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FOOD & DRINK

review



**LIKE THE FRENCH DO**  
Clockwise from left: Warm interiors by NO Architecture offer an authentic French vibe; start a decadent meal with chopped chicken liver on toast with deliciously tartare cornichons (\$10); the sweet El Morro made with Bacardi Superior, guava and lemon (\$12) is a solid sub for dessert, as it is served in a sprinkles-rimmed glass.



# Well FED

Two longtime Atlanta chefs who've been on a chicken coup, stage a return to fine dining in Midtown. What's The Federal verdict? Let's examine the evidence.

*By Stephanie Davis Smith  
Photography by Heidi Geldhauser*



**THE FEDERAL**  
1050 Crescent Ave.,  
404.343.3857, [thefederalatl.com](http://thefederalatl.com)

Breakfast: Mon.-Fri., 8-10:30AM  
Brunch: Sat.-Sun., 9AM-2PM  
Lunch: Mon.-Fri., 11:30AM-2PM  
Dinner: Sun. & Tue.-Thu., 5-10PM;  
Fri.-Sat., 5-11PM

Romantic French music wafts down Crescent Avenue greeting guests as they stroll up to The Federal's wide-slung, welcoming doors. Only three months ago it was a Bantam + Biddy fried chicken outpost, which tells us that longtime Atlanta chefs Shaun Doty and Lance Gummere move pretty fast. To flip an entire space over from their cheerful fried chicken franchise to an adorable, low-lit romantic bistro inside of eight weeks is no easy feat—but the pair pulled it off and opened in mid-November. With its orange facade and bold lettering above the door, The Federal now resembles something out of Manhattan's Soho neighborhood or Paris' 11th arrondissement.

They spruced up the small spot named after the nearby Federal Bank with tangerine banquettes, titled Parisian mirrors, white tablecloths and even a gussied-up staff that's still learning the wine list—but selling it with verve and charm.

The simple elegance of the ambience pairs beautifully with a classic menu of steak frites and maitre d' butter, creamed spinach, an exquisite blue crabcake over Napa cabbage and Doty's famed chopped chicken liver toast (a favorite for those of us who remember Shaun's in Inman Park).

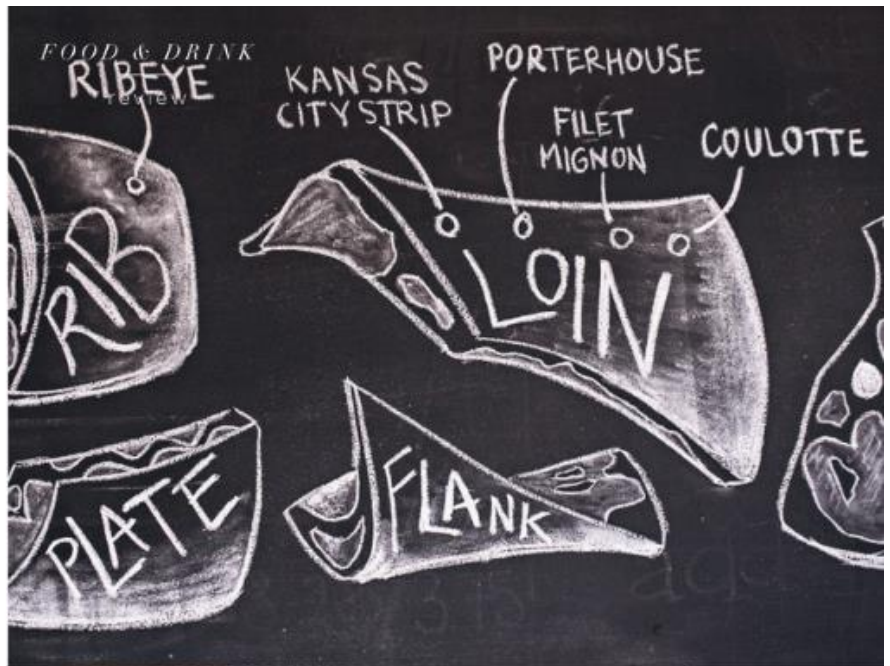
Not everything on the lineup is expected out of a typical bistro—don't let the French music fool you. While there's no sounds of polka coming out of the speakers anytime soon, there's a hint of German and Polish influence on the menu. Dishes such as West Texas venison with cheese pierogi, red cabbage and sour cherries; a rutabaga soup du jour so soft and rich you could cuddle up with it; and a pork schnitzel with peanuts over onion salad were all surprising and felt more global in influence.

A cold-smoked trout arrived with Anson Mills grits, white spheres of well-executed turnips, greens and Patak bacon butter. After a few glasses of Wolfer Estate Rosé and one quirky El Morro cocktail rimmed in sprinkles, the leftover trout had to come home in a box. It was as good cold the next morning as it was hot the night before. A true test, passed. **CONTINUED...**



CONTINUED... Beef tartare with Belgian-style fries was a bit salty on one occasion, however the antipasto with Iowa prosciutto, mozzarella, Ligurian olives, deviled egg and fresh ricotta is a bona fide success every time and has become a must-share with friends and co-workers. A whole loup de mer with a chickpea pancake contains a welcoming licorice note courtesy of fennel, paired with some lovely bitterness of olives, and smoothed out by saffron yogurt and, yes, bee pollen.

The dessert list is kept tight—just a trio of intended-to-be-shared options that appeal to all tastes—and it doesn't look like it will rotate. A tangy Key lime tart with coconut mousse is gluten-free, as Doty was at the forefront of GF dining in Atlanta. A half-moon-shaped chocolate fried pie with vanilla bean ice cream appeared covered in a cinnamon



**MAGNIFIQUE!** Clockwise from top left: The steak frites with a sunflower sprout salad, *maitre d'* butter and a generous helping of fries (\$22) is one of the Paris bistro-inspired resto's signature dishes; charming chalkboard art adorns the walls; the extensive bar features a textured base and white subway tiles; the chefs' fresh take on a dessert includes their chocolate fried pie served alongside vanilla bean ice cream (\$8).

#### Pro Tip

Be sure to park in the restaurant's exclusive deck for two hours of free parking any day of the week.

#### Drink This

The Appalachian Trace (\$12) is a cocktail truly unlike any other. Made with High West Silver Whiskey, egg whites, cream and nutmeg, this innovative cocktail has a unique texture that complements the rich taste.

#### Where to Sit

For an intimate and romantic dinner, book a table by the windows, perfect for people-watching over candlelight. If you're in the mood for a more lively scene, take a seat at the bar, where you can watch the action in the kitchen as you enjoy some sweet sips.

and sugar texture that reminded me of a churro at an amusement park—delightful and amusing eating. The sticky toffee pudding was the third in pleasantly uncomplicated offerings that were crafted for comfort.

It's difficult to be both timeless and timely. But Doty says he's hoping the neighborhood crowd drops in regularly to fall in love with both sides of The Federal, whether it's solo to sit at the sleek bar and cocktail-it or for breakfast and brunch. The truth is, the street needed The Federal. Slivers of Crescent have turned the strip into somewhat of a dining destination—Lure, South City Kitchen, RA Sushi and Princi Italia are neighbors—but no one has done the French bistro thing quite right in this part of town. Until now. ■