

WELL DONE

BY BRET LOVE

Atlanta's best chefs reinvent the burger joint.



FLIP's pork belly melt burger with a side of caramelized Brussels sprouts



Grass-fed beef burger from Yeah! Burger

A few years ago, Atlanta's economic recovery was still in its infancy, and the city was still recovering from the economic downturn of 2008. The burger battle cries were still loud, and the competition was fierce.

Richard Blais, a chef with Barry Mills, was coming off the failure of his upscale restaurant BLAIS and was attracted by the challenge of creating what Mills calls "fine dining between two buns."

"Closing my restaurant was tough, but I'm stronger and smarter for it," Blais says. "FLIP is a more recession-friendly restaurant, and it was fun to take something as common as burgers and give it a twist, with modern design, beautiful aesthetics and a creative menu." That menu—including signature items such as the rBQ burger (with pulled brisket, coleslaw, rBQ sauce and smoked mayo) and blackened shrimp burger—immediately resulted in lines out the door, not to mention contenders hoping to replicate FLIP's success.

In Decatur, Restaurants) of sourced fare. A Linton Hopkins garnered attention by offering just 24 burgers per night at 10pm sharp. The time is announced via bullhorn, creating a bit of fanfare—and sometimes they sell out in less than a minute. (Hint: The burger is also a staple of its Sunday brunch.) And Chef Shaun Doty shut down Shaun's, a four-year-old fine-dining restaurant in Inman Park, in order to focus on Yeah! Burger (which *Bon Appétit* named as one of its favorite burger spots in America).

Focusing on organic, locally sourced and seasonally available fare, Doty's venture with partner Erik Maier allows guests to customize burgers with a vast array of options, including sunflower sprouts, bacon jam and cage-free fried eggs. In Doty's view, the burger boom can be chalked up to a return to simplicity.

Richard Blais threw the gauntlet down when he partnered with Barry Mills to open FLIP burger boutique in October 2008. The celebrity chef (recently crowned winner of *Top Chef All-Stars*) was coming off the failure of his upscale restaurant BLAIS and was attracted by the challenge of creating what Mills calls "fine dining between two buns."

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offers owners, Doty suggests that its impact can only be positive. "I'm not afraid of competition, because as chefs we innovate and constantly improve our product. If chefs and consumers demand higher quality, that's a great thing for our American food culture."

In other words, no matter who comes out on top once the Atlanta burger battle's dust has settled, it's the customer who is ultimately the real winner.

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FLIP burger boutique

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Yeah! Burger 2 locations;
404-496-4393;
yeahburger.com

Grindhouse Killer Burgers
2 locations;
grindhouseburgers.com

Boardwalk Fresh Burgers & Fries
2 locations; boardwalkfreshburgersandfries.com

FLIP: HEIDI GELDHAUSER FOR THE REYNOLDS GROUP; YEAH! BURGER: SARAH DORIC