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IDEAS FOR FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS

RESTAURANT

HOSPITALITY

THE BEST DAMN RESTAURANTS, PERIOD!

THREE TOP PERFORMERS SHOW HOW IT'S DONE. BY MEGAN ROWE

IT ISN'T EASY getting everything right, but it's definitely possible. Once in a blue moon a restaurant assembles the total package: the right concept for the times, a well-executed menu, stylish décor, seamless service, all for a price that makes sense. The front line talent is well matched to the creative genius in the kitchen. The critics like it, and the locals are loyal fans. Of the hundreds of thousands of restaurants in this country, we have singled out three as role models. We aren't saying they are perfect, but we do admire what they are doing, and there may be some lessons for you in studying them.

BEST DAMN RESTAURANTS

REAL DEAL: Michael Schwartz has succeeded in creating a "fresh, simple, pure" dining experience at Michael's Genuine Food and Drink.



FRESH - SIMPLE - PURE

Michael's Genuine Food & Drink aims to be exactly what its name suggests: a restaurant where guests are welcomed and recognized, they can always find something they want on the menu and what goes into those menu choices is simple, fresh and pure. That philosophy alone, though, is not enough to push a restaurant to the top.

What is? Chef/owner Michael Schwartz, who cemented his reputation with the pioneering South Beach restaurant, Nemo, serves up moderately priced, contemporary American fare relying on the best possible ingredients. He favors products from local growers and small farmers—items like roasted poulet rouge, a rare breed raised in North Carolina, or roasted pork shoulder "so tender it threatens to cross over from meat to custard," or deep-fried hominy nuggets dusted with ginger, garlic, chipotle and sugar. The dinner menu changes daily and offers moderately priced bar snacks and small, medium, large and extra large plates to appease all appetites and wallets. Extraordinary wines,

including boutique and rare vintages, are sold at sane prices. The upscale, unpretentious interior with tiny globe lights, leather seats, polished concrete floors and rich woods reinforces the "genuine" mantra.

Put all these elements together, and you have a spot that pulls in top chefs and celebrities, Miami's design community, a slew of regulars who stop by several times a week, and even tourists and shoppers, who have followed the strong buzz to the arguably dicey location. Since opening two years ago, Michael's has racked up kudos from *Gourmet*, *Bon Appetit* and *Esquire*, and the *New York Times*' Frank Bruni cited the place as one of the 10 U.S. "restaurants that count" last year. Like many of his peers, "he's ditching the haute for the homey and focusing more on sourcing than on saucing," Bruni said.

"Michael's is the geographic and social epicenter of the Design District," one maven pronounced.

A reviewer for a Miami paper called Michael's "a remarkable restaurant that epitomizes everything positive about today's slow, inexorable worldwide movement toward slow, indisputably honest food." >>>