

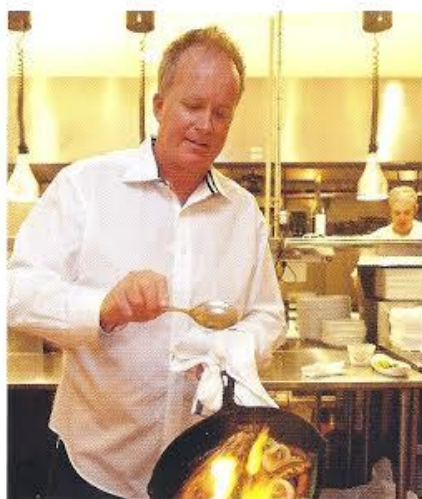
Southern Cast Iron



CAST-IRON CATFISH

Fresh, local, Southern: a bite of Birmingham at Galley & Garden

BY GINNY HEARD PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN O'HAGAN



Located on Highland Avenue in the Five Points South neighborhood of Birmingham, Alabama, Chef James Boyce's newest restaurant, Galley & Garden, provides an upscale respite from the hustle and bustle just outside its doors. Seasonal, local food adorns the tables in a gracious, contemporary Southern space.

In the stunning kitchen that's a focal point of the restaurant and allows diners to watch the show through a large steel-framed window, sous and prep chefs work in measured movements in a kind of kitchen ballet as Chef Boyce uses a cast-iron skillet to conjure a beautiful dish of catfish and just-picked vegetables.

While swirls of olive oil pour from his steady, practiced hand and coil into the hot 10-inch skillet, Chef Boyce decides which vegetables will take the plunge first. In go zucchini, squash, carrots, and onions. They sizzle as they caramelize—grilled vegetables never seemed so glamorous. Steam billows from the pan, rising with the souls of the sacrificed veggies. They have died a noble death.

He shakes the pan as flames lick up around it and talks about the catfish. "I get mine from a local guy, and he brings me beautiful catfish," says Chef Boyce. It's not farm-raised, mind you—don't you dare think it was farm raised. He removes the vegetables from the pan to make room for the catfish, which sears in the deep-greased blackness of the cast iron. "You can't get this kind of color in any other type of pan," he says, pointing to the golden brown crust appearing on the fish. Once the fish is cooked, he adds the vegetables back to the skillet along with a handful of fresh ones to get further definition of color, texture, and flavor. "Cast iron retains heat well and cooks very evenly—it's the perfect pan."

Originally from New York, Chef Boyce has that straight-talk tendency that one expects from a New Yorker. As such, you know he isn't sugar-coating things. And though his background is further north than his food would suggest, he's certainly embraced the Southern cast-iron passion and names Tennessee's Lodge as his favorite brand.

Chef Boyce has a good deal of experience with cast-iron pans—he uses them at his restaurants and at home. He can still remember the first thing he cooked in cast iron: bacon. He had the opportunity to cook in an 18-inch skillet once—a feat of muscle and determination. These days, he mostly finds himself using a 10-inch skillet along with miniature skillets for some of his desserts and sides. "They're a tenth of the cost of other pans, and they always do such a good job," he says. As a matter of fact, he has a good deal more to recommend about cast iron—namely, that you don't have to wash it. "I hate to say that out loud—it sounds bad—but washing it ruins it," he says. "Just wipe it out." He's right—the seasoning is what makes your cornbread and cobblers so delicious with such depth of flavor. "Seasoning," of course, refers to the many wonderful meals embedded in the pan's finish. Don't mistake the instruction to season a skillet, as a relative of Chef Boyce's once did, to mean adding salt and pepper to an empty skillet!

Beyond the ease of use and upkeep, what truly makes cast iron stand out to Chef Boyce is that you can use it to cook anything: meats, vegetables, anything you can cook on the grill—the list goes on. With his catfish dish finished off with a handful of torn fresh herbs, Chef Boyce grins assuredly. "There's nothing cast iron can't do," he says. We're inclined to agree with him. ●

VISIT GALLEY & GARDEN
2220 HIGHLAND AVE. S
205.939.5551
GALLEYANDGARDEN.COM



CAST-IRON CATFISH WITH PAN-ROASTED VEGETABLES

Recipe submitted by Chef James Boyce, Galley & Garden,
Birmingham, Alabama

Yield: 4 servings

Tender baby vegetables and flaky catfish combine for a simple and elegant skillet supper.

- 4 (6- to 7-ounce) catfish fillets
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 8 baby carrots, halved lengthwise

- 4 cipollini onions, halved
- 8 baby zucchini, halved lengthwise
- 8 baby squash, halved lengthwise
- 1/2 pound thin asparagus spears, halved crosswise
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 1/2 cup vegetable or chicken broth

FIRST Heat large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. Season catfish with salt and pepper. Add olive oil to skillet. Cook catfish until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes per side. Set aside on a warm platter.

NEXT Add butter and carrot to skillet; cook 2 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add onion, zucchini, and squash; cook 2 minutes more. Add asparagus, thyme, and broth. Cook until broth evaporates, 3 to 5 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.

LAST Return catfish to skillet. Serve immediately.

FALL 2015 SOUTHERN CAST IRON 11

BRANDING + COMMUNICATIONS
GREEN OLIVE
— MEDIA —
★ ★ ★

For More Information Contact:

Green Olive Media, LLC.
361 17th Street, Suite 1,
Atlanta, Georgia 30363
404-815-9327
www.greenolivemedia.com