



WHETHER IT'S FRIED CHICKEN AND ALL THE FIXINS', a big bowl of shrimp 'n' grits, or a rich, hearty gumbo, Southern food is good for the soul. Most everyone loves comfort food, and the Divas are no exception. So for supper one evening, we ventured to the newest southern jewel to hit the Plano culinary scene: **Julia Pearl Southern Cuisine.**



MAMMA'S IN THE KITCHEN:

Julia Pearl Southern Cuisine is a down-home delight BY THE DINING DIVAS

The brainchild of Darcy Dudley and his partners at the Trendine Restaurant Group, the name pays homage to Darcy's wife's grandmother, Julia, and his grandmother, Pearl. Darcy laughs when he recalls driving down Highway 75 on Sunday mornings and telling his wife Vivian, "That's going to be my building," referring to the former Allen Wickers Pub location, and she'd look at him like, "Yeah, right!"

Well, it's his building now. Since its debut in January, Julia Pearl is drawing attention from all over the DFW Metroplex. Having a world-renowned culinary director and co-owner like Tre Wilcox at the helm certainly helps. Tre and Chef Jermaine Brown have created a menu of Southern-style dishes that are honored with tradition and innovation.

The Divas start with a sampling of finger-lickin' fare: Pearl's Hot Sauce wings, Lemon Pepper wings, and JP's Barbecue wings. All wow us, but the Lemon Pepper came out on top.

"They're the most unique," says Barbara. "I've had lots of wings with hot sauce or barbecue sauce before, but never like this with lemon pepper. They are delish."

Brit agrees, "The Lemon Pepper is my favorite but the sweet and savory Barbecue wings are a close second."

Up next, the Deviled Eggs. Thank goodness Julia Pearl is generous with the yolk because let's face it, it's the best part. The boat-filled bites have a unique twist: They are topped with crispy chicken skin, chives and smoked paprika. The textural contrast between the velvety smooth yolk and crispy chicken skin is to die for—Oh, Julia Pearl, how devilish you are.

"The chicken skin adds a nice crunch and flavor," notes Barbara.

"As far as I'm concerned, the skin is the best part of the chicken anyway!" says Rebecca.



Meet the chef

Executive Chef Jermaine Brown got his start at Brennan's of Houston, where he earned his stripes as the lead line cook and banquet chef. Moving on to Dallas, he continued his development in the kitchen at Abacus, Kent Rathbun's award-winning

restaurant, where he worked his way up from line cook to Executive Sous Chef. Chef Brown has also held Executive Sous Chef positions at fine dining spots including Marquee Grill and Loft 610. With more than 16 years of culinary experience, his rich background and diverse skill set made him the perfect choice for Julia Pearl.

Our souls are stirrin' and we're just getting started.

Served on top of a lemon-mustard sauce and parsley oil, the Jumbo Lump Crab Cake is equally delicious. *Ooohs* and *ahhhs* are pouring from Rebecca's lips. Brit's pleased that the breading is so light and doesn't overpower the crabmeat, while Barbara appreciates the freshness of the crabmeat and that it doesn't have a lot of filler.

The Black-eyed Pea Hummus trumps the starters. (Can you honestly say you've ever had black-eyed pea hummus?) The earthy, creamy but not completely smooth spread is topped with olive oil and tomato, complementing a crunchy crostini. Brit, who doesn't even like black-eyed peas, finishes hers in two bites.

Time to spice things up

Julia's Gumbo comes hot and spicy. Sliced Andouille sausages are dunked in a savory roux made with garlic, Cajun seasoning, clam juice, long-grain rice, crabmeat and shrimp.

"There are a lot of ingredients packed into one bowl and each complements the other well," says Rebecca. "The thickness of the roux is perfect, not too thin, not too thick. It's like a hot, savory soup."

The Marinated Jumbo Texas Shrimp with Spicy Cheese Grits beckons an "ah" from Barbara. "I love shrimp 'n' grits," she declares and melts in her chair. "This dish is so nicely seasoned, both the shrimp and the grits, their version is now my new favorite."

The Cornmeal Crusted Catfish is served with whipped potatoes, green beans and caper lemon butter. The mashed potatoes are made with copious amounts of cream and butter, seducing Brit into a food coma.

We lost Barbara at the Shrimp 'n' Grits, so that leaves Rebecca to tackle the catfish. "I've never had catfish," she admits, taking a bite of the golden filet...and then another, and another, until she looks up and decides, "I'll be ordering that again."

Julia Pearl's Southern Fried Chicken stole the show. The Divas all take a bite at once and the volume (or noise level) at the table drops; you know it's a perfectly crisp and delicious chicken when the Divas' mouths are so full, there's no room for comment.

Truly, we could say the same for all of Julia Pearl's soul-splurging dishes. Supper never tasted so good. 📍

This month's Dining Divas are Plano Profile's Barbara Walch, Brit Mott and Rebecca Silvestri.

Julia Pearl Southern Cuisine

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Monday–Thursday: 5–10 p.m.
Friday–Saturday: 5–11 p.m.
Sunday: 10 a.m.–3 p.m.