

food & wine

EAT, DRINK, & BE MERRY

THE REVIEW: McCrady's

Science never tasted better than at Charleston's landmark McCrady's, where you'll find chef Sean Brock taking his passion for molecular gastronomy to delicious new levels. Every night, this talented young chef celebrates fresh food in all its splendid dimensions to deliver intensely flavored, elegant, yet still playful cuisine in accordance with his philosophic commitment to "the science of deliciousness."

Tucked into its quiet, understated setting at Two Unity Alley, this handsome restaurant began its historic journey in 1788 as McCrady's Tavern. Following a number of subsequent redesigns throughout the years, the most recent transformation by New York design firm Bentel & Bentel resulted in its stylishly sophisticated brick-and-beam main dining room warmed by colorful art and a flickering fireplace. The bar is a comfortable venue for pairing extensive wine options with small plates and conversation, as are the three lovely adjacent private dining rooms and expansive second-floor Long Room.

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PHOTOGRAPHS (3) BY CHRISTOPHER BROWN

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Bring home the bacon:

Seared foie gras "bacon" perched atop toasted brioche with sweet-tart apple butter, diced Granny Smith apple, and a drizzle of Canadian bliss maple syrup.

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In the kitchen, Brock transforms the finest ingredients into extraordinary dishes by incorporating a number of contemporary techniques, including *sous-vide*—vacuum packing ingredients in airtight plastic bags and cooking them slowly in water heated well below the boiling point. Our most recent expedition began from a cozy corner vantage point, with a perfect view of the West Fraser oil cityscape that graces the dining room. Our server brought us the first of the evening's samplings: a brilliant, jewel-like amuse of chilled heirloom tomato soup topped with another of Brock's specialties, glistening foam richly flavored with olive oil. A tiny sliver of fresh plum at the end of the soup sip lent a most delicate surprise finish. Next, a luxurious mushroom and pine nut stew, with its earthy, woody aroma, featured a mélange of shiitakes and nuts, Parmesan tuile, and the *pièce de résistance*: a perfectly opaque, farm-fresh poached egg.

Seared foie gras "bacon" was a beautiful sight perched atop brioche with complements of



McCradys chef Sean Brock. Top: Burnished wood and brick archways add historic charm to the intimate Unity Alley space.



Each intimate corner beckons with an appeal in keeping with the remarkable cuisine delivered by a revolutionary chef who is quickly making a name for himself.

sweet-tart apple butter, tiny dice of Granny Smith apple, and drizzle of Canadian bliss maple syrup. Its crowning apple-scented meringue lent the perfect contrast for this amazingly satisfying feast for both eye and palate.

These wonderful beginnings made way for equally memorable main courses of Niman Ranch rib eye and seared Hawaiian tuna. Featuring the deckle (cap), the well-marbled rib eye had the tenderness of filet. It was paired with luxurious potato purée, piquant balsamic onions, and sauce Périgord. The amazing accompaniment of carrot confit, we learned, was produced by blending carrot purée and juice-steeped carrots with caramelized carrot glaze, all cooked *sous-vide*. The ultimate result was the most tender, flavorful morsels of carrot I've ever enjoyed. An autumn vegetable mélange of butternut and baby pattypan squash, potatoes, carrots, parsnips, and tender Brussels sprout leaves atop fennel purée and saffron emulsion accompanied the delicate tuna seared in cracked pepper—once again, dazzling.

Pastry chef Winburn Carmack's immaculate

celebrations of the season manifested as inventive apple crisp with almond Teecino ice cream and whiskey caramel, as well as ethereally light banana hazelnut tart with banana sabayon, caramel ice cream, and rum-caramel sauce. Both were rousing successes.

Our service team executed their delivery with charm and enthusiasm, recovering nicely from a bit of a challenged beginning with style worthy of the establishment. Historic patina lends charm to the setting, which features burnished wood-encased banquettes, appealing archways, and a towering wine wall. Each intimate corner beckons with an appeal in keeping with the remarkable cuisine delivered by a revolutionary chef who is quickly making a name for himself in the culinary world. —**Patricia Agnew**

MCCRADY'S

Two Unity Alley, (843) 577-0025,
www.mccradysrestaurant.com.
Bar opens at 5 p.m.; dinner nightly
at 5:30 p.m. Entrées: \$25-\$34;
chef's tasting menu: \$70/person