



HOT OFF THE SKILLET

What I'm Eating Now: Matt McClure

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The current buzz in Northwest Arkansas? The Hive, the much-anticipated restaurant tucked into the [21c Museum Hotel in Bentonville](#) opened this week (the hotel will follow in February). We pulled chef Matt McClure off the line for a few minutes to find out what's for dinner in Bentonville—and why he's so excited to be back cooking in his home state.

Current ingredient obsession: Pasture-raised chickens from local Arkansas farmers such as [Sarah Jane Farms](#) and [Twisted Tree Farms](#).

Why do you love them?

Their incredible flavor and versatility. We roast them whole, and there is an incredible meaty flavor that is not found in their commodity cousins. I love to be able to use their livers, gizzards, feet and necks for various dishes such as our cornmeal fried livers with buttermilk and watercress. We add the feet to chicken stock and the necks are used in our gravy. I am currently playing with different ways to menu the gizzards as well.

How do you prepare them?

The chickens are sorghum-brined and then roasted, and served with grilled cabbage, farro, and a citrus puree from Seville orange peels. This combination of a meaty roasted chicken, a bittersweet citrus puree and the almost creamy grilled cabbage is unlike any other chicken dish that I've tasted.

What's your favorite thing on the menu at Hive, and why?

Our ham-brined pork chop with sweet potatoes, braised greens, and pecan relish. I am getting these Berkshire pigs from a local farm and they just blow my mind. Throughout our menu, I'm using accessible ingredients that have a superb quality, and elevating them through a very refined cooking process. To "ham-brine," I soak the chops in a sorghum brine for 2 to 3 days, which begins to cure the meat in a way that changes the texture into a mouth feel and flavor that is more like ham. The natural marbling of the Berkshire pigs and their clean, porky flavor are able to absorb smoke and spice much better than other varieties.

You've described your food as having Arkansas terroir, what does that mean?

A reliance on fairly common ingredients that are grown in my region. The climate and soil dictate the nuances in flavor of different vegetables and meats. It's not this homogenous profile of food that you are used to at a large grocery store. For example, onions—I have found them to be amazingly sweet here, and I am very excited to be able to showcase them on my menu. At The Hive, I like to slowly roast onions, which give them a sweet and creamy flavor profile, and serve them with crispy chicken livers. I also like to pickle them and serve on our butcher plate. We also have great local shallots; I roast them with olive oil and thyme until they are sweet and creamy and serve them in a pickled shrimp and country ham dish. Great local ingredients give me the ability to offer a unique culinary experience—and I am proud to be from this region as well.