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SECTION D

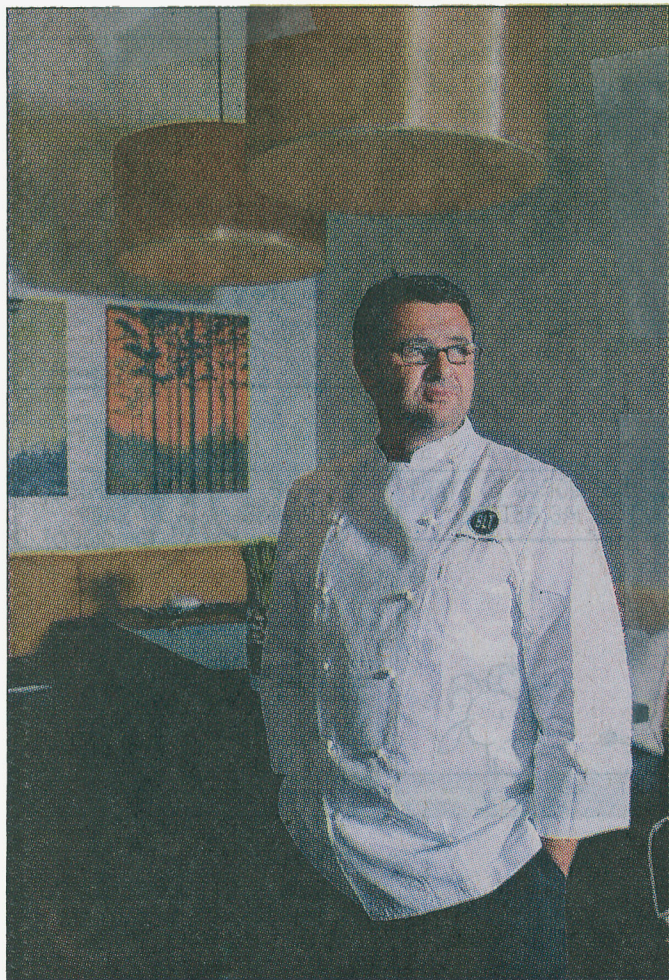
Carolina Living

FOOD

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KATHLEEN PURVIS



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5 Questions for Laurent Tourondel

In the name of the restaurant BLT Steak at Charlotte's new Ritz-Carlton, "BLT" stands for Bistro Laurent Tourondel.

Tourondel, 42, is the French-born, classically trained executive chef who's launched a raft of BLTs - BLT Fish, BLT Market, BLT Prime, BLT Burger - starting in New York and now around the world, including BLT Steaks in Washington, Miami and Hong Kong.

Bon Appetit magazine named him Restaurateur of the Year in 2007, and he even turned up on "Top Chef" a few weeks ago.

For last week's opening, he flew into Charlotte from Hong Kong and sat still long enough to answer five questions. — KATHLEEN PURVIS

Q. *What bad cooking habit do you wish you could stop everyone from doing?*

"There are a lot of people who don't taste the food. I don't think they taste for seasoning. And a lot of people don't cook fish. They are scared to cook fish. It's simple to cook."

Q. *Is there one food from France that you wish you could get in America?*

"No. Everything is here now. In all my restaurants, I carry American cheese, not French. I have this discussion with French people; they think they have the best. Well, of course they think that - they are French. But I tell them, 'If I put out one tray of American cheese and one tray of French cheese, you wouldn't be able to tell which is which.'"

Q. *If you could go to one of your restaurants without being recognized, what would you order?*

"It doesn't matter if I am recognized; I would still order the same thing. The hamachi appetizer (raw yellowtail with avocado, pickled ramps and honey-orange sauce). Kobe (Wagyu) skirt steak. Jalapeno mashed potatoes. The grilled tomato. And for dessert, I will have the steamed date pudding (sticky toffee pudding)."

Q. *You've traveled all over the world. Which country is your favorite for street vendor food?*

"Thailand. First, they have amazing ingredients - everything spicy, everything vegetables, so many vegetables, it all looks healthy but it's not. But it's full of flavor."

Q. *What are the key steps to a perfect steak?*

"First, get the right meat. If you don't get the right meat, you've got to marinate it to add flavor. Season it properly. And grill it on a proper grill. Charcoal is good. And very important, let it rest before you cut it. A minimum of 5 minutes. I know it's hard to do, to wait, but you have to wait."