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## Durham Restaurant Turns Twenty

Ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in Nation by "Gourmet" Magazine

Durham has earned a reputation as one of the most sophisticated dining destinations in the Southeast, thanks in part to its thriving colony of acclaimed chefs and eateries.

Many point to Ben and Karen Barker, chef-owners of Durham's acclaimed Magnolia Grill, as a spark that ignited national recognition of Durham's dining scene and the emergence of a colony of talented and inventive chefs. And now for the second time since its opening, Magnolia Grill has been named the nation's 11<sup>th</sup> best restaurant by *Gourmet* magazine (October 2006 issue).

In November, Magnolia Grill will celebrate 20 years of dishing out its unique blend of neo-southern flavors to Durham residents and visitors alike, including notable celebrities such as Michael Jordan, James Taylor, Ted Koppel, and Gregory Peck.

After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, Ben (executive chef) and Karen (pastry chef) made several stops before deciding on a converted specialty grocery store on Ninth Street in Durham as the location for their own restaurant. On November 13, 1986, the Barkers opened the doors of what would become one of the most recognized restaurants in America, Magnolia Grill.



In 1988 (just two years after opening Magnolia Grill), Ben was named one of the top Southern chefs by *Food & Wine* magazine, and in 1992 *Food & Wine* named him one of the ten best new chefs in America. The accolades continued, including 10 [James Beard Award](#) nominations (seven for Ben and three for Karen), culminating in 1999 with Karen earning "Best Pastry Chef" from *Bon Appétit* American Food & Entertaining Awards, in 2000 with Ben winning the James Beard Award for the "Best Chef in the Southeast," and in 2003 with Karen winning the James Beard Award for the nation's "Outstanding Pastry Chef."

Despite the magnitude of awards, press from around the world, and successful cookbooks, Magnolia Grill and the Barkers have stayed true to their roots as a casual, neighborhood eatery that just happens to serve some of the best food in the world. Along the way the Barkers have produced 29 protégés nationwide, including Scott Howell, who opened [Nana's](#) in Durham in 1992, and Walter Royal, now a chef down in Raleigh at the Angus Barn.

Magnolia Grill was the first of what are now 28 uniquely Durham restaurants and chefs. Celebrated status is given to those Durham restaurants that are not part of a chain, have been regionally or nationally reviewed, and are noted for their unique regional cuisine or custom menu designed by a Durham chef. Several of Durham restaurants that pre-date Magnolia Grill have subsequently earned celebrated status, including [Anotherthyme](#) (1982), [Bullock's Bar-B-Que](#) (1952), Dillard's Bar-B-Que (1956), [Fishmongers](#) (1983), and [Pizza Palace](#) (1965). George Bakatsias's [Parizade](#) opened in 1989, just a couple years after Magnolia Grill.

On March 7, 2007, Durham will recognize Durham's pioneering chefs at DCVB's Annual Tribute Luncheon at the American Tobacco Campus, Bay 7. Along with the Barkers, Mary Bacon ([Anotherthyme](#)), George Bakatsias ([G Loft](#), [George's Garage](#), [grasshopper](#), [Parizade](#), [Verde](#), and [Vin Rouge](#)), Tommy Bullock ([Bullock's Bar-B-Que](#)), Sara Foster ([Foster's Market](#)), and Scott Howell ([Nana's](#)) will be recognized for their contributions to Durham's unique sense of place.