In recent years Western North Carolina has seen a surge in locally owned restaurants garnering regional or even national attention. The Asheville area in particular has become a destination for “foodies” looking for locally sourced, regional cuisine. The recipes used in these establishments originate with executive chefs from a wide range of backgrounds. Some of the restaurants and menu items have been featured in national media, a trend that shows no sign of slowing.

In Chefs of the Mountains long-time food writer John Batchelor gives his readers a tour of over forty restaurants located in the western mountain area of the state. The restaurants and their chefs were self-selected in response to the author’s mail inquiries. While the geographical coverage is broad some readers will undoubtedly discover that their own favorite restaurant is missing. Most of the restaurants fall into the upscale or fine dining category. Readers looking for family style dining will not find it in this book.

Each chapter begins with a short biography of the chef and a description of the restaurant. The remainder of the chapter features selected recipes. Each chef describes his or her background, philosophy and experience. Some chefs were self-taught and worked their way up, while others graduated from top culinary schools and have lengthy experience in renowned restaurants. Success in the restaurant business requires energy and commitment and these traits show through clearly. One man escaped from Communist East Germany, while another overcame poverty and near-homelessness. Some gave up promising careers in other fields. One woman dropped out of a PhD program to pursue her passion for creating fine food.

A number of the restaurants are leaders in the “farm to fork” movement which focuses on food from local farms or shipped as short a distance as possible. Sidebar entries found throughout the book describe various local food producers where several of the restaurants obtain ingredients. The recipes range from European-inspired gourmet dishes to Southern specialties like fried green tomatoes or pecan-fried trout on cheese grits. The recipes have been modified for home preparation and are geared toward family-size quantities. This is not a recipe book for beginning cooks or for those looking for a ten-minute meal. It will be most useful for experienced cooks looking to create upscale dishes for entertaining or special occasions.

The book is printed on glossy paper and lavishly illustrated with color photographs of the individual chefs and representative selections of prepared dishes. Browsing the book when hungry could be damaging to one’s waistline. Separate indices make it easy to locate individual chefs and recipes, though some cross-referencing in the latter would be useful. As with any print resource, changes may occur to data after publication. One restaurant described in the book has gone out of business, while at least one chef has moved to another establishment. Readers are advised to call before visiting a particular restaurant to verify current information.

This book will make a pleasant addition to the North Carolina travel and cooking collections of public libraries. It should also be considered by academic libraries that support culinary arts programs.

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