

# SOUTH PARK

M A G A Z I N E

*Plus*

FAB FASHION  
SHOWS ROCKING  
CHARLOTTE'S  
RUNWAYS

WINING MEETS  
DINING AT THESE  
LUXE LOCAL  
DINNERS

ROAD TRIP! THREE  
COZY MOUNTAIN  
GETAWAYS



## Culture Crush

A PEEK INSIDE AN ARTIST'S HISTORIC HOME  
UP CLOSE WITH A NATIONALLY KNOWN PAINTER  
WHAT'S HITTING THE ARTS SCENE THIS SEASON

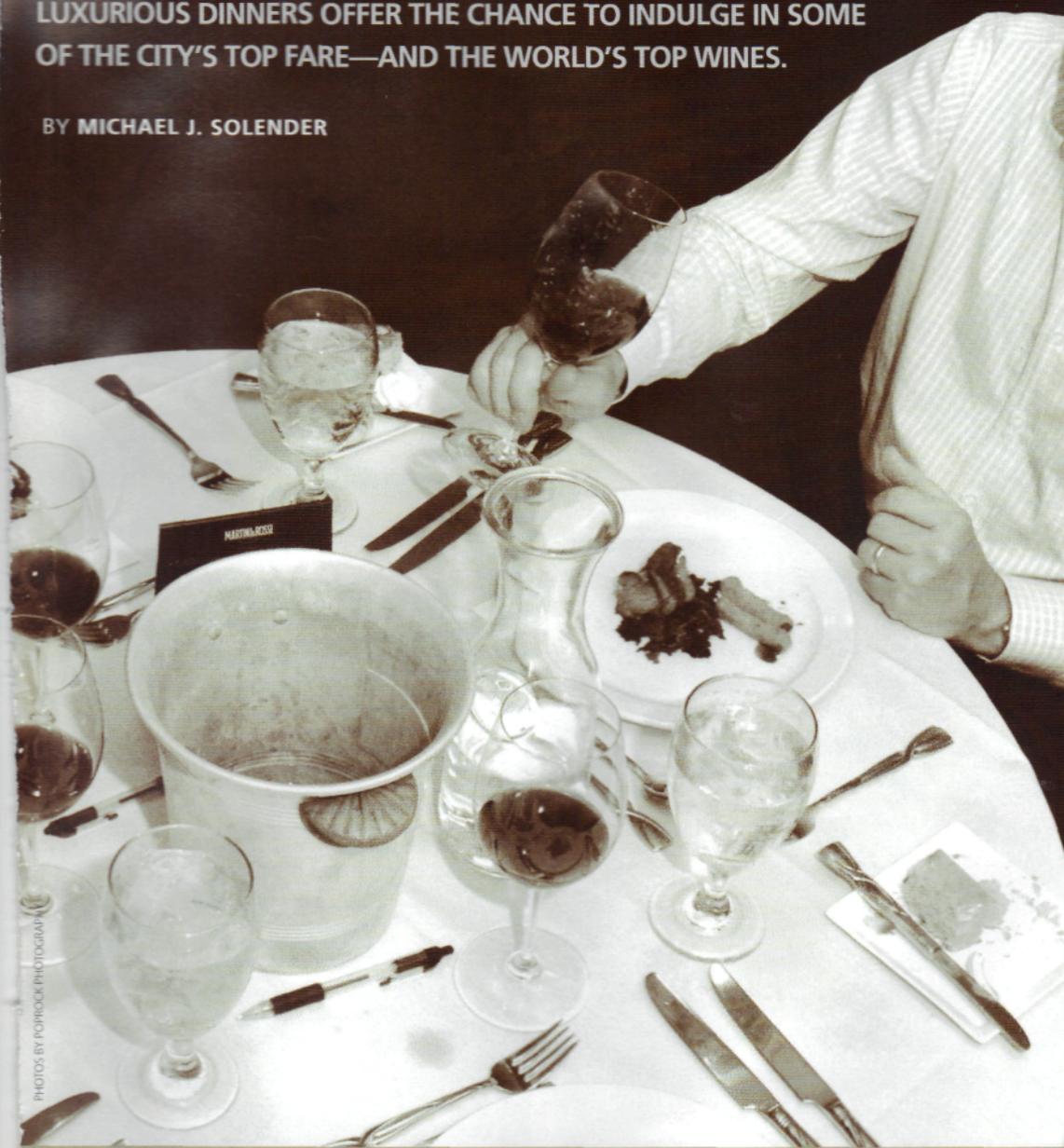
# avenue

Cuisine. Arts. Travel.

## Grape Escapes

LUXURIOUS DINNERS OFFER THE CHANCE TO INDULGE IN SOME OF THE CITY'S TOP FARE—AND THE WORLD'S TOP WINES.

BY MICHAEL J. SOLENDER



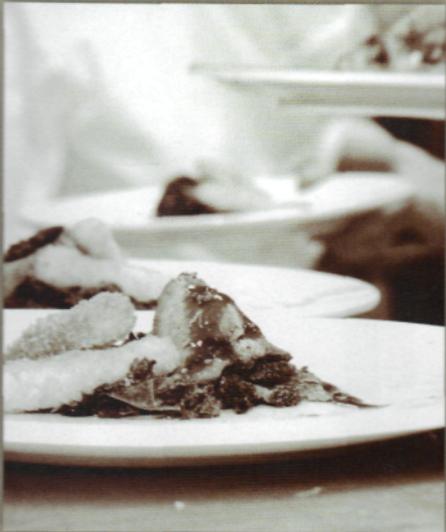
It is 6:30 p.m. on a sultry summer evening and Jim and Lisa Alexander's elegant South-Park restaurant, Zebra, is filled with 40 diners mingling as they sip sparkling Blanc de Blanc and nibble on salmon tartare and crème fraiche filled tiny cones. Moments later, the group is sharing an estate Chardonnay over butter poached swordfish served atop polenta and golden chanterelles.

Welcome to the start of a perfectly constructed wine dinner featuring a special chef-crafted menu that complements the bounties of the seasons with wines especially chosen for that purpose. As more local restaurants offer these sophisticated evenings complete with words from the winemakers and chefs' creative bests, we've found four top spots for soaking in the trend.



## CAFÉ MONTE

From the burgundy colored leather banquetts and wicker-backed chairs, to the authentic Parisian bar seemingly straight from the 14th arrondissement, Café Monte has the vibe of a romantic Parisian bistro. Even better, the kitchen has mastered the slow braises (Coq au Vin, anyone?), rich quiches, and dozens of other rich bistro staples. Owner Monte Smith and Chef Ric Donaldson welcome diners the last Tuesday of every month for five course wine dinners. A recent harvest meal featured the venerable Stags Leap Cellars' wines paired with such treats as an Heirloom Tomato Salad and a NC Day-boat Grouper. [www.cafemonte.net](http://www.cafemonte.net)



## E2

Wine is second nature to e2 General Manager Jeff Wakem. Christened with the coveted Court of Master Sommeliers certification, he selected every bottle offered at e2, Emeril Lagasse's uptown eatery. Chef Brian Motola prepares just the right menu to pair with some of the most exciting wine offerings in the region. "First and foremost is a fun and special guest experience—these aren't stuffy affairs," says Wakem. Diners recently were delighted with a South African offering from the Thelema winery, a small family maker with limited distribution. The Curry Rubbed Wild Boar with corn milk, sweet potato, and peanuts won raves. And most guests took advantage of the special prices available and purchased the evening's offered wines after the leisurely two-hour dinner. [www.e2emerils.com](http://www.e2emerils.com)



Culinary Institute of America

trained chef, owner, and wine

maven Jim Alexander has been

setting the standard for wine din-

ners at his contemporary French

restaurant for more than a dozen

years. Zebra has built a strong

following by providing some of

the most dynamic and inspired

plates in Charlotte. The Chicken

Ballontine with Roasted Chili

Pepper-Molasses Gastrique drew

applause from guests at a recent

pop up wine dinner where both

the menu and the featured winery,

NC based Shelton Vineyards, were

kept secret before the event. The

first-time experiment sold out in

spite of the mystery—a testament

to Zebra's well-deserved reputa-

tion. [www.zebrarestaurant.net](http://www.zebrarestaurant.net) **SR**

**ZEBRA**



## UPSTREAM

This Pan-Asian stalwart puts a

twist on its wine dinners by letting

guests be their own sommeliers,

bringing their own wine to accom-

pany Chef Tom Dymness's creative

four course menu. "These dinners

are one of our most popular dining

experiences," says proprietor, Ken

Higgins. "Our guests are incredibly

knowledgeable about wine and use

the dinners to take advantage of our

ability to get special product and pre-

pared in delicious and creative ways."

A recent BYOB wine dinner show-

cased an English Pea Cannelloni,

Wild Rabbit Schnitzel, and Snake

River Kurubuta Short Ribs. [www.harpersgroup.com/upstream](http://www.harpersgroup.com/upstream)