

# Restaurant

HOSPITALITY

MAY 2014

# THE COOL FACTOR

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PHILLY SOUL FOOD

food & drink/ 70

5 THINGS GABRIEL  
RUCKER CAN'T LIVE  
WITHOUT

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SAKE: THE NEXT  
ARTISAN BREWING  
TREND

# 5

RESTAURANTS  
THAT HAVE IT

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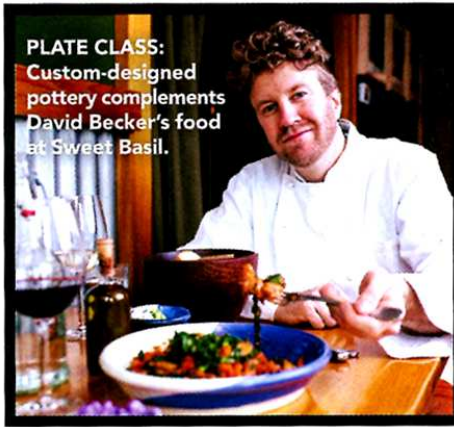
SO DOES THIS CHICK:

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THE COUNTRY'S BEST VEGAN RESTAURANT? 56





**PLATE CLASS:**  
Custom-designed pottery complements David Becker's food at Sweet Basil.

DAVID SALAFIA

STYLE

## At This Restaurant, Even the Plates Are Local

Chef/restaurateur Dave Becker of Sweet Basil creates his own dinnerware. By Gail Bellamy

**A**T SWEET BASIL in Needham, MA, chef Dave Becker has broadened the definition of locally sourced. He makes his own plates and serving dishes for the restaurant, using Massachusetts clay from Sheffield Pottery. In the future, he predicts, knowing the potter who creates a restaurant's artisanal plates may become as important as knowing the farmer who produced the grass-fed beef.

"Whatever you can do to make yourself unique and stand out will be another level of getting noticed," Becker says. "I'm surrounded by many great restaurants, and do what I can to be unique."

Sweet Basil's Italian menu features appetizers such as smoky veal meatballs in marinara sauce with housemade herbed ricotta and crispy kale (\$13) and entrees such as handmade ravioli (\$20).

Becker has been hand-throwing the restaurant's plates and serving dishes since Sweet Basil opened. "I've worked in restaurants my entire life, since I was a

little kid. There are so many things to think about with a restaurant—the appropriate price for smelts, the dumpster company. I worry about everything all the time, trying to be better...I wanted to do something with no consequences. I wanted to find something I could consciously suck at. It's healthy to have hobbies where you don't try to over-achieve."

Instead of taking up golf or another pursuit, Becker turned to making pottery.

"It's addictive. I've graduated from lopsided ashtrays to actual vessels, making things for the restaurant." What started out as a hobby evolved into something more: an image-maker.

"In a restaurant, everything from start to finish is an art piece—the flowers you choose, the plant in front of the restaurant, the music you play. It's not just the food anymore—it's interesting cocktails, funky single barrel bourbons and ryes that nobody else has. You're a curator of your own style."

Becker's custom designed pottery complements the

restaurant's menu. "The two are not completely unrelated," he says. "It's hand-made rustic plateware with evidence of tool marks and handprints. The food, like the hand-done ravioli, is not persnickety, either."

In addition to using local materials requiring minimal transportation, Becker also tries to use recycled clay. "I always like to use stuff that has already been considered refuse." He usually makes 20 to 24 of each plate or bowl design. For practical reasons, stackability is also a big consideration. "You need the same footprint," he explains. "I make plates in sets for efficiency reasons. I weigh out the clay so they're all the same weights, with the same glazes. I try not to spend more than five hours a week doing it, but I probably do."

Eventually, Becker says, he hopes to make enough pottery to sell it at reasonable prices to restaurants that want unique pieces. Currently, Sweet Basil's customers can purchase the custom dinnerware at the restaurant.

CONTESTS

## Calls for Entries

**Getting into Print**

Deadline: May 30, 2014

Professional chefs are invited to submit their original, unpublished gluten-free recipes for the **National Foundation for Celiac Awareness (NFCA) Gluten-Free Chef's Challenge Cookbook**, to be published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. The cookbook will feature 100 recipes from the country's most notable and innovative chefs. The top 10 favorite recipes will be highlighted in the cookbook and those winning chefs will receive complimentary GREAT Kitchens gluten-free training by the NFCA. To enter the challenge and learn more about winners' benefits, visit [www.GREATChefsChallenge.com](http://www.GREATChefsChallenge.com).



**Winners' Circle**

*Sweet Potatoes Reimagined*

The **North Carolina Sweet Potato Commission** welcomed two restaurants into the winners' circle in its recent Savor Your Sweets recipe contest, open to independent restaurants in the Southeast. The savory category winner was Taqueria del Sol, with multiple locations including in Cary, NC. The recipe for Cuban Tacos features diced sweet potatoes stewed with ground beef and cheese filling. In the sweet category, The King's Kitchen in Charlotte, NC, earned top honors for its Sweet Potato Rice Pudding. Both winners received \$1,000 cash prizes.



marlo