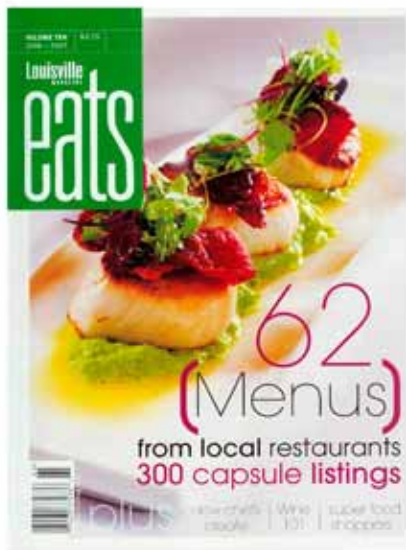


Michael Paley, Proof on Main

People in Louisville love to dine out," says Michael Paley, executive chef of Proof on Main, the restaurant in Hotel 21C. This was one of Paley's first observations after moving to Louisville from Florida in October 2005 to open the downtown restaurant. Responsible for developing the Tuscan-influenced menu with a nod to regional cuisine, Paley spent his first few months in the city dining out. "I had time in Louisville to experience restaurants, and there's lots to choose from. I realized I could do a lot at Proof in creating the menu."

Bison-raising philanthropists Steve Wilson and Laura Lee Brown own Proof, and the Myriad Group, the New York-based company known for culinary stand-outs Nobu and TriBeCa Grill, operates it. Proof's menu presents what Paley calls "modern Tuscan" fare — American cuisine with regional components interpreted with an Italian sensibility. That sensibility is both personal and professional. Paley, a native of Washington, N.J., grew up in a large extended family that often gathered to share traditional Italian meals. From 2002



until his move to Louisville he worked as sous chef at Myriad's Tuscan-inspired restaurant Lucca, located at the Boca Raton Resort and Club in Florida.

The former film-studies major at Florida State University left what he considered to be dull academic pursuits for the more exciting culinary adventure of a job at the prestigious University Center Club. By age 22 he was supervising one of the club's two restaurants, where he had his first experience composing menus. "I had a lot of freedom as a chef serving 150 plates a night. You have to understand how food works and doesn't work" before writing menus, he says.

Much of Paley's inspiration comes from exploratory dining, including keeping up with the restaurant scenes in New York and San Francisco. He pores over newspapers and magazines like the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Gate*, *Food & Wine* and *Food Arts*. Proof's menu incorporates Paley's interpretations of traditional Italian fare and revved-up regional dishes. Proof's Pacific diver scallops entrée is served on a

bed of caramelized spaghetti squash with a piccata-esque sauce "It's not a true piccata, but is in that style," he says. His lively take on a classic Southern picnic dish is the double-smoked ham salad with colorful ingredients and a bourbon aioli instead of a creamy mayonnaise base.

Many of his dishes use produce, meat and fish from local farmers, including striped bass, country ham from Newsome's, hydroponic lettuce from Louisville's Grateful Greens and bison from the farm owned by Brown and Wilson. "The flavor of the bison is better than other meat. It's richer," says Paley. Proof serves a bone-in bison tenderloin. He chose this cut because "I'm conscious of portion size," he says. "Most people eat their way through courses on the menu, so I asked myself, 'What can I do that's smaller?' Keep the bone in."

His approach, he says, is to be playful with ingredients while keeping the dishes uncomplicated. "The style of cooking here is very simple. Each dish is made to order; we don't make anything in big batches," he says.