



## KRS No. 1

### **Kevin Rathbun's Steak stakes its claim**

By Suzanne Wright

And then there were three: three great restaurants under the creative stewardship of Atlanta's favorite adopted chef, Kevin Rathbun, that is.

In 2004, the chef and restaurateur almost single-handedly spurred renewed interest in Inman Park when he opened Rathbun's, a modern American eatery. It was an immediate smash, a destination drawing residents from across the Metro area and giving the neighborhood new cachet. He followed Rathbun's by opening—in the parking lot of his first restaurant—the snug, Mediterranean-influenced Krog Bar in 2005 and again struck gold.

The chef, who grew up in Kansas City, known for its large stockyards, continues his winning streak with his third venture, Kevin Rathbun Steak (KRS), also on Krog Street. (Just a thought: Should the street be renamed for its leading benefactor?) With his father as his guide, Rathbun remembers visiting some of the Midwest's biggest and best meat processing factories; the sights and smells of the hand-picked beef favorites that ended up on the family's dinner table are recreated at his new restaurant. And the carnivores have come out in force: KRS has been packed solid since its opening in late May. The same successful triumvirate is at the helm: Rathbun, General Manager/Partner Cliff Bramble and co-owner and Pastry Chef Kirk Parks, along with Rathbun's co-owner and wife, Melissa.

The building was once a cotton warehouse, a Clorox bleach factory and a musician's rehearsal hall. Now surrounded by new residential development, it's been magnificently restored by the Johnson Studio, the same firm responsible for the cool interiors at Rathbun's and Krog Bar. The entrance is covered by canvas (Look closely before you swing open the glass door; under the kudzu you'll see a wall of graffiti left from the previous tenants.) Inside, the hand-cut stacked walnut wood walls, black leather chairs and booths, original iron columns, exposed brick, open kitchen and monochromatic chocolate color scheme lend it a masculine speak-easy character.

The only touches of color are red-smattered glass panels suspended from the ceiling, separating the bar from the dining room. The most eye-catching detail? The organic-looking chandeliers that resemble silver branches and twigs (they're made of brushed aluminum). Downstairs, the 100-year-old cellar is home to the chef's cookbook library, while the wraparound "beltline patio" has large, comfortable chairs. Perfect if you want a cigar after your steak.

Just like at his other restaurants, the KRS menu is extensive with much to tempt a diner. Dishes are grouped by category: hot appetizers, cold appetizers, chilled seafood towers, salads and soups, USDA prime meats, fish and shellfish, alternative selections and sides. My generous pal Susan sprung for a bottle of red, the mouth-filling Dasche 2005 Zinfandel and as we sipped, we make our choices.

The lightly fried oysters and okra are the best either of us had ever had: the oysters are buttery and sweet, the okra melts in our mouths (not a trace of the dreaded green slime!), and the Creole rémoulade is a zingy dip. Did I mention Susan isn't usually a fan of either dish? We both could have eaten a platter. The Georgia shrimp rémoulade, served cold with a mustard dressing on shaved iceberg lettuce, is a textbook rendition, a nod to Rathbun's culinary stint in New Orleans. The warm spinach salad flatbread with hot bacon dressing and shaved organic egg has an appealing woody flavor. The portions are prudently sized, good for sharing, but not too much to fill you up before the main event: meat.

We order the dry-aged steak for two with two accompaniments, the house steak sauce (rather ho-hum) and the Stilton bleu cheese butter (delicious). Although presented bone-in, the steak has been thoughtfully carved into slices. Dry aging concentrates the flavor; it's costly, but absolutely worth the expense. I don't know if I've had a better piece of beef—rich in flavor and meltingly tender. Our sides, the cauliflower gratin with aged Gouda and the not-overwhelmingly-cheesy mac and cheese with truffle crumbs, are both served in mini-crocks; both are delectable. (Incidentally, leftovers reheated beautifully the following day.)

Although almost an afterthought, we order the chocolate-chocolate layer cake and the Southern ice box cheesecake for dessert. The chocolate cake is a bit dry and we'd have preferred a smaller slice of moist, bittersweet dark-chocolate cake instead. The cheesecake is light and lemony—the perfect meal capper.

The pacing of our meal is flawless; two hours fly by and the kitchen, though slammed, never falters. Busy runners replenish bread and refill water glasses. The minor wobbles of a newly opened establishment—a server unfamiliar with the wine list, doggy bags indiscreetly plunked onto the center of the table—are sure to be ironed out as the young staff finds its footing. I gotta hand it to Chef Rathbun and his colleagues: They've truly got the Midas touch.

## **DINING ESSENTIALS**

### **Kevin Rathbun's Steak**

154 Krog St. Suite 200  
Atlanta, 30307  
404-524-5600  
[www.kevinrathbunsteak.com](http://www.kevinrathbunsteak.com)

**Hours: Dinner:** Mon.-Thu., 5:30-10:30pm; Fri. and Sat. 5:30-11:30 p.m.

**Reservations:** Yes

**Dress Code:** Dressy casual

**Cuisine:** Steak, seafood

**Alcohol:** Full bar

**Cost:** Entrees \$16-\$64

**Credit Cards:** All major

**Parking:** Valet, lot