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Food and More with John Kessler (<http://blogs.ajc.com/food-and-more>)

## Five chefs to watch for

4:10 pm June 11, 2010, by John Kessler



Chef Nick Rutherford, the Porter Beer Bar

Mention Atlanta chefs and several names come up time and again. Anne Quatrano and Linton Hopkins are our standard-bearers for fine local cuisine. Richard Blais and Kevin Gillespie are our celebrities who made it to the bigs via "Top Chef." Kevin Rathbun is everyone's favorite purveyor of big flavors. But there are some up-and-coming chefs you've probably never heard of, like Nick Rutherford (above). These five have the goods — the palate, the skills, the P.O.V. — to have an impact on the city in years to come.

Who else belongs on this list?

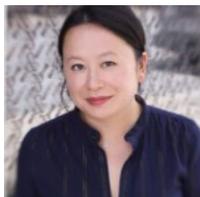
### Nick Rutherford, The Porter Beer Bar

This 30-year-old cooked in some of Atlanta's most refined restaurants — Seeger's, Quinones at Bacchanalia — before opening the inexpensive and pleasantly grungy Porter in the heart of Little Five Points with his wife, Molly Gunn. He has never strayed from his mission of serving burgers, fries and general absorption food, but he never misses an opportunity to put a gourmet spin on comfort classics. The beef stroganoff consists of braised brisket and homemade pappardelle. And those meatballs in the meatball sub? Pig's feet. The daily specials list features some of the most exciting, original fare in the city. Lately he's been spending more time in the garden behind his house growing tomatoes, beans, melons, raspberries and peaches for the restaurant.

**Why do you like cooking in Atlanta?** "There is still a lot of ground to be broken here. It's not like New York where almost every crazy idea has already been done."

**The city needs:** "More ramen noodle bars."

*The Porter Beer Bar: 11:30 a.m.-midnight, Monday-Wednesday; 11:30 a.m.-1 a.m., Thursday; 11:30 a.m.-2:30 a.m., Friday-Saturday; 11 a.m.-midnight., Sunday; 1156 Euclid Ave.; 404-223-0393; [theporterbeerbar.com](http://theporterbeerbar.com)*



### Cynthia Wong, pastry chef, Cakes & Ale

This 36-year-old Southerner (born in Charleston, S.C., grew up in Mobile) has held a lot of jobs in the Atlanta food industry. She was the production manager for Via Elisa Fresh Pasta, a food stylist for the TBS program "Dinner & a Movie" and even a food reviewer for Creative Loafing. But she has found her metier at Billy Allin's Cakes & Ale restaurant, where her unique desserts — such as fennel-brown sugar wafers with toasted almond ice cream and ouzo-marinated cherries — are always worth saving room for.

**So you've got big plans:** "We're building a bakery/dessert bar next to the Cakes & Ale expansion, which we hope to move into by midfall. I'll bake croissants, sticky buns, scones and bagels fresh every morning. I'm really excited to get back to my bread-baking roots."

**Is that all?** "No. I'll make eclairs, freshly baked and filled. Buttermilk layer cakes. Chocolate bundt cakes. Oatmeal cookie and marshmallow ice cream sandwiches. Ice cream birthday cakes to order. Cake and jelly doughnuts and cupcakes — people can say both these things are "overdone," "

but to me there is no such thing, as long as it is tasty. Delicious is delicious, no matter how long it's been around or en vogue."

*Cakes & Ale: 6-10:30 p.m., Tuesday-Wednesday; 6-11 p.m., Thursday; 5:30 p.m.-midnight, Friday-Saturday. Also open the first Sunday of each month for Sunday supper, 5:30 p.m. -closing (call for seatings); 254 W. Ponce de Leon Ave., Decatur; 404-377-7994; cakesandalerestaurant .com*



**Julia LeRoy, currently between jobs**

Like Rutherford, this 29-year-old Detroit native has a background in fine dining, having worked at Seeger's and the Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton Buckhead. But she made it onto the radar at the Bookhouse Pub, where her locavore Mondays were a sensation. Whether she's cooking White Oak Pastures beef cheek pot pie with turnips, kale and a buttermilk biscuit crust, or wild Georgia shrimp with sweet potatoes in chipotle broth, she fashions a distinctive cuisine from regional products.

**What's next:** "I want to open my own restaurant where I can focus on the total experience for the guest. The plan right now is to serve lunch and dinner with a small menu."

**Do you have a name in mind?** "It's probably going to be LeRoy's Lunch and Dinner."



**Todd Ginsberg, chef/co-owner, Bocado**

Precise technique and plating mark the casual dishes — mostly small plates and sandwiches — at Ginsberg's Westside restaurant. This 35-year-old learned his lessons under both Joel Antunes and Bruno Menard, the two chefs he worked under at the Dining Room at the Ritz-Carlton Buckhead. Yet his food is completely unfussy. "Great ingredients speak for themselves," Ginsberg says, talking about his signature salad of bibb lettuce with buttermilk dressing, local goat cheese, cranberries and chives.

**Atlanta inspires you because:** "The dining scene here does not lack variety at all, and there are unique areas to the city, like Buford Highway. I lived in New York, and still to this day think the foods of Southeast Asia are better represented here."

**Where do you see yourself in five years?** "Maybe in Paris. I'd like to open an American-style bistro there."

*Bocado: Lunch 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Monday-Friday; dinner 5 p.m.-closing, Monday-Saturday; 887 Howell Mill Road; 404-815-1399; bocadoatlanta.com*



**Jennifer Etchison, pastry chef, Pricci**

A Columbus native, Etchison, 34, worked with such notable area pastry chefs as Kirk Parks (Rathbun's) and Kathryn King (Aria) before assuming the position at Pricci. Working closely with Pricci chef Piero Premoli, Etchison researches the canon of Italian sweets thoroughly for the restaurant's monthly regions-of-Italy menu. Whether she's making a double-crusted ricotta tart or a Friuli-style crostada of dried fruits and chocolate, Etchison's creations are memorable because they are so unlike anything else in the city. She makes swoon-worthy gelato — perhaps a Nutella version she tops with candied chestnuts — or a floral honey one that catches, like good honey does, in the back of your throat. Then again, her Nutella moon pies with Coca-Cola granita makes a compelling case for Italian/Atlantan fusion.

**One day you'll own:** "A small bakeshop where I can make all of my favorite desserts. I could also imagine running a small bed and breakfast."

**Where do you eat out?** "Mostly I cook at home and am happy with that."

*Pricci: Lunch 11:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Monday-Friday; dinner 5-11 p.m., Monday-Saturday; 5-10 p.m., Sunday; 500 Pharr Rd.; 404-237-2941; buckheadrestaurants.com/pricci/*

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