

Five Quintessential Sarasota Foods

EAT LIKE US. BY AMY NANCE PHOTOGRAPHY BY SALVATORE BRANCIFORT

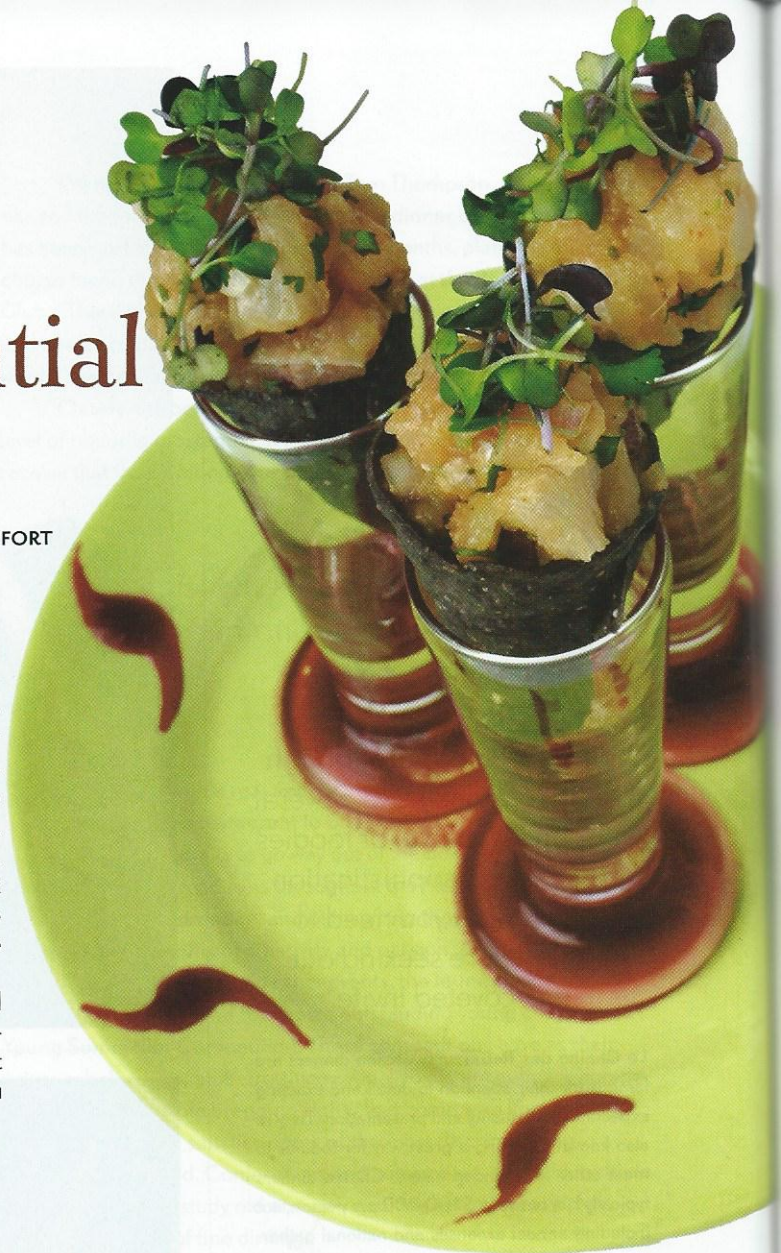
What kind of town embraces hush puppies and ceviche with equal gusto? We're fashionable and fusion, home-grown and heartland. We can say without hyperbole that, yes, those shrimp have been plucked from our very backyards, which are rich tributaries of seafood, to hear our local menus tell it. Our ambitious, entrepreneurial chefs have imported the food traditions and culinary expertise of their countries—Peru, France and Scotland, to name but a varied few—and their educations. They have an impressive cache of Golden Spoons among them. Blessings by Zagat's aside, our dynamic cuisine says a lot about us: Who we think we are (tastemakers). Who we actually are (tasteful). Who we aren't (New York, New Orleans) and who we don't want to be (Memphis, Baltimore).

If you want to know a community, study its food. It's a tall order for a town whose culinary identity is a constant work-in-progress, but sometimes the picking's easy. Here we present the five foods that speak to us—and for us—and the dishes you absolutely must try.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL SARASOTA FOOD: SHRIMP

MIX IT UP AT: 5 ONE 6 BURNS

No roundup of Sarasota's archetypal foods would be complete without this proud staple, a sly challenge for the innovative chef. Fortunately for us, Chef Seth Groseclose, new owner of 5 One 6 Burns, gives us a fresh take with his Shrimp and Grits dish. Each shrimp in this dish gets a smoky rub and before hitting the grill with a combination of paprika, pepper and cayenne. It's served up with orange-based citrus grits, as creamy and as fluffy as it gets. Chef Groseclose explains that the surprisingly sweet grits are a good counter to the spicy smokiness of the shrimp. "The angle is earthy flavors, which are Southern, and sophisticated, rustic comfort food overall." Groseclose draws on his Virginia-North Carolina roots, pulling ideas from "stacks of my family's recipe books." His fried green tomatoes—served at 5 One 6's Sunday brunch—vie for quintessential status.



THE QUINTESSENTIAL SARASOTA FOOD: CEVICHE

TRY A TRIO AT: THE TABLE

A little plate-gazing and it becomes apparent that Sarasota likes it ceviche, and how. More a preparation than a stand-alone food, ceviche is a South American dish where seafood (think sea bass or shellfish) cooks in contact with citrus juice. Naturally, we adore it. Not only does it call upon our long standing love affair with citrus, but it gives us another excuse to nosh on seafood. There are many versions of ceviche, depending on where you're eating it in Latin America, but here in Sarasota, Atlantic Rim restaurant The Table offers a trio of ceviches: Wild King Salmon, Wahoo and Ahi Tuna, each accompanied by an equally eclectic citrus. The restaurant's Wahoo Cones are a handy and scrumptious approach to ceviche, which is served as icy-cold as an ice cream cone.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL SARASOTA FOOD: GROUPER

GET IT FRESH OFF THE BOAT AT: CAPTAIN BRIAN'S

There's nothing better than Florida grouper, and Brian Bochan, owner of Captain Brian's Seafood Market knows it. At Captain Brian's, they bring in the grouper by their own boats every day and year round, an important consideration for fans of the fish, who know that you don't always get grouper when you order "grouper." "In the restaurant, we keep it as natural as possible, whether it's blackened, sautéed or grilled," says Bochan. That means the grouper is never overdone, kept at an even medium while cooking. He admits that grilling is the preparation that most reveals the fish's true flavor. The Captain's Choice sandwich goes well with one of the restaurant's made-from-scratch soups, but most people take advantage of Captain Brian's combination platters, pairing grouper with shrimp. And for fresh, local grouper you can filet at home, stop by the market for the daily catch.




THE QUINTESSENTIAL SARASOTA FOOD: KEY LIME PIE

CHEW WITH A VIEW AT: ROD & REEL

In these parts, Key Lime Pie inspires a devotion approaching worship. With so many connoisseurs of the fresh treat readying their forks at dessert time, a pie really has to stack up. At Anna Maria's rustic gem Rod & Reel, a restaurant set right on a fishing pier overlooking Tampa Bay, the pie is so good it's the only dessert offered. Rod & Reel's Captain John says that's because this pie is "perfectly tart but sweet, piled with whip cream and with a true graham cracker crust." The pie is made fresh every day at Bradenton's Mr. Cheesecake and brought to the Rod & Reel, where it is best enjoyed in the balmy breeze out on the pier.

THE QUINTESSENTIAL SARASOTA FOOD: HUSH PUPPIES

GET YOUR FRITTER ON AT: HICKORY HOLLOW

At the singular Hickory Hollow, famous for its barbecue, hush puppies are known as corn fritters. "Everyone has their own way of eating our corn fritters," says Jarrett James, son of owners Donna and Robert James. "Some people peel off the outside, some people put it in the sauce. I like to eat the inside, leave the crust behind and fill it with barbecue sauce." Donna James developed the Hollow's coveted fritters 24 years ago, when the restaurant opened, and they've been serving them ever since. She wanted the solid cornbread with the process of a hush puppy and eventually hit on the perfect recipe. Now, there are the "faithful followers of the fritter," according to Jarrett James. The fritters are getting the dessert treatment as of late. "Just roll it in powdered sugar," he laughs. As for what to eat with your fritters, the James family doesn't use any shortcuts in making their 25 entrees and 20 fresh vegetables, including black-eyed peas and melt-in-your-mouth collards. 

5 One 6 Burns, 516 Burns Ln., Sarasota, 941-906-1884; Captain Brian's, 8421 N. Tamiami Trl., Sarasota, 941-351-4492; Hickory Hollow, 4705 US Hwy. 301 N., Ellenton, 941-722-3932; Rod and Reel Pier, 875 North Shore Dr., Anna Maria, 941-778-1885; The Table, 1934 Hillview St., Sarasota, 941-365-4558

