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Southbound Restaurant- Where Cooking with Fire Meets Southern Hospitality!

By Bailli Paula Traktman Duncan

Southbound Restaurant's Owners Kelleanne and Chef Ryan Jones have worked together for 25 years, initially at their successful catering company and then at the "Mill at 21", their award-winning fine dining restaurant in Tariffville, Connecticut. There they were first recognized by the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs.

In 2016, the Joneses made a southbound pivot to Charleston, South Carolina, which offered opportunities for their culinary ambitions as well as a prime coastal location. Since then, their Free Reign group has opened four successful restaurants in the Charleston area, each with its own distinct gastronomic focus and atmosphere. Chef Ryan leads the culinary teams and menu development, while Kelleanne is responsible for their striking interior design, front-of-house operations and overall hospitality.

On Wednesday, May 20th, we enjoyed a special dinner at their Southbound Restaurant. Situated in a restored historic house, Southbound has a unique and welcoming layout featuring a lively bar, counter seating overlooking the Chef station, outdoor porch and interior seating on two floors, and a charming private dining room where we were seated. Southbound is a live-fire restaurant, with all cooking performed over two wood fires—one designed for pots and pans, the other for direct cooking. The finesse and precision their Chefs achieve under these conditions are truly remarkable.

We enjoyed a four-course prix-fixe meal with wine pairings designed especially for us. For our 1st Course we were served local asparagus, lightly grilled with a soft hen egg enveloped in truffled Béarnaise sauce, topped with shaved truffles. This luxurious dish paired with Morét-Brealynn Rosé (2025), Santa Lucia Highlands, Monterey County, California. Produced from



Pinot Noir grapes, the wine comes from winemaker Morét Brealynn-Chavez, whose path to winemaking is a fascinating one. After studying psychology and working as a publicist and marketing specialist for wineries, she transitioned into winemaking, releasing her first rosé in 2021. Her wines have earned considerable praise. This rosé displayed a striking crimson hue with notes of watermelon and raspberry, complemented this course.

The 2nd Course, grilled octopus and Carolina shrimp accompanied by a cauliflower vadouvan sauce, charred scallion and apple relish, and micro cilantro. This deeply flavorful seafood dish was paired with Domaine La Croix Saint-Laurent Sancerre (2024), Sancerre, France. This Sauvignon Blanc, produced by the Cirotte family whose respect for the environment has earned them the Terra Vitis label ("sustainable viticulture"), is both dry and fruit-forward, making it an ideal companion for seafood.

Our 3rd Course, North Carolina flounder in a smoked oyster and fennel chowder, accompanied by parsnips, fingerling potatoes, and trout roe, offered a sophisticated combination of flavors and textures. It was paired with Alberto Graci Etna Rosso (2022), Sicily, Italy. This organic wine is produced from Nerello Mascalese grapes, a varietal native to Mount Etna. The volcanic soils contribute distinctive wine characteristics, with clean, refined flavors pairing well with the richness of the fish.

The 4th Course was a venison petite filet accompanied by creamsicle potatoes, wilted Swiss chard, and blueberry-vanilla jus. The flavorful venison was paired with Meadowcroft Cabernet Sauvignon (2023), Napa Valley, California. With notes of dark fruit and pepper, the wine provided a robust complement to the dish. Fully satisfied after this superb meal, we were delighted to linger over truffles that served as the perfect exclamation point to the evening's culinary journey.

The décor at Southbound is rustic and elegant, with intimate private dining rooms making us feel like special guests in a remarkable home. Service was warm and proficient, with Kelleanne making us feel welcome, expressing her appreciation for once again being involved with the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs. While live-fire cooking may evoke images of rustic fare and large cuts of meat, the cuisine at Southbound was creative, refined, and memorable. We were impressed by every dish and the thoughtfully chosen wine pairings. This evening was undoubtedly one of the highlights of our season - the blend of "Cooking with Fire and Southern Hospitality" was outstanding!