

Date Night Dining: Scenic City Supper Club

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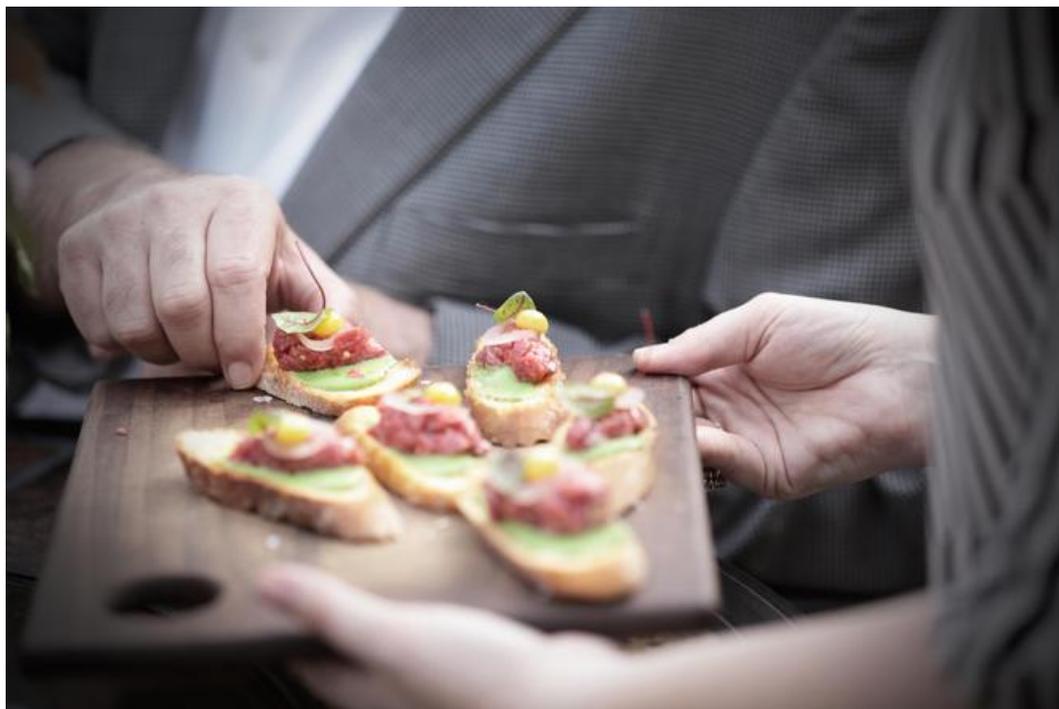
Mixologist Alex Jump prepares a cocktail. (Photo: AR Photography)

This week, I had a dinner experience to ruin me for dinner experiences. Along with more than 50 other Chattanoogaans, I attended the inaugural [Scenic City Supper Club](https://www.facebook.com/ScenicCitySupperClub?fref=ts) (<https://www.facebook.com/ScenicCitySupperClub?fref=ts>) at [The Urban Lawn](https://www.facebook.com/urbanlawn) (<https://www.facebook.com/urbanlawn>). Is this some sort of secret society of the elite members of the city's culinary underworld? Not at all. The Supper Club started as an idea from [Easy Bistro & Bar](http://www.easybistro.com/) (<http://www.easybistro.com/>) co-owners Erik and Amanda Niel to highlight Chattanooga's thriving culinary scene.

The first edition focused on those chefs who are "rising stars" in Chattanooga. For only \$50, guests experienced a multicourse dinner that was easily worth triple the price. The event sold out so quickly that they decided to do it again this upcoming

Sunday (another sellout). Follow the Scenic City Supper Club on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/ScenicCitySupperClub>) to keep track of upcoming gatherings.

The following is an account of my experience. You'll notice, too, that the photography is exceptionally good. That's because I didn't take them with my iPhone. All credit goes to Andrew Rogers and AR Photography (<http://arogersphotography.printroom.com/>).



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Tartine of Lake Majestic beef tartare. (Photo: AR Photography)

The atmosphere/drinks

I arrived dateless at the 6 p.m. start time and soaked in the surroundings. The Urban Lawn is an incredible venue for an outdoor gathering. A long, elegant table was set with floral centerpieces from Crabtree Farms (<http://crabtreefarms.org/>). Guests were encouraged to grab a "welcome cocktail" mixed by Easy Bistro's Alex Jump. The cocktail contained barrel-aged Herradura Silver tequila, Amaro Nonino, Carpano Antica, Grand Sapins liqueur and grapefruit bitters. I don't think I've ever had any of those ingredients before, but this cocktail was one of the best I've ever tasted. Everyone in attendance was complimentary of the drink. For the next half-hour, I

mingled among the guests. Ethan Sindler of Main Street Meats (<http://www.mainstreetmeatschatt.com/>) provided the hors d'oeuvres for the evening, a tartine of Lake Majestic beef tartare. Raw beef can be scary, but in the right hands it can be divine. This was the latter.

The diversity of the attendees was impressive, and the conversation was impressively varied. Eventually, I landed at a small table next to Ellen and Ken Hays and beside Nooga.com contributor Alice O'Dea (</author/alice-odea>). We had no idea what the menu would be until we sat down, but the courses that followed completely shattered my mind. The phrase "oh, my God!" was uttered by everyone at the table on multiple occasions.



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An assortment of bread from Heather Thacker of The Farmer's Daughter. (Photo: AR Photography)

The food

Our first course was a collection of breads from Heather Thacker of The Farmer's Daughter (<http://thefarmersdaughterchattanooga.com/>). She prepared a stinging nettle sprouted wheat levain and a sorghum rye brioche. Though both of those were exceptional, my favorite—and this is no surprise—was the salami cornmeal biscuit with Shakerag blue cheese lard. The amuse bouche (a meal in a bite) and first course

were provided by Benjamin Park of St. John's Restaurant (<http://www.stjohnsrestaurant.com/>). He hinted to me a few weeks ago that he might do something with sea urchin butter, and he did. The amuse bouche featured farm-cured egg, baby vegetables and the delicious butter. I've never had anything like this.



The amuse bouche: Egg, baby vegetables and sea urchin butter. (Photo: AR Photography)

The presentation of each dish was impeccable, especially Park's first course—rabbit offal (entrails and organs) with pickled duxelle (mixed mushroom) and pine broth. I'd never had rabbit organs, and I'll bet a lot of people in attendance hadn't either. This dish was strange, but I respect Park for pushing us out of our comfort zones a bit. Plus, I bet half the people there didn't know what "offal" meant.



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Benjamin Park's deceptively delicious rabbit offal. (Photo: AR Photography)

John David Wright was up next. He represents The Flying Squirrel

<http://www.flyingsquirrelbar.com/>) and offered one of my favorite courses of the evening. He essentially water-cooked (forgive me for not remembering the exact phrase he used) a piece of halibut and served it on a bed of collard greens, ham hock and katsuobushi (bonito flakes, or skipjack tuna shavings). The fish was among the most succulent I've ever tasted, and the preparation allowed it to simply melt in your mouth.



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Halibut with collard greens, ham hock and katsuobushi. (Photo: AR Photography)

The third and final course for the dinner portion was a masterfully prepared Mahada Farms smoked lamb shoulder with sausage, spring peas, charred baby Vidalia petals, green strawberries and foraged blossoms. The chef was Peter Barlow from Easy Bistro (<http://www.easybistro.com/>), and his expertise was palpably apparent with the first bite. Like the halibut, the lamb was tender and delightfully gamey.



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Mahada Farms smoked lamb shoulder. (Photo: AR Photography)

There was no way Wendy Buckner from [The Hot Chocolatier](http://thehotchocolatier.com/) (<http://thehotchocolatier.com/>) could provide a dessert as tasty as any of the previous dishes, right? Wrong.

Dessert/cocktail

Had he known of Buckner, I imagine Augustus Gloop would've had her picture hanging in his bedroom. Her expertise regarding chocolate and confections is to be worshipped. The dessert she served us—a strawberry basil white chocolate mousse cake—literally almost made me cry. It was one of those desserts that make you understand why the word "sinful" is used to describe chocolate. I felt guilty for having the pleasure to eat it, as if I were unworthy to put something that delicious in my mouth. The dessert paired well with Jump's final dessert cocktail, a simple mix of Mount Gay rum, fino sherry and Cynar (an Italian bitter liqueur). The night ended with a short speech from Erik Niel and a round of applause for the rising stars of Chattanooga's scene. I slept like a king.



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A strawberry basil white chocolate mousse cake from The Hot Chocolatier. (Photo: AR Photography)

Would I go back?

We all basically agreed that whatever the Niels decide to do next with the Scenic City Supper Club (they're talking about a guest chef experience), we'll be ready with our wallets open. There isn't another experience like this to be found in Chattanooga. The city has needed an event like this for years, and I'm overjoyed that it turned out the way it did. Whatever you do, make sure you plan to attend the upcoming events.

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