

BY H.M. CAULEY

If the opening of Abattoir on Atlanta's Westside has done nothing else, it has added a new word to the city's vocabulary. (Take a quick poll of your co-workers and see how many of them don't know that the word "abattoir" means "slaughterhouse.")

Of course, this latest concept from the brains behind Bacchanalia and Floataway Café has done much more than increase everyone's etymological awareness. It's put new life into the old White Provisions warehouse on Howell Mill Road. It's given local foodies another great porch where they can dine overlooking the sights of the city. And it's established a reasonably priced menu for those who can't afford Bacchanalia's stratospheric prices. (Even the drinks are cheap: Beers start at \$1.50.)

The goal here, and hence the name, is to serve a menu with dishes taken from every portion of the animal. The menu headings remind you that there's a distinct connection between the creature and the food on your plate. (And that may be a connection some diners really don't want to dwell on. But it's hard to overlook when there's an entire menu category devoted to offal—try that word out on your colleagues, too.)

Snacks and starters feature beef jerky, steak tartare, a charcuterie plate and terrines of pork, pig foot and rabbit. The "food in a jar" section serves up pickled shrimp, potted chicken liver and foie gras and rabbit rillettes (think pate). There's also a parsnip soup that arrives in a small Mason jar that, when uncapped, reveals a thick, cold soup.

The main courses from the grill are a lamb loin, a New York strip and a pork chop, as well as a beef and pork burger. The "offal" list features tripe stew, crisp sweetbreads, lamb liver fritters and fried chicken livers. There are a few more options of duck breast, spicy shrimp and cabbage, chicken with schnitzel, rabbit with okra, brisket with sweet potatoes and scallops with curried greens and bacon.

In keeping with owners Anne Quatrano and Clifford Harrison's commitment to supporting local growers, the menu is sprinkled with plates of fresh, local veggies: There's the day's catch in an herb dressing or paired with pickled cabbage; mushrooms sauteed in red wine over grilled sourdough bread; pears in fennel, ginger and arugula; and marinated beets with a house-made ricotta.

The single dining room is a comfortable space done in shades of gray, with plush banquettes along both walls in front of marble-topped or wood tables. The bar overlooks the kitchen, and has a roomy

communal table as well. The far wall of the room is largely glass doors leading to the covered porch. The anchor of the dining room is a long farmhouse table that doubles as the main serving station for the staff. It's pretty, but it's also one of the dimmest dining rooms in town, so much so that the wait staff carries pen lights to help diners read the menu.

A recent midweek visit to Abattoir found the dining room fairly full. But whether locals will line up at Abattoir remains to be seen. Several of the dishes disappointed. It would have been good to know the soup was cold. The sauteed mushrooms were delicious, but the thick slab of sourdough below was so hard even a knife wouldn't cut through it. The shrimp and cabbage bowl, a handful of shrimp in a spicy broth with cabbage and lemongrass, was unmemorable. And yes, it's probably not the best plan to order seafood in a restaurant named Abattoir, where meat is the thing, so stick to items such as the New York strip, a thick, juicy cut big enough for next-day leftovers.

It's unclear how the "food in a jar" concept is going, but eating out of glass jars not bigger than a votive candle holder caused one nearby diner to comment that it was "sort of like eating at Wicks 'n Sticks." The best item in a jar was the Sweetgrass Dairy goat cheese cake, a rich, creamy cake on the bottom of the glass topped with fruit. When asked how they pack up an unfinished dessert in a glass, the waiter explained that they can certainly do so—and they'll charge for the jar. Perhaps the maple bacon beignets would be a better choice; another nearby diner raved about them so vocally it almost reached the level of the famous restaurant scene in "When Harry Met Sally."

Still, there's something a tad unsettling about the curved, rustic "Abattoir" sign over the stairwell, and those juxtaposed meat cleavers on the menu and dishware. Sometimes it's hard to keep your mind on the food when you're constantly reminded of what Abattoir really means. SP

DINING ESSENTIALS

ABATTOIR

1170 Howell Mill Road  
Atlanta, 30318  
404-892-3335  
www.starprovisions.com  
HOURS: Tues.-Sat., noon-11 p.m.  
RESERVATIONS: Yes  
DRESS: Casual  
COST: Appetizers, \$2.50-\$16; entrees, \$12-\$30; soups, salads, \$7.50-\$10; desserts, \$7.50-\$12; beers, from \$1.50; cocktails, \$10-\$12  
ALCOHOL: Full bar  
PARKING: Free in adjacent garage

ANIMAL FARM

A closer look at Abattoir



Lamb liver fritters



Pork belly and tripe stew

PHOTOS/JAMES CAMP

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[editorial]



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