



MEATING SPOT Rustic white-oak flooring and sleek seating set the tone at KR SteakBar designed by The Johnson Studio. Below: Dried and aged eye of rib-eye with arugula, roasted garlic and aged balsamic

Steaking New Ground

Smaller plates, edgy cuts and other surprises await at Kevin Rathbun's newest resto in Peachtree Hills.

| *By Katie Kelly Bell* | *Photography by Caroline Petters* |

What's not to love about Kevin Rathbun and his successful collection of restaurants? We love him for pumping some culinary energy into the Old Fourth Ward. We love his eponymous restaurant Rathbun's for the big and rich Second Mortgage Plates and industrial-chic ambiance. We love Kevin Rathbun Steak's gorgeous, marbled, unapologetic cuts of corn-fed beef. We love Krog Bar's sleek, international vibe. But, his recently opened KR SteakBar in Peachtree Hills brings the top toque's fans something new. Focused on smaller portions, an intimate communal ambiance and what he calls "fifth cuts," it's an all-around fresh embarkation from the big spaces and big plates of the usual Rathbun repertoire.

The location in the ADAC West building is the first surprise. Why an interior design center? "That's a good question," says co-owner Cliff Bramble. "This place is a departure for us. We love the ample parking, the accessibility and the space itself." The space is the second surprise. Intimate, warm and utterly inviting, it's a Johnson Studio special with loads of local flourishes

(tables and lighting are all made by local Atlanta artisans). "This restaurant has the warmest feel among our locations, we really wanted to create a casual, upscale neighborhood feel and focus on smaller portions for sharing."

Cue the Coors in a can (yes, it's on the menu) and a prime patio seat under the protective shade of a grand magnolia. Of course, you can go upscale with no trouble and order a glass of prosecco or one of the signature classic cocktails. The A team of mixologists, including Trey Bullard from Top Flr, plans to have 15 or so original KR SteakBar cocktails on the menu in total. The restaurant is a clever hybrid of communal and personal, intimate and social—the



KR SteakBar

349 Peachtree Hills Ave.
404.841.8820
krsteakbar.com

Hours: Bar opens Mon.-Thu., 4:30-11PM; Fri.-Sat., 4:30-11PM; Sun. 5:30-10PM; dining room opens daily at 5:30PM

What To Order

Don't miss the intense lemony kick from their housemade limoncello, and look for seasonally inspired versions throughout the year, including blood orange and grapefruit.

What To Wear

In keeping with most of Rathbun's restaurants, the dress is smart- and sassy-casual. You should feel comfortable, but keep the look sharp. It's an all-ages crowd, so wear what works for you.

bar opens to the patio; some booths are in the bar, but still feel private; the communal tables rest on the edge of the dining room. If you just can't decide where you want to enjoy your meal, reserve the private table in the heart of the restaurant.




Saving the best for last, the biggest surprise at KR is the menu. You won't find any 18-ounce bone-in rib-eye or soft lobster tacos here. Instead, Rathbun offers a range of smaller to midsize plates featuring some edgy cuts. In fact, he's pushing some envelopes here with newer, fresher flavor dynamics. Consider the sturgeon with *sous vide* fennel and grapefruit. Savory and elegant, this is one knockout dish, like a ballerina with a serious left hook.

Working with fifth-cut proteins and his own spin on New York Italian cuisine, the offerings include beef tongue and tripe, certainly unique for Rathbun (and Atlanta). As a nod to his roots, the menu does offer a dry-aged porterhouse for two. And we can all relax because Rathbun's knack for tasty, satisfying food is still intact. Bring your sense of adventure, and go for the pork foot with shell beans or the beef tongue with olive oil pudding. The tamer tri-tip with mushrooms, brown butter and sage delivers classic unctuous steak flavor—ditto the shell steak with espresso and horseradish. I have to give the hanger steak with arugula, apple and kumquat salad the nod for best overall combination. Leafy, bright lettuces and the sharpness of the kumquat make a great textural contrast to the caramelized, nicely salted and very tender steak. Bare in mind, as rich and delicious as these sound, the portions are civilized, and you won't leave feeling ridiculously overfed.

As for pastas, his *bombolotti* with *guanciale* and a spicy tomato/chili sauce is easily the tastiest pasta dish I've enjoyed in some time. Don't even consider leaving until you've ordered Pastry Chef Kirk Parks' pine nut tart with rosewater gelato and wild flower

honey—a buttery, warm, not-too-saccharine pitch-perfect end to the meal.

All told, KR SteakBar is still signature Rathbun, but with a new refinement, and it works. An interesting, slightly subversive menu of perfectly portioned plates for sharing, a smart location that's easy-in and easy-out, great flavors, convivial atmosphere, serious beverages, even a patio with a magnolia tree—and, of course, that is no surprise. 



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CUTTING EDGE

Clockwise from left: Lavender panna cotta served with *saba amaretti* and candied kumquats; red-wine-braised octopus swims amid farro and candied lemon; a custom cherrywood table offers a communal dining spot

