

Travel

A Tour of the Off-the-Beaten-Path Culinary Gems of North Carolina

These are the best restos and watering holes in previously uncharted pockets of North Carolina



BY ETHAN FIXELL
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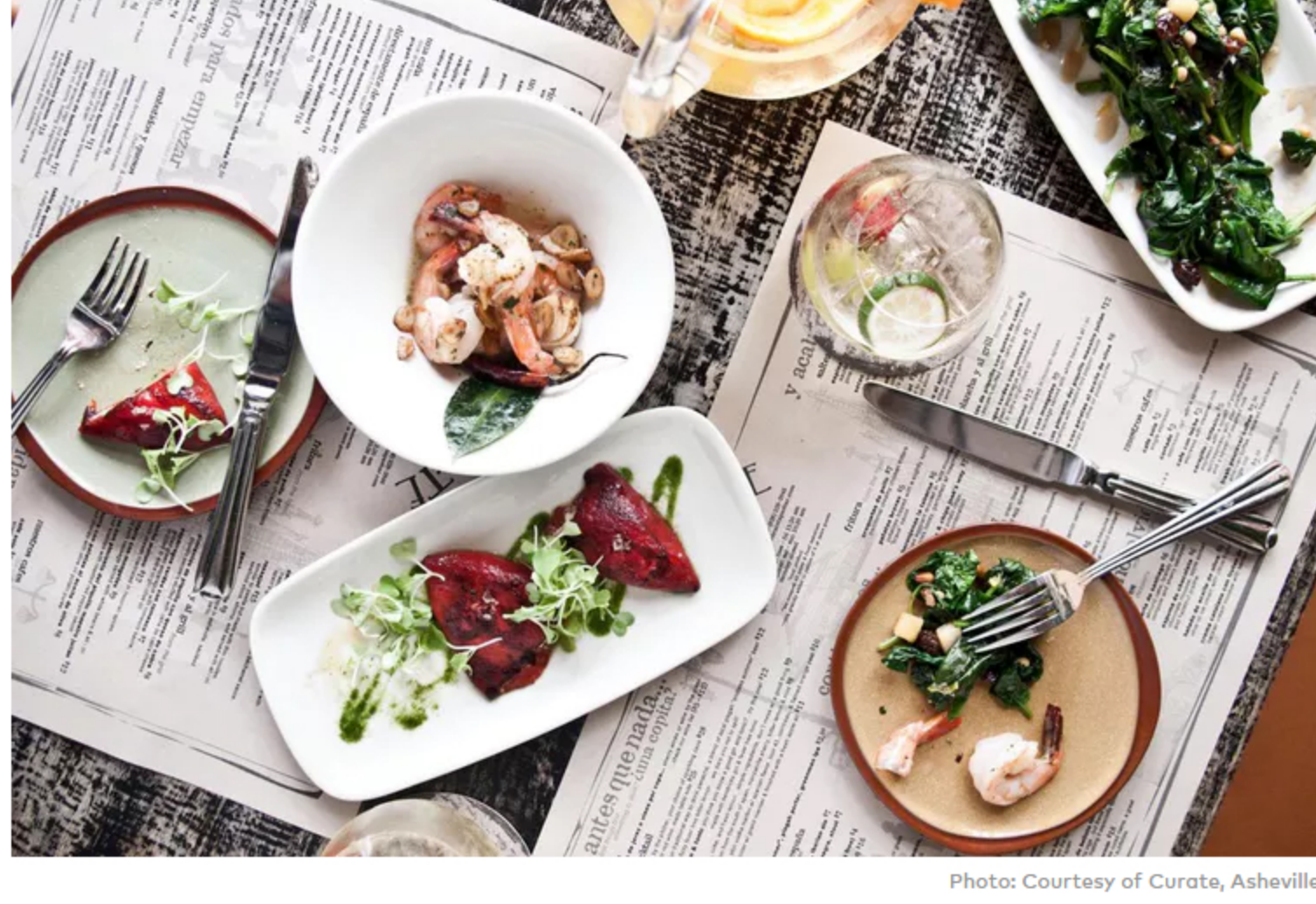


Photo: Courtesy of Carole, Asheville

By now, it's no secret North Carolina is a culinary destination to be reckoned with. Cities like Charlotte, Asheville, Raleigh and Durham have all come into their own over the last decade, offering some of the best and most innovative food and drink to be found in the South. But I've been hearing murmurs of a scene beyond the scene: a growing number of restaurants, breweries, bakeries and farms cropping up miles outside city limits in previously uncharted pockets throughout the state.

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So my wife, Debbie, and I decided it was time to head down to NC to explore the spots most tourists don't know about. And through some intensive research—i.e., irresponsibly devouring everything in our way—I've determined the best off-the-beaten-path food-and-drink destinations in North Carolina.

Follow our [map](#) and get moving!

Asheville Area

Zebulon Artisan Ales

(Weaverville)

Mike Karnowski, former specialty brewer at [Green Man Brewery](#), aims to woo thirsty locals with cerebral beers. This Beery Wonka offers no training wheels at the brewery he cofounded with his wife, Gabe Pickard; instead, prepare for long-forgotten historical brews, like Grodziskie (a Polish golden smoked ale), or challenging—but brilliant—conceptual beers, such as Experimental Forest #1, a dark saison brewed with acorn flour, fir branches, and aged oak and maple.



Photos: Ethan Fixell

Appalachia and Charlotte Areas

Knife & Fork

(Spruce Pine)

The oft-treacherous drive from Zebulon to Knife & Fork is nearly an hour—but, boy, is the journey worth it. Chef Nate Allen uses ingredients from within a 50-mile radius to create rustic, sophisticated dishes that utilize produce, like radishes and fresh tarragon, with pantry treats, such as kettle corn and goat yogurt. Meanwhile, the carefully curated farmer's board offers the most value for a [charcuterie plate](#) on earth. This is big-city food for small-town prices at its finest.

Kindred

(Davidson)

Dining at Kindred is like eating at your fanciest friend's house. In this case, the classy yet casual "home" belongs to Katy and Joe Kindred. I gorged on delectably textured Wagyu beef tartare, and the Appalachian trout and green garlic yogurt made this Jewish writer—raised on lox and cream cheese—feel right at home. But the pièce de résistance of this modern Southern gem was the [crispy oyster](#), a perfect symphony of salty, creamy, crunchy, sweet and spicy.



Asheboro Area

Fair Game Beverage Co.

(Pittsboro)

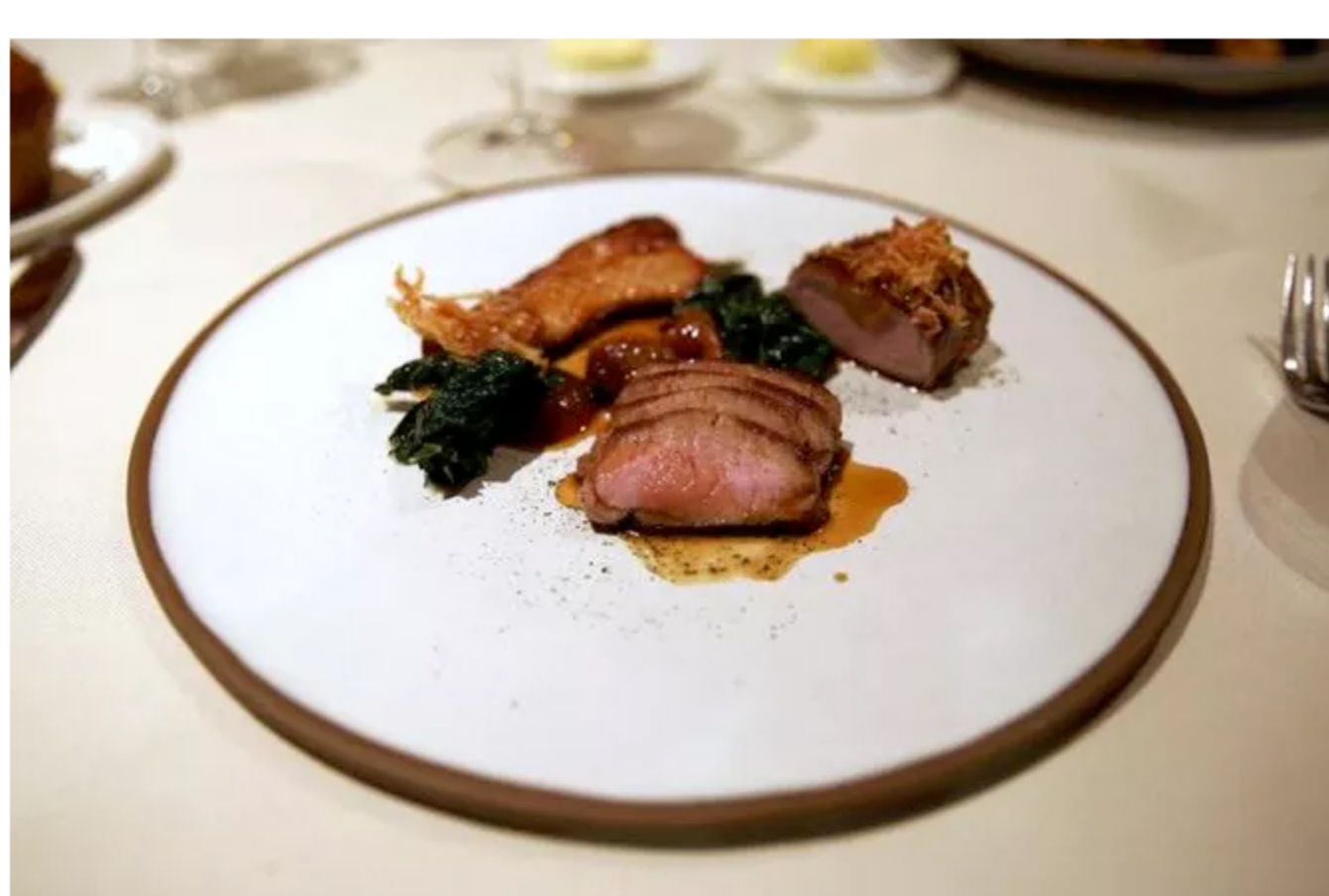
A bizarrely postapocalyptic former military alloy plant, The Plant is now the home to a bomb-proofed distillery. In addition to producing wine from North Carolina grapes (try the Scuppernon Tipper, a semisweet white infused with brandy that smells like a grape Blow Pop), Fair Game Beverage distiller Chris Jude uses local-ish sorghum cane to make No'Lasses, a uniquely [tasty rum-like spirit](#). His Carolina Agricole Rum is another must-try.



Ferrington House Restaurant

(Pittsboro)

A stunning British country-style Disneyland for well-off adults, Ferrington Village is an idyllic destination in itself, offering lodging, shopping, spa services, fresh air and a seemingly endless supply of elegance. All of the on-site dining is great, but the AAA Five Diamond [Ferrington House Restaurant](#) is a must. We dined on succulent woolly pig and a fried chicken dish that beautifully marries Lowcountry with high culture. Its famous chocolate soufflé is a killer end note—"I could swim in this," Debbie said as she took rich, decadent bite after bite.



Triangle Township (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill) Area

Coon Rock Farm

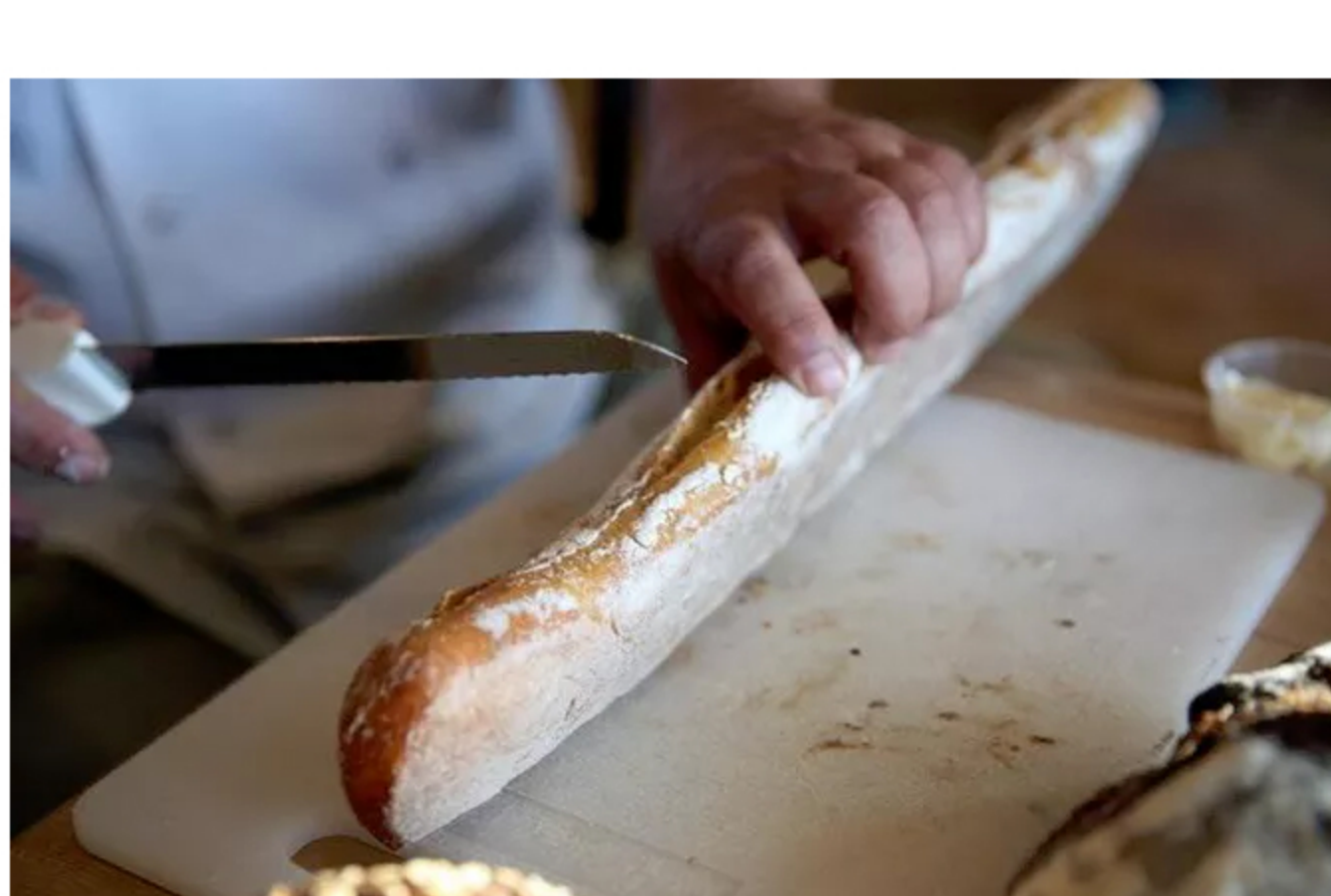
(Durham)

The 55-acre Coon Rock Farm in Hillsborough is open year-round but offers prime produce between July and September. Though the [gritty working farm](#) is no polished tourist attraction, a visit will give you context before dining at [Piedmont](#), the farm-to-table Downtown Durham restaurant that sources about half of its produce from here during peak season. Chef John May whips up creative veggie-forward eats (Debbie's favorite: garden greens-stuffed focchi, a purse-shaped pasta) in a spacious, upscale setting.

La Farm Bakery

(Cary)

At 7:45 a.m. on a Sunday, La Farm is bustling. By 8:30 a.m., it's mobbed. Master baker Lionel Vatinet, who has been baking fresh bread in Cary for 18 years, guided us through tastings of his [signature sourdough](#), an Asiago Parmesan bread, and his new buckwheat raisin loaf. This boisterous French dude (also the founding instructor at the San Francisco Baking Institute) proffered insider tips along the way, joking that changes and humidity and temperature have made him a better baker. "I live in the present a lot," he joked, echoing the overarching theme of what turned out to be an incredible journey through North Carolina.



Ethan Fixell is freelance beverage writer from New York City, and the Editor-in-Chief of [The Beer Necessities](#). Follow him on [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) at [@EthanFixell](#).

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