



litz lapidus public relations

THE ATLANTAN

“Toying Around: Livingston’s New Chef Like To Play With His Food”
By Katie Kelly Bell
May-June 2011



ZEB OUT Clockwise from bottom left: Chicken bratwurst with shaved Brussels sprouts and caraway; the lounge at Livingston; chef Zeb Stevenson; tuna crudo with candied mustard and pistachio

Livingston
RATING ★★★
659 Peachtree St. NE,
404.897.5000,
livingstonatlanta.com

What the stars mean:
0 = poor, unacceptable
★ = fair, some noteworthy qualities
★★ = good, above average
★★★ = very good, well above norm
★★★★ = excellent, among the area's best
★★★★★ = world-class, extraordinary in every detail.

Reviews are based on multiple visits.
Ratings reflect the reviewer's overall reaction to food, ambience and service.

Tucked inside the historic Georgian Terrace Hotel, Livingston sits directly across from the Fox Theatre—the marquee glow is very “bright lights and big city” through the gauzy sheers on the restaurant windows, giving the dining experience a unique Broadway feel.

The allure of grandeur defines this historic setting, which blends sleek modern furnishings with stately marble columns and detailed ironwork in a soaring two-story space. Livingston has rightfully earned a reputation as a classy place to nosh a light meal before any Fox show. Yet the elegant atmosphere and theatrical vibe belie the relaxed and more playful menu of new Executive Chef Zebulon Stevenson.

Originally under the direction of chef Gary Mennie (of Taurus and Canoe), Livingston is now in the hands of Stevenson, who has spent time honing his craft at Dick and Harry’s and Spice Market. He characterizes his style

as fun, making note of the fact that he “bores easily,” and explains, “The worst thing any chef can do right now is take their food and themselves too seriously. You can still have discipline and technique, and have some fun at the same time—it’s just food.”

These playful impulses have netted some of Stevenson’s most inspired dishes, like his from-scratch chicken bratwurst. Using fresh toasted spices for best flavor and poaching each one in chicken stock, he serves it up with shaved Brussels sprouts and caraway. It’s an under-the-radar knockout. Expect to see more hot dog and sausage inspirations at Livingston—but with upscale touches (such as using short rib for an all-beef dog) to go along with the restaurant’s elegant vibe.

The pulled duck flatbread layered with shredded duck, figs, rochetta cheese and arugula also stays true to his relaxed approach. Everything plays **CONTINUED...**

HOURS

Breakfast: 6:30AM-10PM;

Lunch: Mon.-Fri. 11AM-2:30PM;

Brunch: Sat. & Sun., 10:30AM-3PM; Dinner: Sun.-Thu., 5-10PM

Fri. & Sat., 5-11PM

WHAT TO ORDER

Any of chef Stevenson’s fresh charcuterie, skirt steak, duck and fig flatbread.



CUT ABOVE From top left: The terrace facing the Fox Theatre is the best people-watching on Peachtree; thinly sliced Kobe beef carpaccio with vinegar caviar and shallot salt; carved house-smoked duck breast with baby turnips, hazelnuts and kumquat

...CONTINUED so well together on that wood-fired crust—the tang of the cheese works in contrast to the burst of sweet fig, and the duck lends it all a nice meaty, salty kick. An added drizzle of violet-scented honey on top seals the deal.

Stevenson doesn't shy away from fancy-schmancy dishes, but they aren't where he shines brightest. Starters such as the lobster tempura with a dash of smoked salt or beef carpaccio with vinegar caviar and shallot salt are tasty, but fairly tame. Things go awry with the delicate tuna crudo, which is overpowered by the bold and clashing flavors of candied mustard and pistachio pesto.

When we asked about the house-made artisan meats platter, our server (and the menu) mistakenly attributed all cured charcuterie to chef Stevenson. Alas, he only crafts fresh (read: terrines, sausages and pâtés), not cured, charcuterie in house. If you want the real deal, skip the imported salami and serrano ham in favor of his luscious handmade terrines and pâtés.

Many of the basics (steak, salmon, lamb, etc.) are done beautifully. Your best bet is the grilled skirt steak with hand-cut fries and smoked hollandaise. Swoon. The caramelized crust, the tenderness! Each cut marinates in papaya juice and ginger for 24 hours before serving. With a glass of the Merryvale Starmont Merlot, you'll be

falling for this instead of your date. Pan-roasted salmon with grilled shiitake and braised leek is also a nice option if you want to go lighter.

The theater menu offers a limited three-course meal with a salad, entrée and dessert, along with a glass of wine, for \$30—a great deal—but stick with the heavy proteins here, such as house-smoked pork with scallion barbecue sauce or the beef short rib with rosemary potato gratin. Our shrimp ravioli with water chestnuts and black truffle came with an earthy and sensuous mushroom broth. However, I like my stuffed pasta soft and pillowy, and the crunch of water chestnut in the pasta stuffing was just weird.

Breakfast and lunch offer fairly predictable fare—it is a hotel restaurant after all. You'll find a solid selection, including panini, burgers, crab cakes, chicken salad and the not-to-be-missed chopped vegetable salad with sweet onion dressing.

The menu continues to evolve. Right now, Stevenson is experimenting with molecular gastronomy in the hopes of creating a fizzy vinaigrette to pair with white asparagus and caviar. He also wants to get serious with crafting hot dogs. For those who like to play with food, Stevenson's flair and fun with the basics should keep diners amused. **A**

Crumbs and Caveats

>>> The name Zeb is short for Zebulon. "My parents loved *The Waltons* and I'm named after Grandpa (Zeb) Walton. They were big fans. I'd love to be able to say there is some cool reason for the name, but it serves me well." >>>> On theater nights, chef advises diners to come in after 7:30PM to avoid the mayhem of theater-goers in turbo dinner mode. >>> He plays in a rock 'n' roll classics cover band with Gary Mennie and Ford Fry (of JCT. Kitchen). >>> He was a fine arts major at Cornell and paints on the side. >>> The restaurant is named for Livingston Mims, one-time mayor of Atlanta at the turn of the century.