

Taste of Tupelo Honey

New cookbook
highlights recipes
from Asheville favorite

BY MICHAEL HASTINGS
Media General News Service

Chef Brian Sonoskus hopes that customers find the flavor of Asheville — literally and figuratively — inside Tupelo Honey Café.

"Asheville has a certain vibe to it," he said. "Tupelo has that vibe, too, and people here understand it."

Tupelo Honey Café, owned by Steve Frabitore, is a downtown Asheville restaurant founded in 2000. It's known for its eclectic and creative Southern comfort food. The restaurant opened its second location, in south Asheville, last year. This month, "Tupelo Honey Café," written by Sonoskus and Elizabeth Sims, an Asheville food writer, was published by Andrews McMeel Publishing. The authors will have book signs around the area.

Sonoskus, 43, is a New Jersey transplant who has developed a deep love for Asheville. "When I first came here, I knew it was a place I wanted to call home," he said.

His commitment to food and the area led him to buy a farm to help supply the restaurant. He has since sold the property to someone who contracts with Tupelo, supplying it with about 10 percent of its produce. He also buys from more than a dozen other farmers and local food producers, putting Tupelo's money behind his belief in local

food and a restaurant's sense of place.

"We are all about the community," he said. "This is a way to provide health to the community."

Tupelo is a Southern restaurant, but it reflects the city's makeup. The Appalachian Mountains, the bohemian artists, New Agers — it's the diverse population that has made Tupelo what it is.

"We define ourselves as Southern, but we put a pretty wide brim around that," Sonoskus said, noting that the menu has Creole, Lowcountry, Texas and Memphis touches. "I look for flavors, colors and integrating local ingredients I can find. It's Southern comfort, but it's my twist on something."

So Sonoskus adds ground nuts to the coating of fried chicken because he's a big fan of nuts.

He started putting goat cheese in grits because he found great local cheese. Now, it's the only way he serves grits.

His popular pancakes are made with local sweet potatoes, and he gives them a creative touch with peach butter and spiced pecans.

"If I were going to use one word to describe the restaurant, it would be creative," Sims said.

Sims came on board to write the book in part because Sonoskus "is a really passionate guy in the kitchen," she said.

"He is all about the food and the flavor. He's interested in

where the food comes from. And he likes to play with his food," she said.

"One thing Tupelo doesn't do is take itself too seriously. It's a fun place."

Chapters in the book start with The Larder, full of salsa, dressings and condiments, such as Sunshot salsa, named after the Sunshot Organics farm that Sonoskus started, pickled sweet onions and smoked jalapeno aioli.

The next two chapters cover appetizers, soups, salads and sandwiches. These include Tupelo Honey wings, Carolina fish chowder, Southern fried chicken BLT and peachy grilled chicken salad with pecan vinaigrette.

Entrees include chicken andouille stir-fry with orange jalapeno glaze, buttermilk pork chops with creamy, red-eye gravy, and shrimp and goat-cheese grits with roasted red-pepper sauce.

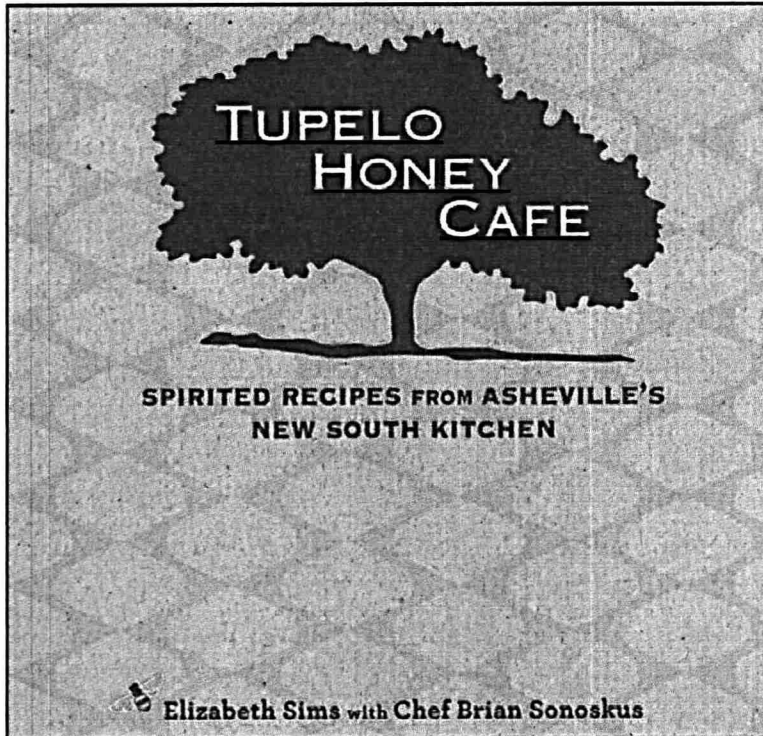
Sides include benne-coated asparagus. Desserts include maple sweet potato pudding and chocolate pecan pie.

Sonoskus hopes people will try the book's recipes and experiment in the kitchen, the way he likes to do.

And he hopes that the book gives people a taste of Asheville.

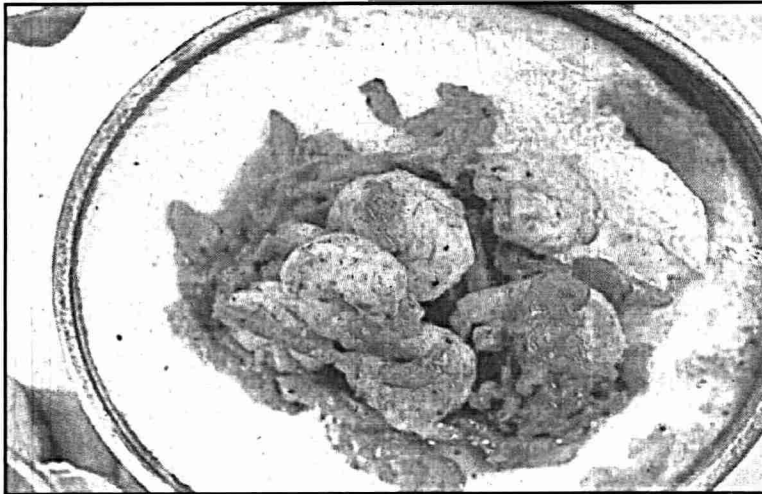
"Asheville has a great heartbeat," he said. "It's a funky town. It's whimsical, and the restaurant reflects that."





MEDIA GENERAL NEWS SERVICE PHOTOS

"Tupelo Honey Café," the first cookbook from the downtown Asheville restaurant of the same name, includes recipes for staples such as shrimp and goat cheese grits in roasted red pepper sauce. The book was written by Brian Sonoskus and Elizabeth Sims.



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