Rat Pack. An assortment of people were laughing, talking and paying visible attention to the musical interaction that was occurring. Clapping after solos and cheering when the band played the first measure of a famous jazz standard, I knew I was among a music-loving crowd. The cool, intimate setting, created by jazz guitarist Londzell Hardy, offered a welcome escape from the hustle-and-bustle of outside. I ordered, sat back and drank in the atmosphere.

The menu at Londzell's is as diverse as the crowd in the restaurant. Immediately, I knew I was in for a treat when I saw the selection of appetizers, which featured everything from jerk glazed hickory smoked riblets to Thai beef satay. The menu, created by Executive Chef Tony Itvie, continued to pique my interest as I came across the selection of entrées that included crispy herb-crusted salmon, Zell's fried shrimp, veal meatloaf and a variety of burgers and sandwiches. When my plate arrived, my mouth began to water as I looked down to find a steaming hot bacon mushroom burger and fries staring me in the face. One bite and that was it; I had finally found a place with good music that had amazing food to complement it. The 100-percent Angus beef burger was tasty to the last bite and I did not leave one fry on that plate. I was already impressed with the music and atmosphere of Londzell's, but the food just might have been my favorite part.

Londzell's Jazz & Blues Café, which celebrated its grand opening in August, is not your typical





PHOTO COURTESY OF JILLIAN PILCH

Londzell's Jazz & Blues Café

dinner-and-music-style restaurant. The club is open from 5 p.m. to 2 a.m. and offers live music seven days a week. Featuring a blues night, a traditional jazz night and contemporary jazz nights, Londzell's Blues & Café is sure to have something for everyone. The club also has an open-mic night every Wednesday, where locals can bring their instruments and play along with other musicians in the area. Londzell, along with managers Cree Barber and Greg Williams, even provide music as the house band, giving the club a truly personal feel.

An important facet to a place like this is seating, and there is not a bad one in the house. From anywhere in the restaurant, you can have a view of the action. If you are not seated at one of the convenient booths or tables, there is a large flat-screen television above the bar depicting a

Londzell's Jazz & Blues Café
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678-795-9100
www.londzellsjazzandblues.com

live scene of the band so patrons can enjoy the sights and sounds without having to move. Thanks to the food, the music and the people, I look forward to frequenting this neighborly destination.

— Reviewed by Stephen O'Kane



A Culinary Surprise

At first glance, the menu at Cenci looks like that of any other casual restaurant with a Southern flair; if you order and never look back, you may never even notice the difference. But those with an acute attention to detail will see the fine print at the top of the page: "all 'meat' vegetarian."

So the black pepper steak, the barbecued spareribs and the seafood jambalaya? Yup, that's right — all vegetarian. And the roast Peking duck? That's made from wheat gluten, too.

But before you run in the other direction, allow your mind to be slightly adventurous. After all, it's not what's in the food but how it tastes. Plus, Cenci is a labor of love. Brothers Phil Martin and Anthony Molden moved

from New York City to share their fondness of flavorful, healthy food; atmospheric, electronic music; and wild, thought-provoking art with the people of Atlanta.

Located off Moreland Avenue near Little Five Points, Cenci features a chic, yet minimalist, exterior. Almost everything inside, from the dark wood tables and chairs to the deep yellow walls, was built and/or designed by the Martins. A strip of dark wood forms the center walkway of the restaurant, providing a "red carpet" to the bar. Rectangular droplights and small candles make it easy to see the edgy art on the walls. Two black chalkboards with smoothie and drink specials neatly written on them hang above the bar, and a DJ/musician enhances the ambiance unobtrusively from a corner.

"We have a very holistic view of the place — from the artery-friendly food to the artsy atmosphere, we want people to feel comfortable here,"



PHOTO COURTESY OF CENCI

Cenci

Phil said. "Cenci is 'Renaissance chic.' It transcends time and age. People come here and have epiphanies."

One of those epiphanies may be that vegetarian does not mean bland. As a chef for the past 16 years, Anthony has quite a few vegetarian tricks under his apron. Sure, the veggie burger is to die for, and the salad descriptions make your mouth water (mesclun mixed baby greens, green apples, feta cheese, dried cranberries, cucumbers and tomatoes, drizzled with homemade honey mustard vinaigrette), but even Southern specialties like collard green rolls — spring rolls stuffed with sweet collard greens, garlic, onion, shredded cabbage and veggie smoked ham (no SPAM here) served with a sweet chili dipping sauce — leave you wondering, "What's the big deal about meat, anyway?" Even the shrimp has a texture so similar to the real thing that non-seafood eaters may wince before remembering that it's not real.

The Martins emphasize that they cater Cenci toward "transitional" vegetarians and their friends. While vegetarians relish a grilled eggplant sandwich or fish tacos, non-vegetarians can enjoy mac and cheese or real-tasting barbecued spareribs. Top it off with a delicious fruit smoothie (try the Mango Moon with papaya, peach, mango, banana and soy milk) and meat-eater or not, you'll be as pleased as a rabbit in a carrot field.

— Reviewed by Carly Felton

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