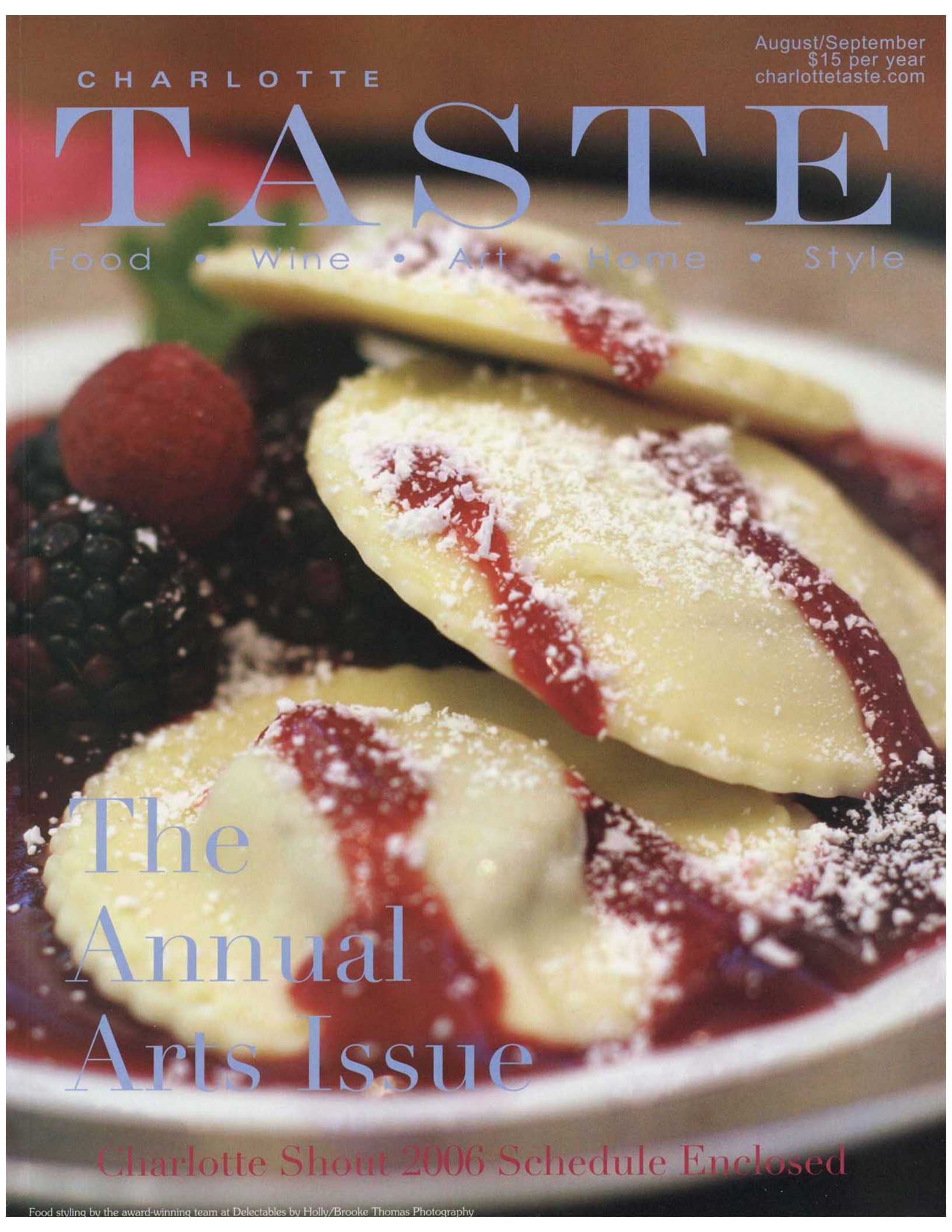


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The Annual Arts Issue

Charlotte Shout 2006 Schedule Enclosed

Currents Coastal Cuisine

I love my neighborhood – even though some of my friends do refer to it as ‘the boonies’. In fact, I think the area between Matthews and Weddington has only one drawback, and that’s a drawback shared by all of the best neighborhoods in Charlotte: It has no ocean view.

But Currents Coastal Cuisine, tucked away in the back corner of Promenade on Providence, is the next best thing. The restaurant is definitely beachy in theme – there’s a heavy Charleston influence, with a few Hawaiian and Caribbean touches – and yet it still somehow manages to remind me of Shutters, my favorite restaurant in Santa Monica. It doesn’t matter what coast you’re into – with its airy aquamarine décor, Currents will make you feel like you’re there.

Currents is the collective brainchild of four men. It’s owned by native Charlotteans Jimmy Lee and Raymond Tom and managed by their former East Meck classmate Mark Mueller. The chef is Will Pickett who attended Johnson & Wales and worked with Mueller in Charleston. Will shows a lot of creativity in presentation, especially in his appetizers. The Low Country Pickled Shrimp (\$12) come eight to a mason jar, packed tight in a sweet and tangy pickling juice with onions and garlic. The Bento Boxes (prices vary) are a montage of whatever Will is featuring that evening. There are usually four selections, including such exotic little nibbles as a shrimp corn dog, ‘Oyster Rockafella’, chilled flank steak or rare tuna salad.

Mark Mueller estimates that two-thirds of the guests order ‘off the line’, a menu feature that allows you to choose your fish, select how you want it prepared and then add whatever sauce and side suit your fancy. (Prices range from \$14 for salmon to \$22 for grouper.) Another good choice is the Black Pepper and Cornmeal Crusted Tuna (\$22), grilled medium rare and served with black olive tapenade and sautéed spinach. While the entrées clearly lean toward seafood, Currents doesn’t ignore carnivores. The Portside list features duck, pork, steak and a rack of lamb. And the menu finishes strong with island-themed desserts. The Old Fashioned Coconut Cake with Caramel Pineapple Sauce (\$8) is such a huge and tasty slab that you can take it home and nibble on it for days.

Take it from me – the rooftop bar is a welcome addition to the neighborhood. (Likewise, the Sunday brunch.) With its constant breeze, live music and high stools, the cleverly named C3 Patio really does seem like a beachfront hangout. (Last time I visited, there was a whole flock of Jimmy Buffet wannabees, complete with flowered shirts and cigars, drinking rum in the corner.) The bar menu features a variety of options, including Pork Tenderloin Skewers with Sweet Chili Sauce (\$11), a Southern Cheese Plate with Housemade Pimento Cheese (\$8) and my favorite, the Fish Tacos (\$10). I like fish tacos in just about any form, but these – salmon with corn tortillas, avocado and cilantro cream – stand out from the pack. Settle back with a couple of margaritas and you’ve got all the makings of a great summer evening.

And after a while, the traffic on 485 starts to sound a little like the surf. *Currents Coastal Cuisine. 10822 Providence Road. 704.845.0999. ■*

By Kim Wright Wiley, Photo by Brooke Thomas

