

Southern Roots

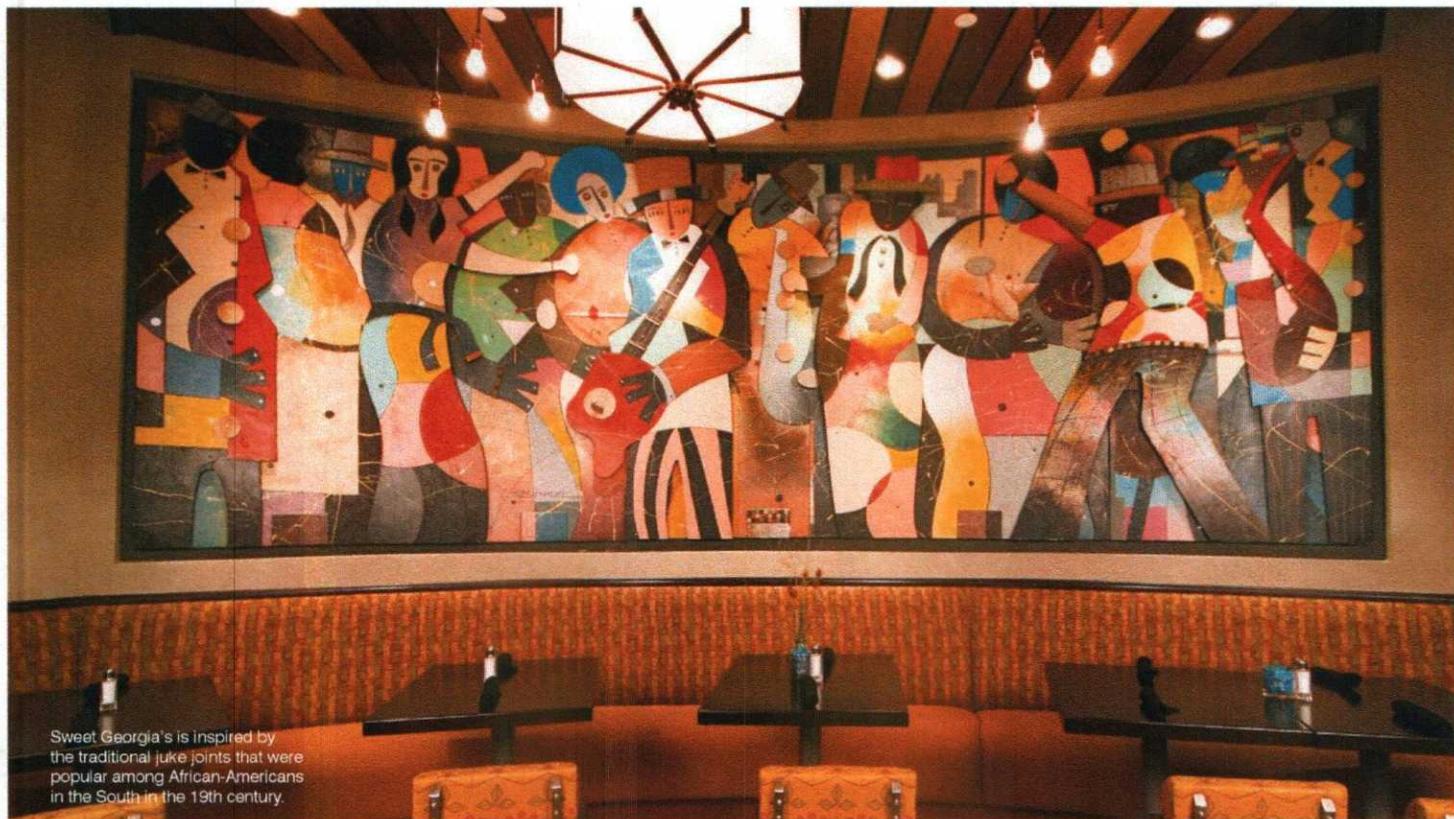
Tradition comes alive in food and music at downtown's Sweet Georgia's Juke Joint.

Don't let the name fool you. The new Sweet Georgia's Juke Joint in the historic 200 Peachtree building downtown is anything but a, well, rowdy joint. What it is, is a super chic spot where you can get a mix of traditional Southern cuisine and live music every night of the week.

Sweet Georgia's name—and the concept—actually refers to the traditional juke joints that popped up soon after emancipation in so many Southern towns. They were the spots where African-Americans gathered, dined and listened to live music after a long week of work. Most of the music centered on the fiddle and the banjo, but ragtime and dance music soon became popular in the late 19th century, as did Southern blues. And that's why so many genres of live music are also the centerpiece today at Sweet Georgia's.

The restaurant was designed by L.A. Meyers Architects and RJS Designs Inc. The main bar is located in the front of the space, with the main dining room in the rear. Walnut wood, blues, greens, oranges and other earth tones make the space cozy and chic, while period art, photography and wall murals give it a nostalgic feel. The main dining room also features a dance floor and small stage for live music.

But what we're equally impressed with is Executive Chef Jackson Loos's deeply Southern menu. The house-made pimento cheese and black-eyed pea hummus starter is one that's reflective of the region. It's served with toasted rosemary flatbread and is ideal for sharing. The cheese is smooth and tangy—just the way it should be—and the black-eyed pea hummus provides a nice twist



Sweet Georgia's is inspired by the traditional juke joints that were popular among African-Americans in the South in the 19th century.

Photo by Curtis Sims

on the traditional app. The fried green tomatoes with goat cheese and sweet onions are also a hit, although we find it a bit unusual that they're topped with sliced red tomatoes, especially when they're not quite in season.

The menu's selection of entrées includes everything from hearty smoked pork or roasted turkey triple stack sandwiches to massive "meat and two" options. The St. Louis pork ribs fall off the bone, and the barbecue sauce has a little kick that we didn't expect, but love. Shrimp and grits with Southern gravy again pays homage to the roots of the Deep South, and the shrimp are so massive that we simply can't finish the dish. But that's because we care more about eating the macaroni and cheese side dish; it's made with aged white cheddar, and is hands down some of the best we've ever had. The other sides—collards, black-eyed peas and sweet potato fries—are equally delicious; perhaps chef Loos would do well offering a veggie plate on his menu (hint, hint).

Throughout dinner, several different musicians play the blues, and around 9PM, a full brass band takes the stage and jams. The Juke specialty cocktail (a tasty mix of Ketel One Citron, coconut rum, crème de cassis and pineapple juice) makes a perfect nightcap, but we have to cut ourselves off eventually. Blame it on the macaroni and cheese again—it leaves us with little room left for anything else. *180 Peachtree St., 404.230.5853 or sweetgeorgiasjukejoint.com* —SARAH GLEIM



THE MUSIC

Sweet Georgia's Juke Joint will feature multiple performers seven days a week. At lunch, students from Georgia's colleges and universities will perform, while well-known local artists, bands and headliners from all genres will perform in the evenings and on weekends.

Clockwise from top: St. Louis pork rib rack; wild-caught shrimp and stone-ground grits and the Southern starter of fried green tomatoes, herbed goat cheese, sliced sweet onions, okra croutons and basil oil