



BEST NEW CHEF  
**CHRIS DEBARR**

*Delachaise*

"I'M THE CHEF AT THE Delachaise," says Chris DeBarr with the enthusiastic tone rock fans use to name their favorite band. Working alone most nights in the wine bar's small kitchen, over the last year he's created more than 175 different dishes of "high quality bar food that really has some fine dining sensibilities behind it." Local diners have started to notice. Other chefs frequent the St. Charles Avenue bar. Even Michelin-starred celebrity chef Mario Batali stopped in recently and declared his meal "delightful and very sophisticated without trying to be

sophisticated."

Raised outside of Dallas, TX, DeBarr began cooking professionally when he was a student at the University of Georgia in Athens, Ga. When his wife - novelist and New Orleans native Poppy Z. Brite - convinced him to move to New Orleans in 1992, he began his education in fine dining.

His first job was at Arnaud's. Then from 1994-'96, he worked on the line at Commander's Palace under Jamie Shannon. For the next 10 years, he cooked all over town, from Vincent's to Christian's - where he was the chef de cuisine until

Katrina closed the restaurant.

DeBarr's Broadmoor home flooded, and he found himself unemployed and living around the corner from the Delachaise. "I went over there and basically bothered them, because their chef didn't come back," he says.

DeBarr thrives on the challenge of single-handedly turning out a nightly menu with up to 25 dishes, along with 20 cheeses, all while running the plates to the tables, answering questions from the customers and even washing the dishes. The food

at Delachaise is full of bracing flavors and seasonal ingredients, like the fried oysters topped with horseradish cream sauce, Spanish-style roasted eggplant, onions and pepper with pesto, or a traditional Turkish dip made with walnuts, red peppers and pomegranate.

"I'm a New Orleans cook I've lived here so long, but I enjoy presenting people with the city's Mediterranean roots," he says. Recently DeBarr has raised the stakes for his one-man kitchen by offering a limited-seating chef's menu, such as a 13-course cheese dinner or a seven-course foie gras menu.

"It's all about working with limitations and turning your minuses into pluses," he says. "It's a great analogy for post-Katrina New Orleans." — *T. P.*