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From fine regional Indian in D.C. to a reimagined chophouse in Los Angeles, **John Mariani** has once again scouted the country in search of the best new eateries. Inside, the twenty most exciting places to dine right now. PHOTOGRAPH BY DARREN BRAUN



## ECCO Atlanta



The Fifth Group had already proven themselves innovators in this town with restaurants such as South City Kitchens, La Tavola Trattoria, and Sala-Sabor de Mexico, but Ecco is a much bigger (240 seats) and more refined space, and certainly Atlanta's best Mediterranean-style restaurant ever.

The restaurant is housed in what used to be the Atlanta Fencing Club, with dark walnut, leather, and Carrara marble adding a swank modern sheen to an old, comfortable space. Chef Micah Willix works in full sight from the tiled open kitchen, and as soon as you're seated you're tempted by the sizzles and smells as he whips up specialties like fall-from-the-bone short ribs

stuffed with hot piquillo peppers, and sherry-dashed sweetbreads with a crushed-almond coating. His golden-squash blooms are fried and given a crunchy sprinkling of sea salt; the braised breast of veal can be eaten with a spoon. Loads of garlic bolster the chile-braised pork that dresses firm house-made pappardelle noodles. Order any bottle of wine and, at meal's end, you get a lovely description of the vintage printed on a very thin sheet of wood to take home with you—along with your feeling of deep satisfaction. 40 Seventh Street; 404-347-9555; ecco-atlanta.com.

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