

Maya chef, owner and father Christian Kelly mans the kitchen behind a spinach salad (left) and a trout dinner with red beets and cheese grits.

Soft Southern style

Maya blends dining with live music, area experience

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Maya is considered a branch of Eastern philosophy by its owners, an eatery that offers hearty options by its diners and an ensemble of feline sleepwear by one 4-year-old little girl.

"That's the cat's pajamas," Christian Kelly said with a laugh, when describing how his daughter reacts to seeing her

name on the door at 633 W. Main St.

Kelly and Peter Castiglione, Maya's primary owners, took their time choosing a moniker. Maya Kelly served as part of the inspiration, but the second ingredient is the philosophical definition. As in, the medium through which life is experienced. Then the food and venue come together to create "positive Maya," a welcoming experience with simple, satisfying food.

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This roasted cherry and vanilla parfait with candied walnuts is part of the dessert menu at Maya, along with a peach strudel that uses local fruit.

Maya

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Both Kelly and Castiglione have been involved in the culinary business for years, but this time, the building doesn't belong to someone else.

"I decided if I was going to spend my life running a restaurant, I wanted to own the property," Castiglione said.

Kelly's local experience includes plating dishes at Clifton Inn and Oxo before creating Maya's menu.

"Christian's food is fantastic," Castiglione said. "He's a wonderful chef."

Castiglione, on the other hand, opened Zocolo in 2003 and enticed more than half a dozen members of that crew to join him.

Those team members include Ted Norris, formerly of Ten, behind the bar.

Norris throws, twirls, shakes and pours the cocktails created with Mark Dorsey with flair. Just don't ask him what's in the Down Home Peanut Butter cocktail, he and his beverage list are mum on that score, save an endless line of question marks.

Other drinks include the Soul Pickle (a possible restaurant name choice at one point) and the Tantric Sidecar. All of the cocktails are less than \$10.

The food

Kelly points out that diners can order swanky or simple selections from the kitchen. A cold beer can accompany hot macaroni and cheese or a glass of wine looks great next to a seafood dish.



Soul Pickle cocktail sippers will be able to detect a mix of pineapple juice, lime juice and cucumber water.

The starters list includes fried okra at one end of the taste continuum and quail with fig preserves and pecans on the other side. Plus there's shrimp cake and a spinach salad with radishes.

It's also possible to make a complete meal out of \$3 side dishes. Yellow squash, whipped red potatoes with rosemary and roasted beets are among the vegetable options, and Southern staples like cornbread and grits couldn't be left out.

Encouraged by Maya's business and the welcome it has received, Castiglione is looking ahead.

"We hope we'll be here for the next 20 years," Castiglione said.

Maya Kelly will be 24 then, and



Daily Progress photos/Kaylin Bowers

Maya offers sides ranging from macaroni and cheese to sweet potato fries.

she'll probably still think the restaurant is the cat's pajamas.

The nitty gritty

Maya opened May 24 at 633 W. Main St., in the location previously occupied by Southern Culture.

Dining spaces include the bar level on the main floor, an outdoor, semi-covered patio space, an upstairs dining area and a special events room.

The bar is open from 4:30 p.m. to 2 a.m. daily. The kitchen is open from 5 to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday and from 5 to 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

Entree prices range from \$14 for vegetarian un-meatloaf and cornmeal

catfish to \$25 for beef tenderloin, and all the starters are less than \$10.

On Wednesday nights at 9, bands play live music on the patio.

Reservations are encouraged.

Parking is available at meters along the street and in a public lot behind the property.

For more information, log on to www.maya-restaurant.com or call 979-6292.

What's next

A brunch menu will be served from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. starting Sunday. A special events room will open in August.