

YEAR IN EATER

# Insiders from the Carolinas Name the Best New Restaurants for 2021

In a tough year to open, who came out on top?

by [Eater Staff](#) | Dec 28, 2021, 11:53am EST



A full table at Berkeley's in Charleston. | Berkeley's

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In keeping with [Eater tradition](#), our closeout of the year is a survey of friends, industry types, and bloggers. To kick it off in the Carolinas, Eater asked the group seven questions, ranging from the restaurants they frequented for takeout to the saddest surprises of the year. Responses are in no particular order, and readers are encouraged to leave answers in the comments.

**Q. What newcomer on the scene excited you this year?**

*KJ Kearney, founder of Black Food Fridays*

**Daddy's Girls Bakery.** Chewie cheesecakes for the MFN win!

*Hanna Raskin, editor and publisher of The Food Section*

If by “excited” you mean “unable to stop crying,” you’re talking about the opening of **Chasing Sage**, which was years in the making. I met with the Chasing Sage crew every Thursday afternoon between September and June, and left many of those reporting visits unsure if the restaurant would ever materialize: When I finally sat down for a meal there, my husband said I wasn’t as emotional at our wedding. Plus, I’d been so worried about the team’s welfare that I’d never stopped to consider whether the food would be any good: It’s fantastic.

(In the category of newcomers to which I have zero personal connection: **Seabird**.)

*Matt Lardie, freelance writer and Eater Carolinas contributor, covering NC*

For me it would hands down be **Seabird** in Wilmington. I’ve now eaten there four times since it opened and chef Dean Neff’s food has yet to disappoint me. The service is top-notch, the drinks are superb, and its take on the seafood tower makes for a super fun dining experience.

*Marion B. Sullivan, food editor of Charleston Magazine*

There are a number of exciting new restaurants. I am voting for **Kingstide** because Daniel Island really deserved something good.

*Eric Ginsburg, independent journalist and Eater Carolinas contributor, covering NC*

It’s a three-way tie between downtown Raleigh’s **Young Hearts Distilling** for its cocktail menu and small plates, the whimsical new **Wonderpuff** shop at Research Triangle Park, and the unassuming but warm **Melanated Wine** tasting room in south Durham.

*Dave Infante, editor of Fingers, an independent newsletter about drinking in America*

**Berkeley’s** for sure. I’m from New Jersey and the absolute dearth of red-sauce Italian food here in Charleston has been pretty hard to bear. No more!

*Jacob Pucci, food and dining reporter for The Fayetteville Observer*

**Fonda Lupita**, of course, but also **Mr. K Authentic Chinese Restaurant** in Fayetteville, which opened in February. It’s real-deal traditional Chinese food in a city that didn’t have much of that before. The braised eggplant with string beans, dry pot cauliflower, and braised pork belly are must-orders.

*Jenn Rice, freelance writer and Eater Carolinas contributor, covering NC*

Definitely **Crawford Cookshop** in Clayton. More to come on this, but I keep daydreaming about the wings and the crispy catfish sandwich. Le drool. To see Scott Crawford pop open a spot in a neighboring town is very exciting to me. I grew up in Laurinburg, North Carolina, and have always envisioned an eatery like this downtown.

*Maggie Ward, events and marketing manager of The Local Palate*

**Brasserie La Banque** joined *the Local Palate* office's Broad Street neighborhood just this month, and I've already ordered the whole menu. The black cocoa cured foie gras torchon was a stand out, but the real surprise was a duck consommé with foie gras dumplings. It was worth the extended wait (and the caviar service and classic cocktails at subterranean Bar Vauté held me over nicely in the meantime).

*Erin Perkins, editor Eater Carolinas*

I'm excited for small-town restaurants to get recognition, like **Seabird** in Wilmington, **Ilda** in Sylva, **Jon G's** in Peachland, and **Fonda Lupita** in Sanford.

*Stephanie Burnette, Eat Drink Carolinas*

**Jasmine Kitchen** in Greenville is filling a hole for handmade fast-casual lunch with a fresh weekly menu. To boot, they have an amazing mission helping women.

**Enzo's** in Columbia makes memorable Italian subs, hot or cold. I order a different one every time and there's always a chef or restaurateur eating there.

**Kounter** in Rock Hill has a dome-smoked ahi tuna salad with Napa cabbage that I could eat everyday and they're open for lunch and dinner.

*Barbara Skidmore, Eater Carolinas contributor, covering SC and Savannah*

**Common Thread** in Savannah — Chef Brandon Carter and John Benhase bring a creative approach to seasonal menus in Savannah.

*Melissa Howsam, editor-in-chief Raleigh Magazine*

**Highgarden Rooftop**

*Cele and Lynn Seldon, Seldon Ink*

**Blacksheep**, which opened spring 2020 and is still a fave here in Beaufort. Also, Camp in Greenville, **Oak Steakhouse** in Highlands, and **Common Thread** in Savannah. Frankly, we're impressed with pretty much anyone that opened this year!

*Jai Jones, food writer and photographer*

**Berkley's**. The duo behind this new addition to the Charleston scene previously operated a popular pop-up in town called We Flew South, and thankfully the excellent cheesesteak with house-made cheese whiz came along to the new restaurant. It's a great casual neighborhood spot that I've been to often over the past year.

*Kenneth Andrews, Eater Carolinas contributor*

**Pink Bellies** was everything we expected and more. We all knew the food was going to be good but that dining room is beautiful. As for the unexpected **Berkeley's** came out of no where bringing back some of the We Flew South popup favorites and showing how much more they had up their sleeves when they had the room to — forgive my pun — spread their wings. I'll see myself out.

*Kay West, freelance writer and Eater Carolinas contributor, covering Asheville*

A surprising number of newcomers in Asheville in 2021. On the full-service end of the dining spectrum, two stood out to me. **Benne on Eagle** is not a new restaurant but chef de cuisine Cleophus Hethington is new to Asheville and the restaurant. I've loved watching him imprint the Benne menu with his exploration of the African diaspora foodways since John Fleer hired him in late summer. I was also excited to see Linton Hopkins transform his H&F Burger to a full-on **Holeman and Finch Public House** and after many delays, open the first week of December.

On the casual end, though I rarely indulge in burgers, I savor every greasy, cheesy bite of **Baby Bull's** double cheeseburger with American cheese, B&B pickles, caramelized onions and Duke's mayo (and a side of fries with aioli) while sitting at a picnic table on the patio with a view of the French Broad River. Baby Bull, from the owners of Admiral, Leo's House of Thirst and Bull and Beggar, was inspired by the popular burger formerly on the menu at B&B. I was happy to stand in line at the newly opened **Little Chango Hispanic Craft Kitchen** for chef Iris Rodriguez's pupusas, adobo pork arepa and a shimmering disc of coconut milk and cardamom flan. The welcome inside is as cheery at the sunny yellow exterior.

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