

Sean Brock's cuisine morphs into a local harvest Food on the Edge?

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Fresh radishes quartered, sprinkled with salt, and served atop a dollop of chilled artisanal butter; a couple of the guerrilla cuisine guys

If you didn't make the first Guerrilla Cuisine outing a couple weekends ago, you missed a mighty fine demonstration of Charleston culinary cutting edge. Just the suggestion that the space-chef extraordinaires from McCrady's would be headlining an event advertised with a fork and sickle logo in the Soviet style was enough to pique our interest — for \$65 a pop? It was a done deal and turned out nothing like one might expect.

After all, Sean Brock, Charleston's own all-star molecular chef, might be expected to turn a crisp autumn evening into an explosion of pumpkin and spice twisted through a culinary lens full of liquid nitrogen. Instead, guests were treated to an evening centered on the seasonal bounty of the Wadmalaw fields surrounding the venue. He started the evening with the simple admonition that "95 percent of what you will eat tonight was harvested within walking distance of this place since yesterday morning."

That simple declaration soon produced a bountiful expression of a Lowcountry fall, simply adorned with the current fruits of field and forest. Brock's stereotypical swagger — the "molecular gastronomy," food as science project methods on which he rode into town — has morphed into a primary emphasis on freshness and local provenance. The love affair with local tomatoes this summer at McCrady's seems to have changed Brock's focus a bit. Late local tomatoes, still quality on the cusp of first frost, were juxtaposed against juicy plums, sliced into big quarters napped with raspberry vinaigrette and haphazardly arranged on wooden skewers before being passed to hungry diners.

A small dish of purple-hued radishes, splayed open and laid on top a large pat of artisanal butter and anointed with big sea salt flakes, personified the simple, unadorned theme. But then there was the pumpkin soup with foie gras chicken wings and the slabs of suckling pig meat that underwent some considerable meat gluing and sous vide preparation before hitting the table. This stuff is clearly from the mind of Brock, but Brock has transformed his cuisine. Where the science used to drive the content, it now complements, and the focus has shifted to the products of the local soil.

This fit well in the context of a local gathering of foodies attracted by the subversive nature of the marketing. Brock's name alone packed the house with anticipation and the addition of some wicked sweet tea-flavored vodka from Irvin~House Vineyards' Firefly vodka guys lit up the night — and silenced those wondering why an underground dinner party would be held at a local vineyard with a rather visible marketing campaign.

Fortunately, the meals at Irvin~House Vineyards are the tip of the iceberg as the Guerrilla Cuisine guys, led by the mysteriously labeled leader "jimihatt" (who turns out to be a burly looking, bearded cook from the McCrady's line), have ambitious plans to hold regular events in and around town with a variety of local chefs. And how refreshing it will be to have a venue for the exploration of cuisine for cuisine's sake, devoid of the monetary pressures of the market and beholden only to the inspiration some of our most accomplished chefs.

