

The Esquire's

BEST

LEMAIRE

RICHMOND

101 West Franklin Street
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lemairerestaurant.com

Many years ago, my wife and I stayed at the historic Jefferson Hotel, when it resembled a place where they'd shoot a slasher mov-

ie, with a Norman Bates-like manager who told us he conversed with the ghosts who lived there. We passed on dinner. The place was almost razed in the 1980s, but it has been brought back to glorious life—all its marble columns and stained glass scrubbed to a majestic gloss, its public rooms to a genteel polish, and its restaurant, Lemaire, to a luster that has made it one of Virginia's finest.

Chef Walter Bundy grew up along the Chesapeake, plucking crabs

from the bay and tomatoes from the family garden, and later applying those experiences to his cooking at the French Laundry, under Thomas Keller. Now, with the re-opening of Lemaire, Bundy is pouring everything he knows and loves into dishes like sweet-tangy fried green tomatoes showered with Gulf lump crabmeat, sherry vinegar, and verbena—proof yet again that southern cooking long ago moved past Paula Deen's "Y'all

want s'more gree-uts?" Further evidence: a cream of Vidalia onion soup with applewood-smoked bacon laced with crème fraîche, and seared sea scallops with Carolina rice "grits" and spicy saffron-tomato broth. Southerners can get overly proprietary about their food—that nobody-north-of-Virginia-can-make-grits attitude. Those folks had better hope Walter Bundy doesn't open a restaurant in New York: He would blow the myth to smithereens.

REST

2009

HOSTESS OF THE YEAR

TRENDS
WE'RE TIRED OF

BROCCOLI!

BUT ALSO
LOTS OF PORK
AND FRIED OKRA

MEXICAN FOOD—
FANCY AND
NOT FANCY

PLUS:
RICHARD GERE

AND

THE ESQUIRE
RESTAURANT
HALL OF FAME—
OUR INAUGURAL
INDUCTIONS

ANTS

BY JOHN
MARIANI