

Michael Schwartz | Michael's Genuine Food & Drink

Michael's Genuine Food & Drink is the little Design District underdog that's barked louder than any restaurant Miami's seen in years. Chef/owner Michael Schwartz concocted a recipe for an unpretentious, homey joint serving simply delicious comfort food at what he calls "normal" prices, and response has gone through the roof. In the two and a half years he's served delectable dishes such as char-grilled octopus, homemade fettuccine and cheese grits he's attracted a legion of loyal, every-week locals, plus an unexpected barrage of Hollywood A-listers. Aside from impressive accolades from *The New York Times* (Frank Bruni named it "4th Best New Restaurant, 2008" and *Gourmet* (as one of America's best farm-to-table restaurants), Michael's made international headlines as the spot where doomed lovers Jenifer Aniston and John Mayer shared chopped chicken salad, a Manchego and Serrano *panini* and a key-lime-cheesecake flan on their first public date.

Off the Beachin' path: "True, it wasn't the best idea [to open in the Miami Design District] in early 2007. As I tried to raise money for the project I'd bring people here and talk about our vision. Many would say, 'Are you crazy?' But Craig Robins had done a great job laying the groundwork for the area. It's beautiful, it's clean, it's interesting, and he spent a lot of money to get it this way. We saw an opportunity to take advantage of his investment and time commitment. We liked the proximity not only to South Beach but to residential areas like Coral Gables, Morningside and Belle Meade. I knew the area was on the verge of turning around: People wanted somewhere new to go that wasn't on the Beach."

Lettuce eat well: "We don't want the restaurant to turn into 'Michael's Genuine's Greatest Hits,' so we change up the menu every day. But a few solid, interesting dishes do tend to sum up what we're doing here. For instance, our butter-lettuce salad is meaty and chewy. It's bright, with avocados, oranges and hazelnuts and a citrus vinaigrette. That's something people love. It's very simple to me, very elementary. And although it's made of very accessible ingredients, it's about the combination and the way they're put together."

Scarlet 'shrooms: We make a pan-roasted-scallop dish in which we purée the pistachios, rest the scallops on top and serve them with a shaved apple salad and some pickled-lobster mushrooms—big, wild mushrooms that get their name from their bright red-orange color. They're from the Pacific Northwest, so we grab them when they're in season and pickle them to preserve their seasonality. The dish might sound a bit weird but it's delicious.

Genuinely never enough: "To me, *fleur de sel* and parsley are two of the most underrated ingredients. *Fleur de sel* is the best sea salt. It's cream of the crop, with a subtle saltiness. We don't use it in everything, but we always finish with it. And parsley is like my go-to guy. We're pro-parsley. We make sauces with it—parsley sauce, *salsa verde*—and put whole-leaf parsley in salads. Many people just see it as a garnish or don't realize it has such a pronounced flavor."

Hot and crunchy: "Contrast, color, temperature and texture are important. For instance, I'd much rather eat a hot steak with some kind of cold crunchy salad than a warm mashed potato. That's a textural and temperature thing. At lunch, we serve a skirt steak with a salad of shaved fennel, radishes, oranges and arugula, with some olive tapenade on top."

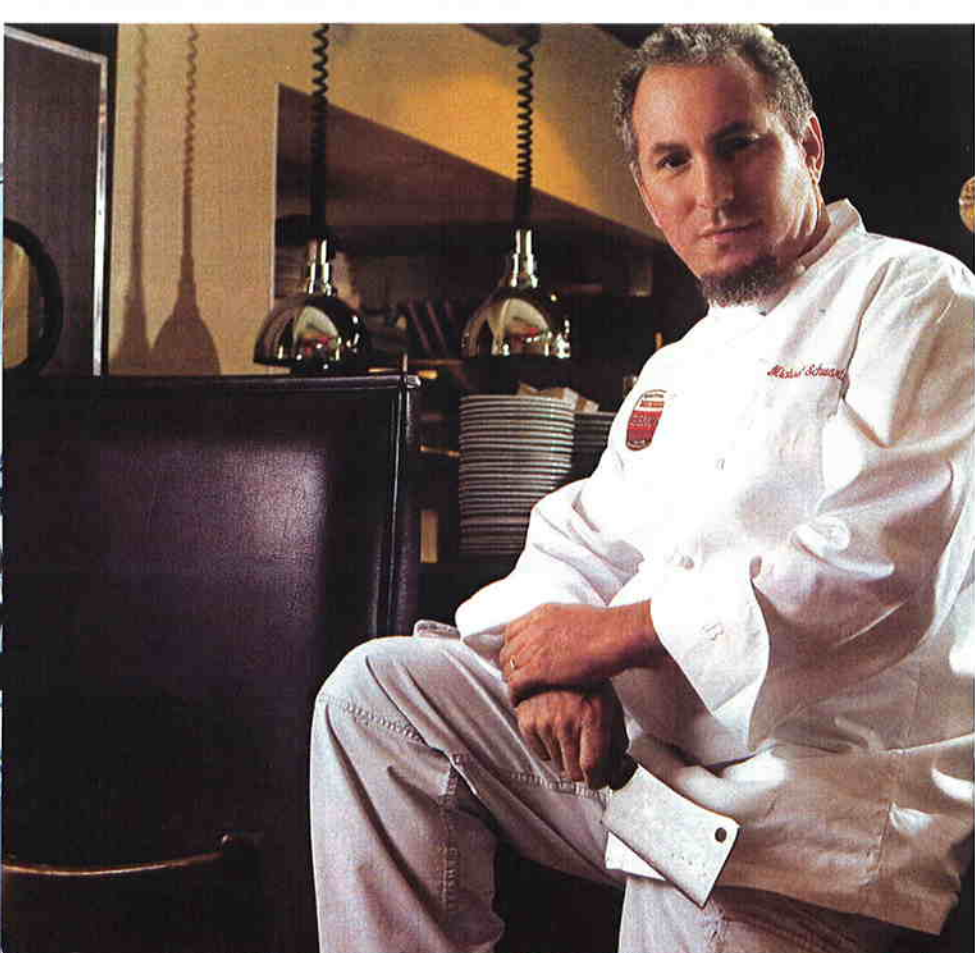
Pigging out: "We buy really good pork: *Kurobuta* is its Japanese name, and Berkshire is the breed of the pig. We maple-cure great pork bellies and smoke them in a little smoker we keep outside in the parking lot all day. We use that bacon in the BLT salad. Pork is used in so many different dishes. We make a pizza with roasted, shredded pork, figs, grilled onions, fontina cheese and fresh arugula, and [pastry chef] Hedy Goldsmith even makes an incredible bacon maple ice cream with it."

Auspicious ambiance: "It feels good in here, and that's something you can't really plan. You can hire lighting and design experts, but—when you turn the lights down at night—you just never know how it's going to be. A place either has it or doesn't, and we got lucky in that respect."



The casual, open-kitchen dining area (above) and chocolate *cremosa* with sea-salt olive, sourdough *crostini* and espresso *parfait* (below).





Clockwise from above: Chef/owner Michael Schwartz; BLT salad with thick-cut house-smoked bacon, heirloom tomatoes, *frisco* and Roaring '40s Blue Cheese; barstools overlooking the open-air kitchen; slow-roasted grilled Harris Ranch short ribs with roasted *cippoline* onions, *romesco* sauce, toasted almonds and hazelnuts; shrimp-chorizo pizza with toasted garlic, escarole and Manchego cheese.

