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South City garners five stars for chic atmosphere, down-home food*Erin J. Murrin*

While preparing to write this review, I grappled with how many stars I wanted to give **South City Kitchen** in Vinings.

I am stuck between awarding four stars for an excellent experience and five stars for an experience that absolutely sets the bar for dining in Cobb.

For those who are unaware, **South City Kitchen** is one child in the family of Atlanta-based Fifth Group Restaurants. It joins the ranks of established Atlanta restaurants such as The Food Studio, Sala-Sabor de Mexico, Ecco, La Tavola Trattoria and **South City Kitchen** Midtown.

The new **South City Kitchen** takes residence in the ever-growing Ivey Walk shopping center, and I can safely assume -- after dining there -- the reputation of Fifth Group is well-protected with its new endeavor.

The stylish and sleek surroundings of **South City Kitchen** bring a sophisticated charm to the area. It's hip, it's trendy, it's smart.

I dined at **South City Kitchen** on Saturday evening. When I arrived, it was quiet. My dining companions and I chose to snag a large booth inside.

The red and orange backlighting of **South City Kitchen** provides a hot and sexy ambiance with lustrous lights, slick fixtures and

sleek surfaces.

In sharp contrast, the seating is comfortable, the servers are relaxed and the menu is down-home.

I opted for an entire Southern meal starting with fried green tomatoes for the table, wedging in buttermilk fried chicken for my entrée and finishing with banana pudding for dessert -- although one of my dining companions had the chocolate pecan tart, which I would get next time.

You absolutely cannot beat the fried green tomatoes which are cooked and battered perfectly and accompanied by delicious goat cheese, sweet red pepper coulis and crisp dandelion greens. I would get this appetizer every time. And it's perfect for two or three diners.

The fried chicken -- absent of bones for clean fingers, mind you -- is served over whipped potatoes, green beans and bourbon gravy. Our server said this is one of the most popular dishes at the restaurant. And although I don't think it's the best fried chicken I've ever had, I'm glad I tried it.

One of my dining companions had another popular entrée, the sautéed shrimp and scallops over grits -- what would a Southern meal be without grits right? This is a fantastic dish if you like Southern-inspired seafood.

One characteristic of **South City Kitchen** I thoroughly appreciate is that the atmosphere doesn't

necessarily pair with the cuisine. I find it refreshing to have a restaurant in the community that isn't afraid of embracing a chic, **city** feel while offering comforting, identifiable food.

Another point worth noting is the superb service. Friendliness and genuine interest is not specific just to our table's server. Everything -- from the greeter holding open the door upon entrance to the manager checking on our table -- was designed to make the diner feel welcome.

Our server was highly knowledgeable about every **South City Kitchen** detail. He knew the specials, he knew what dishes were most popular and he spent a fair amount of time helping us choose an appropriate wine selection.

Aside from there being a few spells where the restaurant's temperature got very hot, I honestly cannot comment on one negative thing about **South City Kitchen**.

The address is close to home; the cuisine hits close to home; and the surroundings feel like you are miles away -- what's not to love?

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