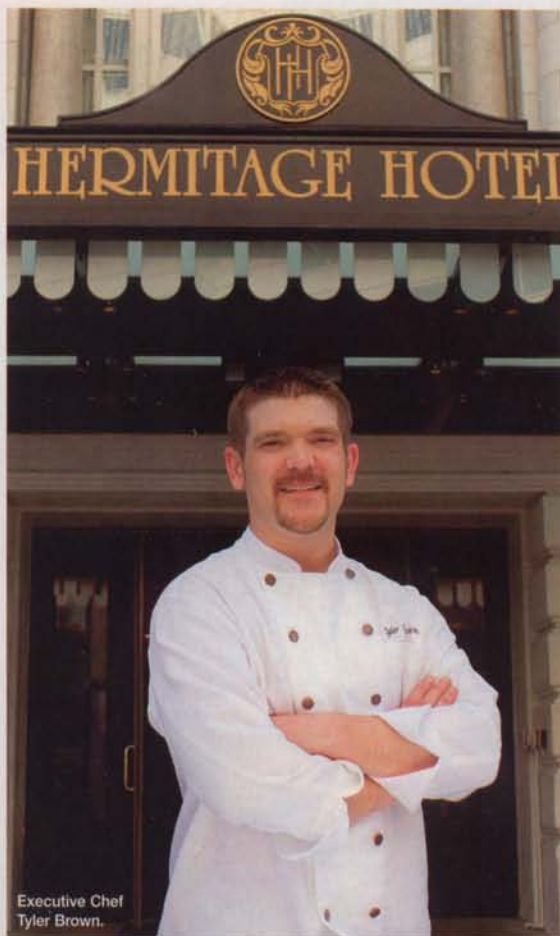


Everyday Opulence

Under a new executive chef,
The Capitol Grille broadens its appeal

By J. L. Reed and J. Allen Murphy
Photos by Susan Adcock

The Capitol Grille at the Hermitage Hotel etched its name among Nashville's finer eating establishments over the past few years under the direction of Executive Chef Sean Brock. Brock's departure earlier this year raised uncertainty as to what would become of the hotel's relatively recently (and exquisitely) renovated dining room, because it was his flair for imaginative menus and ability to turn food into art that brought the restaurant to the forefront of Nashville's fine dining. The answer to the

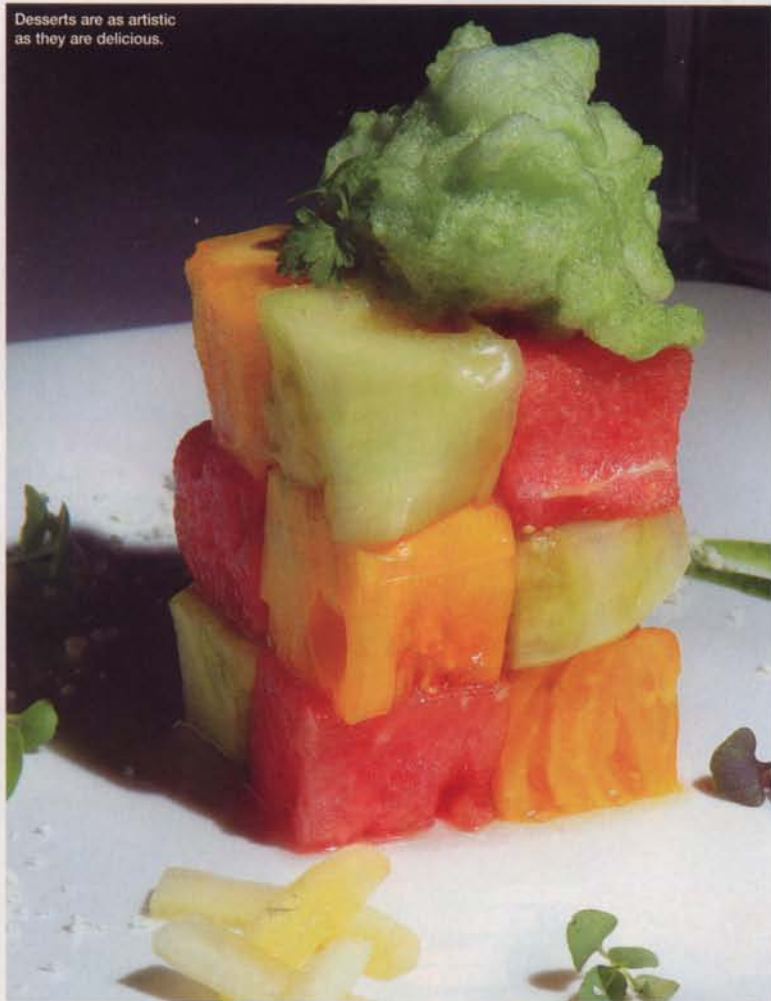


Executive Chef
Tyler Brown.



Grilled Prime
Striploin.

Desserts are as artistic
as they are delicious.



lingering question as to what lies ahead for the Grille's post-Brock future is Tyler Brown, its new executive chef. Brown is not new to Nashville or the Capitol Grille, though—he'd worked with Brock for a number of years as the chef de cuisine.

Along with Brown's promotion, it's apparent there's a new effort to redirect the restaurant into becoming more of a mainstream venue. "We loved being the place where people celebrate annual events, like anniversaries," says Brown, "but we also want to be the place they visit anytime for a great meal, which means pampering our customers with incredible service and serving food so tasteful and satisfying—fixed just the way they like it—that they don't have to wait a year to return. It's like the difference between enjoying art in your home or visiting a museum. We want to be the wonderful painting in your home, not the one hanging in a museum that you visit

once in a while."

The new focus at the restaurant seems consciously directed toward addressing two principles, the first of which, as Brown notes above, is to make the Capitol Grille a more frequented restaurant. And the second, equally important goal is to make sure its diners don't leave hungry. While the Grille built its reputation on artistically inspired presentations, the restaurant's portions were not necessarily built to fill one's appetite. "My staff and I are guided by a few principles," Brown elaborates. "One is that dining is fun, not pretentious. And two, you should not leave the table hungry. Portions are large enough to satisfy normal appetites, not just those of runway models."

The new menu reflects these principles. The entrée choices are heartier and the servings are more substantial. The summer menu, for example, includes Grilled Prime Striploin with horseradish, cauliflower,

The majesty of the Capitol Grille's location—the historic Hermitage Hotel—does not fail to impress.



cippolini onion, and huckleberry jus; Roasted Prime Cote de Boeuf bordelaise with white truffle béarnaise; and Colorado Lamb Loin, with beet and rhubarb in bay laurel jus. There are also a number of lighter items consisting of various salads, yellowtail snapper, wild salmon and grouper, but the overall heartiness of the new entrée menu is undeniable.

Even so, the appetizers, side items and desserts are some of the more notable items on the new menu. Recommended are the Crab Cakes served with a cucumber yogurt and jicama and kiwi, and the Roasted Scallops served atop a bed of corn, vanilla and tomato. The Truffle Mac and Cheese should also be tried. Janet Kurtz, director of sales and marketing for the hotel, notes the pureed Yukon potatoes as one of her favorite menu items.

And the Capitol Grille's pageantry continues with its desserts. Considered by many to be some of the best presentations in the South, the sugary adornments on the desserts shimmer and catch light like brightly lit stained-glass windows. In the right light some of them could as easily be glass chandeliers in the Bellagio as items on dessert plates.

Under the guidance of Tyler Brown, the restaurant's direction is almost surgical in addressing specific elements of the dining experience. Along with portion size and promoting a broader appeal, there's a new emphasis on faster-paced service. As Hotel and Restaurant Manager Ray Minias notes, "Enjoying a wonderful meal should proceed at a pace that keeps up with the diners. Slow, ponderous, overly formal service is a thing of the past. Diners today want to simply enjoy themselves, not impress people, and a ready and responsive service philosophy is essential to this experience."

It's not a little ironic that the departure of Sean Brock, who held an iconic status in Nashville, may result in a broader audience for the Capitol Grille. Under the watchful eye of Tyler Brown and the continued attention to detail, every night is now a special occasion.

The Capitol Grille is located in the Hermitage Hotel downtown at 231 Sixth Avenue N. Valet parking is available at the front door. Call (615) 244-3121 or go to www.thehermitagehotel.com for more information.