



art of the meal  
by Krista Reese



# Barking Up The Right Tree

**I**N THESE TOUGH TIMES, opening any restaurant is an act of courage. However, Dogwood partners Scott Black and Chef Shane Touhy and are not only birthing a new baby, but also breathing new life into two once-tired institutions: Southern food, and a long-comatose stretch of downtown Peachtree Street, a couple of blocks south of the Fox Theatre.

The audaciousness of their vision is visible from street-level, where the big windows (and outdoor tables for friendlier weather) reveal a happening little bar. Step inside, and the dining room's calming grays and contempo-

rary lines suggest a long, relaxing dinner. Upstairs, a private room keeps a raucous party far from the pleasant enclave below. Along with the attractive line drawings and photography of the namesake blossom, there are a few provocative design choices: Is the ceiling's light fixture really supposed to look like the Stars and Bars?

On my first visit, I came away thinking Dogwood held great promise, but faltered on a few small

details (too-salty soups; too much fried, creamy everything with too few balancing flavors). A second visit convinced me that Touhy had worked out those few opening-months kinks to present an exuberant, witty menu and expert service worthy of a destination meal.

Dogwood's most famous invention is The "Grits Bar." No, it's not some-

PHOTOS: BECKY STEIN



## Dogwood

565 Peachtree Street, Atlanta  
www.dogwoodrestaurant.com or 404.835.1410  
Reservations: Recommended  
Prices: Entrees, \$13-\$29  
Dress Code: Stylish casual.  
Parking: Complimentary valet, around the corner (on Linden).



Toppings on Dogwood's Grits Bar, opposite, from left, include braised mushrooms, butter poached lobster and pimento cheese with ham. Scott Black and Chef Shane Touhy, left also offer, clockwise from above left, fried pickled okra with blue crab and brie fondue, a Southern Comfort glazed pork chop and a soup flight: pea and ham, root vegetable purée and tomato bisque



thing you can imagine John Wayne bellying up to ("And make sure they're stone-ground!"), but a daily selection of three versions made with Logan Turnpike "Fools Gold" grits. The pimento cheese grits were irresistible, but not exactly a counterpoint to the many other rich, starchy choices.

I'd a lot rather invest the animal fats in one of the best New South appetizers I've ever tried: The Southern fried quail breast on butter-milk spoon biscuit, replete with milk gravy (enriched with goat cheese, no less), brightened with red onion marmalade. It's a decadently upscale version of the chicken biscuit, and every element was spot on, from the perfectly fried quail to the sop-up gravy, and especially the flaky, crumbly biscuit – a harbinger of the fabulous house-

baked goods that would appear throughout the meal.

Another appetizer was just as fun – fried, whole pickled okra in a pool of melted brie with nuggets of blue crab, perked up with a few dots of smoked paprika oil. It's like a circus in your mouth – there's a lot going on, but it's all very amusing.

The soups are also clever (and change often), and the "soup flight" (three small servings for \$11) is a great deal. My favorites include tomato bisque with a little fried ball of goat cheese as "crouton" (like an uptown tomato soup with grilled cheese), and a smoothly puréed lentil, topped with shredded duck confit – a Southern-style homage to cassoulet. The Southern-style Caesar (cornbread croutons and green-tomato-bacon dressing over romaine) is, thankfully,

lean and piquant – a nice palate cleanser.

If you want to go whole hog for an entree, you'll head straight for the "So-Co" (Southern Comfort)-laced pork chop with a square of impossibly light corn soufflé. But I'm still dreaming about the sweet, nutty dayboat scallops, with a small dirty rice cake and pool of oyster gumbo "sauce."

For dessert, if you have the option, try the "mint ice cream sandwiches." They turn out to be another French favorite – profiteroles, or cream puffs, with housemade mint ice cream, drizzled in chocolate. Yum.

I'd love to see a few more vegetables on the menu, and yes, it's a calorie-and-cholesterol spree. But the next time I go to the Fox and someone asks where I'd like to go for dinner, I know what I'm going to say.

