



**You'll want to check this list - twice - for delicious local drinks and dishes to try on a festive night out.**

Holidays are a time of indulgence. To help you indulge this season, **spark** has joined with Ashley Ryals, owner of Homegrown LLC, to put together the ultimate itinerary for a decadent night of food and drink.

A Huntsville native, Ryals founded Homegrown to promote local Huntsville businesses. Over the years, she says, "I developed a passion for our downtown development." That led to the launch of the Dine and Dash event, a trolley-tour-cum-tasting of five downtown restaurants and bars. Today, Homegrown has expanded beyond event planning to include marketing and event consultation.

Here, you'll find the signature drinks and dishes from around town that made our wish list this season.

# our favorite

## COCKTAIL:

### THE TWICKENHAM BELLE MARTINI *from* WATERCRESS

If you can't resist the icy thrill of a well-made martini, then the Twickenham Belle is one you won't want to miss. A staple of the popular Bridge Street Town Centre restaurant, the concoction is a Watercress original.

"It's a mix of lavender-infused Bombay gin, Cointreau, St-Germain elderflower liqueur, the juice of half a fresh lemon, and a dash of elder flour syrup from Holland," says bartender Laura Gillespie.

The restaurant also offers live jazz from 6 p. m. to 9 p. m. on Tuesday nights, which Ryals says "really adds to the ambiance and makes for a great date night."

## APPETIZER:

### CRISPY SHRIMP AND GRITS *from* 1892 EAST RESTAURANT & TAVERN

1892 East Restaurant & Tavern in historic Five Points is renowned for its eclectic menu featuring locally grown ingredients, but the popular Crispy Shrimp and Grits tops the list.

After all, what's not to love about shrimp from the Gulf, Red Hill Cheddar from Alabama's own Yellow Moon Creamery, and garlic grits, all of which are then crusted in bread crumbs and fried to a golden brown?

"The crispy Shrimp & Grits is a perfect combination of Southern flavor, local sourcing, and our own twist on a classic," sums up Chef Steve Bunner.

Ryals agrees.

"It's not your typical shrimp and grits," she says, adding praise for 1892's atmosphere. "My friends and I can often be found sitting at their bar sipping on champagne and brainstorming future event ideas for Homegrown."



Sarah Cole | photography



Bob Gathany | photography



# things...

BY DIANA LACHANCE

## MAIN DISH:

### PAELLA *from* THE EAVES

Something of a hidden gem, The Eaves restaurant shares its Church Street space - and chefs! - with the Budding Chef Cooking School. Maybe that's what makes its paella so inspired, though Chef Merle Phillip also credits a mix of secret spices.

"The spices I put into it impart lots of layers of flavor, not only into the rice but also into other ingredients," she says. "It's a fabulous dish and we're probably the only restaurant in the city that has paella."

It also helps that the dish is extremely hearty, overflowing with smoked chicken, Spanish chorizo, mussels, clams, lobsters, and prawns.

"It's to die for and it's plenty large enough to share," says Ryals.



Sarah Cole | photography

## DESSERT:

### PEANUT BUTTER & JELLY IN PHYLLO *from* COTTON ROW RESTAURANT

Food and nostalgia often go hand in hand, but few things embody the sweetness of childhood like Cotton Row Restaurant's Peanut Butter and Jelly in Phyllo.

Don't let the modest description on the menu fool you. This delectable throwback consists of a flaky phyllo dough exterior that envelopes a home-made brownie topped with strawberry compote, peanut butter and chocolate chips.

"They only serve it for dinner, but if you ask sometimes you can get it at lunch," says Ryals. She recommends parties of six or more ask to be seated in the downstairs wine cellar, which makes for a cozier setting.



Sarah Cole | photography

## AFTER-DINNER DRINK:

### PEAR-SUEDE MARTINI *from* AMENDMENT XXI

Yes, we already suggested you start the evening with a martini, but you'll just have to trust us! Located downtown on the Northside Square, Amendment XXI is widely known as Huntsville's hottest spot for house hand-crafted cocktails.

One sip of this potent potion and you'll know why. Co-crafted by bartenders Brandon Craig and Jaryl Wilson, the martini is made from fresh pear slices, lime juice, peach schnapps, and Absolute pear vodka.

"We had a pear drink last fall, so we decided to mix some of the old with some of the new and come up with a great new drink," says Wilson.

Even better, says Ryals, the restaurant is "smoke free and the service is top notch." It also features plenty of tasting nights, like the "Above Top Shelf Tasting Series," with liquors ranging from scotch and rum to champagne and sake.



Eric Schultz | photography