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Aria

490 E. Paces Ferry Road, Buckhead
404.233.7673, aria-atl.com

American, \$20-\$36, Reservations recommended, Patio
Executive Chef and owner: Gerry Klaskala Pastry Chef: Kathryn King

Aria just celebrated its 10th anniversary in March, and what better way to continue the festivities than landing the No. 3 spot on our 100 Best Restaurants list? The restaurant has consistently ranked in the top 10 nearly every year since it opened, so we certainly weren't surprised our readers voted it No. 3 this year.

And in a time when Atlanta has seen several of its fine dining establishments close their doors due to a slow economy that's affected the way we dine out, it's great to see that Executive Chef and owner Gerry Klaskala's inventive fine American cuisine is still recognized as among the best in the city. Every dish on the menu is prepared with the freshest ingredients of the day and finished *ala minute*. The result is sophisticated, yet simple entrées that are bold in flavor and detailed in plate presentation.

Since there's no lunch service here, Klaskala and his kitchen staff spend the day devoted only to dinner service. And even though the menu changes nightly, you'll always find at least one of his signature slow-food dishes that have been braised, roasted and stewed all day to develop layers of flavor. Entrées like slow-braised Niman Ranch Berkshire pork and braised Painted Hill Ranch natural beef short rib are standards.

Even if Klaskala is top toque at Aria, he's the first to credit the rest of his culinary team and staff with the success of his restaurant, especially pastry chef Kathryn King. She's by far one of the best pastry chefs in town, and diners are doing themselves an injustice if they skip out on at least one of her sweet treats—think butterscotch pot de crème, seasonal sorbets and her signature warm chocolate cheesecake. Pair dinner with a glass of wine from Aria's extensive wine list, which includes vintages from boutique and emerging wineries, all set among Aria's striking ambiance, and you've got all the ingredients for a stellar evening.

Signature Dishes: The warm lobster cocktail; Niman Ranch slow-roasted pork; Zinfandel-braised beef short rib; pan-seared sea scallops; and warm chocolate cheesecake.

What We Love: The interior: Designed by The Johnson Studio, the black and white color palette complements the building's original neoclassical architecture. But the *pièce de résistance* is the upper balcony seating. The special section features very private, candle-lit black booths ideal for special occasion dining.