

MATT TUNSTALL

Behind the cork of every great restaurant is a skilled sommelier. At Charleston's hub of South Carolina cuisine, that man is sommelier Matt Tunstall. Diving into the cellar of South Carolina's hottest kitchen, Matt shares the dirt—literally—on the South's tradition, transformation and his terroir obsession.

PLAYING IN THE DIRT Our wine list is all about “wines that rock,” literally, wines that define where they come from, the soil and the topography. Grapes absorb the place they grow, so we organize our list by soil type instead of country or varietal. The most delicious soil? For me at this time, volcanic.

LIFE AS A SOMM Some say we live in a cave and drink wine all day. Well, we do drink a lot of wine, but our purpose is to share the love of food and wine with our restaurant guests, and, if we're lucky, teach something to them in the process.

NOT YOUR EVERYDAY FRIED CHICKEN The stereotype of Southern food is fried and super-fatty, with 18 pounds of butter in the dish. But in good hands, it's light, bright and a mirror of the season.

FARM TO TABLE Where I work, if the ingredient's not Southern, it's not coming through the door. This means local and a menu that is ever fluid; nothing stagnant about it. We're all learning daily about flavor combinations and textures, talking with guests and finding wines that celebrate our food.

IN THE GLASS My heart is most definitely in the Old World for wines, but I've had a lot of fun searching for regional wines, Virginia wines especially. I love the teaching moment when I expose the guests to something they've never seen before or talk them into something new.

BY THE BOOK I can't tell what people drink by their appearance. So my approach is simply to ask a few basic questions: What's the last bottle you really enjoyed? If it was a new release Chardonnay, for instance, what aspects did you really like? We connect the dots, choose profiles that will appeal to them and go from there.

MATCH MADE IN HEAVEN Food pairing is about harmony and counterpoints. You can have sweet on sweet (which is harmony), or sweet versus acidity (counterpoint), different textures, acid verses fat. But really, the philosophy is always changing.

WACKIEST PAIR Chinese food with sherry. It's a pairing that balances the heat and textures. And it's just plain fun!

FOR AUTUMN Braised beef, braised short ribs and a Brunello [an earthy Italian red].

IF NOT WINE IN MY GLASS Bourbon.

IF NOT A SOMM I'd be farming my half acre with rabbits and chickens, fresh fruits, vegetables and greens. I'd love making and enjoying food for myself and my family.

IN A WORD Wine takes lifelong education to fully understand. Don't assume; learn continually. ■

The stunning building that houses Husk Restaurant dates back to the late 19th century.

