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All Things Food & Drink

What's a Foodie to Do at Dauphin's on Mobile Bay?

Dauphin's in Alabama offers more choices than a food-lover can handle

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The chef's table at Dauphin's is a cut above the rest.

Sitting at the chef's table at the newly-opened **Dauphin's** (<http://godauphins.com/>) in Mobile, Alabama, is a little like being Ben Higgins on the 20th season of *The Bachelor*. The poor guy was in love with both JoJo and Lauren B., the last two contestants, which made deciding between the two a rather formidable task.

Like most chef's tables, Dauphin's offers a ringside seat to the inner workings of the kitchen — a behind-the-scenes glimpse of the chef working his magic. For a food-lover, that's a pretty sacred thing. You get to rub elbows or even trade gumbo stories with executive chef Steve Zucker, the guy both Southern Living and Esquire singled out as a chef to watch. You get to hear tales about cooking at the James Beard House, about being on the Food Network, about concocting the world's largest pot of gumbo.

But at the same time, the chef's table that's right there next to the shelves of pickled okra has a staggering view of more than 75 nautical miles of Mobile Bay. It's 34 floors up, perched on the top of the Trustmark Building, and it's hard not to sit there with your mouth agape as you look out over the bay, the canopy of oaks gracing historic homes, Fort Morgan, and, on a clear night, even Dauphin Island.

The elegant new restaurant, which has been open all of two months, is the latest endeavor from former NFL great Bob Baumhower. Since retiring from the Miami Dolphins in 1986, Baumhower has opened 13 eateries, and he has really outdone himself with Dauphin's. Featuring what he and Zucker call "classic coastal" with hints of Creole and Caribbean, this 7,000-square-foot beauty (in what used to be the Bienville Club) has a magnificent baby grand in the piano bar, custom-made Italian dishes and glassware, and a view that, as I said, makes it hard to do anything but stare.

Even the menu offers a maddening Sophie's choice. Do you start with a Mobile staple like crab claws or West Indies Salad, or do you go for Zucker's Gumbo Z'herb, a dish recently anointed to **100 Alabama Dishes to Eat Before You Die** (<http://alabama.travel>)

/100-dishes-app)? Do you sip a Thyme Out with vodka, elderberry, thyme lemonade, and pomegranate liqueur; or do you guzzle a Constantine with guava purée, white rum, fresh lime juice, and El Guapo Mojo Cubano bitters?

How can any normal human be expected to narrow down a choice between maple leaf duck breast, Ono Island tuna, and pecan-encrusted dolphin? Even the bread is served with four kinds of spread, from a pink hyacinth butter to garlic pecan pesto to plain old whipped salted butter.

Believe me, the decision is not for the faint of heart. Especially when you know everything's locally-sourced, farm to table, and completely natural. Even the handcrafted cocktails use ingredients grown in Dauphin's rooftop greenhouse.

Ben Higgins, I salute you for finding the courage to make a choice, and I hope you and Lauren get the chance to celebrate one of your anniversaries at Dauphin's in Mobile.