

# Dining Out: Southern Kitchen Restaurant in Whiteville

**By Amneris Solano**

Staff writer

**WHITEVILLE** - At the Southern Kitchen Restaurant, chef Sokun Slama transforms classic European and Southern dishes with an Asian twist.

"It's a passion," said, Slama, who was born in Cambodia and raised in France.

Slama draws on her past to create the menu she serves at the storefront restaurant in downtown Whiteville. Her culinary style has earned her much praise, including a feature in Southern Living Magazine and a Three-Diamond Award by AAA.

Slama, who runs the Southern Kitchen with her French-born husband, Guillaume, received those accolades when the couple owned a historic bed and breakfast in Washington, Ga. The food at their Columbus County restaurant is upscale, Guillaume said, but the atmosphere is laid-back.

"We don't want it to be stuffy or posh. You don't need to have a tie and coat," he said.

A year ago, the couple left their life in Georgia to re-open the Southern Kitchen. The restaurant, a landmark in Whiteville, first opened in 1947 and has served as several different types of restaurants throughout the years. A Columbus County businessman ate at the couple's Georgia restaurant and encouraged them to open a place in Whiteville. He made them a business offer they couldn't refuse, Guillaume said,

The couple, who met in an ice cream shop in Paris, have been married for 15 years. Having their own restaurant had been a dream and is the reason they moved to the United States more than 10 years ago.

Sokun Slama started cooking at age 9 for her family. She developed a love for the craft and took cooking lessons while living in France, making her well-versed in all types of European cuisine.

"She went to Venice to study Italian cooking. She went to Spain to study what they do out there," Guillaume said. "She went to Belgium and the Netherlands."

Those influences make their way into the menu at the Southern Kitchen, which changes often. Sokun said they focus on using seasonal ingredients grown from nearby farms. The restaurant also has a hydroponics garden that runs the length of a storefront window where Sokun clips herbs such as dill, basil, thyme for meals. "We try to use everything fresh," she said.



The Southern Kitchen serves lunch and dinner. The Slamas also own a coffee, pastry, ice cream and sandwich shop two doors down on S. Madison Street called Sophie's. The shop, which used to be a drug store, is decorated with Guillaume's collection of 20th Century American artifacts, including record players, toasters and Coca-Cola advertisements.

The lunch menu at the Southern Kitchen is a mix of burgers, entrees and salads. The crab burger is made with 100 percent lump crab meat for \$11. Burgers come with lettuce, tomato, onion and French fries. Entrees include French classics, such as Steak Frites, a hanger steak with fries for \$14.

The dinner menu offers gourmet fare such as the Chilean sea bass, which is pan-seared with a ginger soy sauce and served with jasmine rice for \$28. The spinach salad is made from a local goat cheese that is spread on a French baguette atop spinach with caramelized onions, pine nuts, cranberries, and balsamic vinaigrette for \$12. A tapas menu is also offered as well as an extensive wine menu.

"We want you to spend a little time here," Guillaume said. "It's not just a place to eat. It's an experience."

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