

## Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA)

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### CUISINE SCENE: Abbey's success spans 35 years

*H.M. CAULEY*

*For the Journal-Constitution*

Take a 1915 church with soaring ceilings and massive stained-glass windows and turn it into a restaurant with servers in monks' robes and you have the recipe for a 35-year-old success story. The combination of extraordinary atmosphere, fine food and detailed service has kept the Abbey in business since 1968.

Owner Bill Swearingen doesn't plan to mark his 35th anniversary at 163 Ponce de Leon Ave. by doing anything differently than what's worked in the past.

Swearingen, who also owns Buckhead's Philippe's, A Bistro, has opened 23 restaurants since opening the Abbey.

"We've served many, many meals to people who come back for the food. I think that's why we've been here for 35 years. We've still got seafood, steaks, the basics. And though we do have many items that change on the menu, we still cover the basics of beef, lamb, veal and chicken.

The menu opens with appetizers as simple as a butternut squash bisque to the glamorous foie gras tower of apples, mushrooms and pistachio phyllo. Other favorites include roasted golden beet and goat cheese salad, tempura scallops and vegetables.

Main courses include poached lobster, roasted grouper, duck breast, herb-crusted Australian rack of lamb, veal chop, grilled ahi tuna and beef tenderloin. Prices range from \$19.50 to \$38.

Along with the sumptuous food, the Abbey is noted for its extensive and award-winning wine list.

"I think wine, food and monks all go together," said Swearingen. "The early monasteries were where all the wines were once made, and they fed masses of people."

There's room for only a small crowd of 350 in the Abbey's medieval-styled dining room. Dinner only is served. Open seven days a week.

For more information, call 404-876-8532.

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# The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

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## Dining : RESTAURANTS REVISITED

### The Abbey answers some culinary prayers

*John Kessler; Staff*

Who says the Abbey is just an overpriced tourist trap? Actually, most Atlantans do. People who haven't set foot in this decommissioned church in 15 years say it. People who've never actually dined at the Abbey, but who've heard about the waiters dressed like monks, the stained glass windows and the general aura of clerical shtick, say it.

But those natives who still go to the Abbey don't pay the tourists any mind. They don't go for the cadre of old-timer waiters in brown robes, the soaring ceiling or the locked glass cabinets filled with corny monastic doodads. They go because they love the wine list and can find the kind of solid Continental food that takes a respectful back seat to an older bordeaux.

In fact, the food can be quite good. Chef Philippe Haddad, in charge for the past two years, doesn't have a consistent menu, but his highlights go far beyond anything Abbey doubters would expect. Trust me.

If you have a complex, medium-bodied red wine in your glass, you couldn't find a much better match than his succulent ostrich loin in a well-executed brown sauce inflected with olives. On the side comes a melt-in-your-mouth rabbit leg confit and a fitting mound of mashed sweet potato.

Haddad likes the mix-and-match species approach. Lean slices of duck sausage team up with a juicy grilled quail over a mound of admirable risotto in mushroom broth. It's a dish to make you look longingly at the grand cru burgundies.

Unfortunately, an inedibly salty bouillabaisse makes you call for the water pitcher stat. There are good scallops bobbing around inside, as well as gobs of clams and mussels, but not enough quality or recognizable finfish or lobster to warrant the \$27 price tag. And a steak ordered medium rare arrives rawish, without a hint of char or much flavor. This chef seems to be at his best in fancy mode.

Which is why a salad of arugula and haricots verts is an exquisite starter, garnished with gorgeous prosciutto and goat cheese, but a mixed green salad is a bore. A so-called "she crab soup" tastes only of unreduced alcohol, cream and Worcestershire sauce. But a fussily layered fresh vegetable terrine in truffle vinaigrette is terrific. My only complaint: Why such a stingy portion? It was sad to see that third and final bite disappear.

While the wine list itself is an impressive tome, the wine program needs work. If you're willing to pay \$100 to \$150, you can find an incredible, albeit relative, bargain in French and American wines. But there's far less of interest in the \$30-to-\$40 range. Also, the glassware is too small and thick, and the wine advice seems kind of uninspired.

Still, there are many vinous delights, such as Chateau Rausan-Segla (a red bordeaux) by the glass.

In fact, my only major complaint with the Abbey is the valet parking attendant who shakes people down for larger tips. As I wrote in last week's column, he told me there was a minimum tip. I called to complain that evening, but wouldn't you know that it happened two nights later. And that's when the words "tourist trap" spring to mind.

Graphic: THE ABBEY  
OPEN SINCE 1968  
Overall rating: B-.  
Food: B-.  
Service: C+.  
Atmosphere: B+.

Just the facts: 163 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E.; 404-876-8532. Hours: 6-10 p.m. nightly. All major credit cards accepted. No wheelchair access, so wheelchairs must be lifted into the dining room, and the only restrooms are down a steep flight of stairs. Reservations accepted.

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# The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

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## Dining : STILL LESS THAN HEAVENLY

### **Service, substance can be mixed blessing at Abbey**

*Elliott Mackle DINING CRITIC*

As a dining destination with an ecumenical gimmick, the Abbey is almost scandalously successful. Slyly ministering to locals and conventioners alike, skillfully positioned between sacrilege and titillation, the venerable shrine-with-a-menu combines nondenominational dinner theater (three courses under stained glass), farce (waiters wear shorty monks' robes over regular trousers) and elegant goofiness (a harpist in the choir loft skips effortlessly from "Ode to Joy" to "Tara's Theme").

First on West Peachtree Street, now in a former Presbyterian church at the intersection of Ponce de Leon, Piedmont and North avenues, this special-occasion sanctuary has attracted multitudes of pilgrims, sinners and assorted curiosity seekers since 1968. Perhaps because it's a temple dedicated to wedding anniversaries and expense-account rapture, nonsacramental wine takes the third most prominent part - after architecture and decor - in the Abbey's rites. Bound wine lists are thicker and more edifying than many New Testament translations.

Loaves and fishes, usually a version of whatever the latest style happens to be, have seldom seemed worth the prices demanded - typically a prodigal son's tithe.

Though the roster of scullery masters (called chefs in the secular world) has included one or two saints (Tom Coohill comes to mind), the majority have been subject to pride, recipe-plagiarization and other deadly sins. In short, the Abbey's culinary reputation has hovered just above that of (you'll pardon the pun) Hell's Kitchen.

Richard P. Lindamood, the latest celebrant of the stove, recently introduced what he calls "creative cuisine." A few items from his canon are worth genuflection. We particularly liked a salad of arugula and mixed mushrooms next to a terrine of foie gras, seared veal and eggplant. The latter, a kissing cousin to Paul Albrecht's brilliant artichoke and foie gras terrine, works well as part of Lindamood's larger conception. An appetizer portion of grilled quail was tasty and well-executed. Alas, the accompanying wild mushroom ravioli in canned-tasting broth detracted from the pleasures of the little bird.

Most of what we tried during two visits was similarly dichotomous: good and bad coexisting side by side, heaven and Hades on a china plate. Fluffy, winning couscous, for instance, far outclassed its pair - a slice of bland salmon overwhelmed by Moroccan spices. Lamb rack, though cooked as ordered, was overpowered by its mustard and herb crust. The side of ravioli, by contrast, was a flavor treasure. Another side, shrimp risotto,

though oversalted, was the unheralded star of a combination plate headlined by snapper fillet, the latter fried until dry and crusted.

Conversely, a tender, nicely-seared (but imperfectly trimmed of fat) veal chop delivered far more pleasure than its plate-mate, polenta cake topped with near-vaporized blue cheese.

None of this is cheap. Seared duck breast with rare-purple interior (it quickly went back to the kitchen) on cubed sweet potato with red onion confit costs \$20. About two-thirds of a roasted game hen arranged on a thin, crisp potato cake flanked by two profane stuffed mushrooms (imagine liquid detergent mixed with Parmesan cheese) goes for \$1 less.

Sweeter than the mushrooms, though no more appealing, lobster "cassoulet" with ginger crust and daubs of mango-vanilla sauce, an appetizer, is a terrible waste of \$12. Salads run less: Given ingredients such as unusually flavorless asparagus and beets, and dry, less-than-sharp hunks of Maytag blue cheese, they should.

Service is as varied as the lives of the saints. One waiter referred to the salmon's Moroccan spice rub as Indonesian. Next, he tried fudging his way past requests for further-than-menu descriptions. Dinner took two hours. Another night, when the restaurant wasn't as busy, everything clicked, the meal was paced faster than 6 o'clock Mass and we were treated as well as any abbott and prioress visiting Rome on company business.

Is it fun? Yes, in a slightly weird way.

But sending the money directly to Mother Teresa or some other selfless tender of innocent souls might feel a whole lot better.

Chart and map: THE ABBEY

Overall peach rating: one

Food/peach: one-half

Service/peach: 1 1/2

Ambience: 2

Location: 163 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E., between North and Piedmont. 876-8532.

Hours: 6-10 p.m daily.

Recommended dishes/price range/cards: Veal and foie gras terrine with salad, grilled quail (minus the mushroom pasta), game hen (minus the stuffed mushrooms).

Starters, \$7-\$15; entrees, \$19-\$25. All major credit cards.

Kids' menu: No.

Reservations: Yes.

Wheelchairs: Not wheelchair accessible.

No-smoking area: Yes.

Color photo (Ran on P/01 with reference to P/16 review): Interior of The Abbey, housed in a former Presbyterian church at the intersection of Ponce de Leon, Piedmont and North avenues./ CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff Photo: Herbed rack of lamb. /

CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff Photo: The Abbey - at the intersection of Ponce,  
Piedmont and North Avenues. / CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff

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## DINING : ASK ELLIOTT

Elliott Mackle

Q: Since - in 1937 - I preached from that pulpit, I may be excused for pointing out that the structure now housing the Abbey restaurant was a Methodist church, not Presbyterian. From 1844 to 1939, the Methodist Church was split over the issue of slavery. The building on the corner of Piedmont and Ponce de Leon was the principal "northern" Methodist church in the South. When the Methodists united in 1939, this congregation -surrounded by other large, influential Methodist churches - gave way to an Assembly of God church. After that came the Abbey. - Dow Kirkpatrick, Atlanta

A: The varieties of Christian experience have never been my strong point. It does seem that, in recounting the past lives of this sainted building, I dropped the chalice.

Q: I want to take my language students on a field trip to a real French restaurant. They've been saving, even holding bake sales, and can pay \$15 to \$25 a person for lunch. Ideally, the menu would be French with table service conducted in that language. - Cecille Kontos, Gainesville

A: Ideally, they'll sell a few more cakes and you'll convince Fabrice, the manager of Brasserie Le Coze (266-1440) in Lenox Square, to quote a good price for the group. The bistro food, though not cheap, is as authentic as it is exquisite and members of the staff do indeed speak French. Other choices include South of France (325-6963) and Violette (633-3323). Though Toulouse isn't usually open for lunch, exceptions can be made for educational and profitable purposes (351-9533).

Where to write

Address your dining-out questions to Elliott Mackle, Features department, Atlanta Journal-Constitution, P.O. Box 4689, Atlanta, Ga. 30302. Or fax the question to Mackle at 526-5509. Full name and a daytime phone number must be included. Questions can be answered only in the column.

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# The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

October 9, 1987

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## Rev. Ralph P. Byrd, 86, retired pastor of Faith Memorial Church

The Rev. Ralph P. Byrd of Atlanta, retired pastor of Faith Memorial Church, died Wednesday at his home. He was 86. Mr. Byrd died in his sleep, according to a relative.

The funeral will be at 1 p.m. Saturday at Faith Memorial Church with burial at Greenwood Cemetery.

Mr. Byrd was minister of the Assembly of God church for 40 years, retiring in 1975. Beginning in 1935, he led a congregation in a tent and in two local buildings until moving with his flock in 1944 to the church building at Ponce de Leon and Piedmont avenues. Mr. Byrd's Sunday morning sermons in that sanctuary once were televised live in Atlanta.

In 1970, Faith Memorial sold the Ponce de Leon Avenue building, now the Abbey Restaurant, and moved to the church's present home on Briarcliff Road, a spokeswoman said.

Mr. Byrd made mission trips to Liberia in 1956, Korea in 1958, the Philippines in 1960, the Middle East in 1961 and South America in 1966.

Ralph Pratt Byrd was born Feb. 16, 1901, in Reidsville, Ga. He had no formal education but, after his conversion, studied the Bible and was tutored by ministers.

He was the pastor of a church in Orlando, Fla., for six years before moving to Atlanta. After Mr. Byrd conducted a revival in Liberia, that nation awarded him a decoration called the Great Band of the Humane Order of African Redemption.

He was a former member of the Christian Council of Metropolitan Atlanta.

Surviving are his wife, Mrs. Farrell Howard Byrd; a daughter, Mrs. Joy Armstrong of Bakersfield, Calif.; two sisters, Mrs. Margaret Greer and Mrs. Ruth Lambert, both of Atlanta; three grandchildren; and three great-grandchildren.

Photo: Mug shot of Rev. Byrd

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# The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

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## Preservation panel devises plan to protect city's landmarks

*WELLS, SUSAN Susan Wells Staff Writer STAFF*

Atlanta's Historic Preservation Steering Committee reached substantial agreement Tuesday on a stringent program to protect historically significant buildings and neighborhoods. After eight months of intense negotiation, a panel of politicians, preservationists and developers has come up with a plan to protect one of the city's scarcest resources - its history.

The Historic Preservation Steering Committee reached substantial agreement Tuesday on a stringent program to protect historically significant buildings and neighborhoods - a radical idea in a city where at least 10 historically significant buildings have been torn down in the last two years alone.

"For Atlanta, my God, it's revolutionary," said Eileen Segrest, executive director of the Atlanta Preservation Center. "It's a miracle."

The steering committee agreed Tuesday to a preliminary list of buildings to propose for protection, but it could not agree immediately on an interim plan to protect the buildings until an ordinance is put in place.

The substance of the plan, which will be introduced to the City Council as a proposed ordinance, sets up a "landmark" designation for the city's most important historic buildings, a "historic site" category for buildings of lesser significance, and landmark, historic and conservation districts for neighborhoods that would fall under varying degrees of city protection.

Landmark buildings and districts would be the most protected, requiring a developer to prove that there is no economically feasible way to preserve the building before allowing its destruction.

If the city Urban Design Commission (UDC), the agency charged with monitoring historic preservation, disagreed, the commission could come up with its own plan for restoring the building. That plan would be submitted to an arbitration board. If the UDC's plan were found to be economically feasible, even if the developer failed to accept it, the city would not issue a demolition permit.

The program also would prohibit a demolition permit if another buyer for the building could be found or if the city agreed to purchase the building at its market value before it was designated as historic.

If the ordinance is passed and the committee's preliminary list of landmarks is approved, the Varsity on North Avenue likely would be there for future generations, as would Macy's downtown, the Biltmore Hotel on West Peachtree Street, the old Winecoff Hotel on Peachtree Street - scene of the famous fire - the Ponce de Leon Apartments and Rich's downtown Store for Fashion. Landmark districts would include Sweet Auburn, Fairlie Poplar, Baltimore Block and Hotel Row on the north side of Mitchell Street between Forsyth and Spring streets.

Both Ms. Segrest and Gail Timmis, executive director of the UDC, agreed that a number of significant buildings could have been saved, and would probably be standing today, if these provisions had been in place a few years ago.

The Virginia Avenue Trolley Barns, The Women's Commerce Club (torn down two weeks ago), and The Peachtree Terrace and Peachtree Point apartments all could have been protected under the proposed ordinance, they said.

It was the demolition of the turn-of-the-century apartment buildings around Pershing Point that spurred the creation of the Historic Preservation Steering Committee in the first place.

The makeup of the group and the fact that it reached consensus on such a strong plan of protection is historic on its own. Mayor Andrew Young, whose record on historic preservation is spotty; four City Council members; and a number of preservationists are on the panel. So are representatives of some of the largest developers in town - Portman Properties, Trammell Crow Development Corp. and H.J. Russell Construction Co.

The agreement of the disparate factions is expected to grease the proposal as it goes through the process of becoming part of the city's Comprehensive Development Plan. That process could take several months.

Tuesday, the committee discussed an interim protection plan for the city's inventory of significant historic buildings, but it could not reach agreement on whether to impose a moratorium on demolition or to extend the protection of the proposed ordinance to the buildings until the City Council acts.

That was a point of great concern to some of the members.

"I hope we don't have developers running out in the neighborhoods to start bulldozing to get ahead of a moratorium," said Sam Williams, a representative of John Portman, a major developer.

The committee should reach agreement on an interim plan within the next two weeks. The buildings chosen for the tentative list are all in the central business district of downtown, and are all private and income producing. They include:

The Dixie Coca-Cola Bottling Co., Brookwood Station, Garnett Station Place, J.P. Allen, Southern Bell (AT&T), Bona Allen Building, Candler Building, Carnegie Building, Crum & Foster Building, Glenn Building, Hurt Building, W.W. Orr Building, Rhodes-Haverty Building.

Ponce de Leon Methodist Episcopal Church (The Abbey Restaurant), Academy of Medicine, Capital City Club, Spring Hill Mortuary, the downtown YMCA, The Castle, Gay House, Mitchell King House, Peters House, William Green Raoul House, Rufus M. Rose House, The Wimbish House, the Belvedere, Cox-Carlton Hotel, Granada Apartments, Palmer House Apartments, Reid House, Georgian Terrace hotel, Bass Furniture Building, Peachtree Manor Hotel, Atlanta Union Mission, and the Cottingham Building.

The Block Building, Mark-Connally Building, Bookhammer/Mirror Building and the Original Bass Department Store Building, all in or near the Underground Atlanta development, were also proposed landmarks.

As historic sites, the committee proposed Regenstein's, the Medical Arts Building, the Olympia Building, Imperial Hotel, the Georgia Power Substation, Brother Juniper's, Commercial Row, C&S Branch Bank, Kress Building, Rager Industrial Sewing Machine Building, Saul Brothers & Co., Rhodes Center, Jett House, Picture House Inc., 1106 West Peachtree, 652 West Peachtree, Blackstone Court Apartments and the Winwood Apartments.

The only currently proposed historic district would be around Crawford Long Hospital.

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## RED DIRT DIARY

### A then-and-now pictorial view of an evolving Atlanta Piedmont-at-Ponce once was address of mansions

*Holly Crenshaw Staff*

On a wall of the BP gas station at Ponce de Leon and Piedmont avenues, a faded color photograph reminds customers of the old days. But take a closer look: It's an image of the Gulf Car Care Center, vintage 1980.

Obviously, nostalgia is not a high priority at the busy gas station, where most of the employees have worked only a few months. But longtime Midtown residents recall that when former owner Bob Todd ran the Gulf station at 160 Ponce de Leon Ave., he displayed a picture of the dignified old mansion that once stood on the corner.

Built in 1950, the Gulf station was one of the earliest signs of commercial development at the crossroads of two major Midtown thoroughfares.

Around the turn of the century, the intersection was known as one of Atlanta's finest residential areas. The extension of street car lines to the area around Piedmont Park in the late 1890s gave rise to stately Victorian homes along the neighborhood's wide boulevards.

"It was a very upper-middle-class area," said Bamby Ray, a Midtown resident and historic preservation consultant. "Most of the houses were designed by the well-known social architects of the day, and they were really quite elaborate."

Much of the surrounding landscape was dramatically altered by a large-scale fire in May 1917 that destroyed nearly 2,000 homes south of Ponce and erased a broad swath of neighborhood history.

"That was really the beginning of the end for Ponce," Ray said, "because a lot of the large mansions were destroyed in that fire, and then development sort of moved northward."

The 1927 Atlanta city directory lists W.I. Walker and P.E. Castleberry as occupants of the large, two-story house that was eventually demolished to make room for the Gulf station.

By then, the residence just to the west had been converted to the Ponce de Leon Methodist Episcopal Church, and in 1932, was operating as the Southern Health Institute --- a sign of things to come, since numerous medical practices have since set up shop in the area.

Around 1968, the imposing Central Congregational Church at 180 Ponce de Leon Ave. -- - formerly Ponce de Leon Baptist Church --- was torn down. By 1971, Standard Oil was open for business on the anchor site, which now houses a Chevron station.

Still, there's a surprising sense of continuity in several surrounding buildings

The three-story red brick apartment building in the earlier photograph still stands at 690 Piedmont Ave., at the corner of Third Street. In a 1922 city directory, it was called the Chatham Court Apartments, with 19 rental units.

Across the street and a few doors to the north, the apartments at 705 Piedmont Ave. look much as they did in 1924.

Two landmarks still hold down the south side of Ponce. The Edward C. Peters House, a soaring Queen Anne-style home built in 1885 at 179 Ponce de Leon Ave., survived a demolition threat in 1970 and was transformed into the Mansion restaurant in 1973. Across Piedmont, the Abbey restaurant has been operating since 1977 in a building that had been the Ponce de Leon Methodist Episcopal Church but became the Ponce de Leon Assembly of God in 1939.

Now a one-way street with three lanes of northbound traffic, Piedmont Avenue maintains a scaled-down sense of grandeur, as cars cross North Avenue and head toward Ponce de Leon.

"It's wonderful as you're driving up that hill and start to see those scattered original houses along Piedmont," Ray said

Photo : Looking north on Piedmont at Ponce de Leon, there are gasoline stations on both sides --- commercial development where residences and a church once stood. / CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff Photo : The BP station is on the site a stately mansion (top photo) once occupied. The top photo was likely taken in the early 1930s. / FIL

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### Historic gems face risk As population rises, something must give

*DAVID PENDERED*

A population boomlet in Atlanta is adding to the pressure on historic buildings and places around the city that are in danger of being razed to provide new residences and shops, according to a new list released by the Atlanta Preservation Center.

Two entire neighborhoods made the list this year because of developments within their borders that threaten their historic integrity, said Boyd Coons, executive director of the Atlanta Preservation Center. The neighborhoods are in Buckhead and near the Martin Luther King Jr. Center.

"Atlanta is a city composed of neighborhoods, and we see the neighborhoods as under extreme threat in terms of character and integrity, and because of the pressure for greater density and development that has manifested itself in varying ways," Coons said.

Atlanta has typically lost historic buildings to fire or decay; others that had little public support have been knocked down to make way for trophy developments.

These days, older buildings are more likely to be jeopardized by condo developments and retail shops. For instance, near Piedmont Park, a 1920s-era apartment building was torn down last year to make way for about 80 residential condos.

New residences are being built all across the city to accommodate the continuing wave of newcomers. Several thousand people move into the city each year, according to estimates by the Atlanta Regional Commission, a planning agency. All of them need a place to live.

In Buckhead, the trend for the past three years has been to tear down older houses and replace them with bigger ones that take up more space.

Consequently, the distinct landscape and architecture of the neighborhood are changed, according to the preservation center. Atlanta City Councilwoman Mary Norwood has been working on the issue of infill development for several years and says she is close to unveiling a voluntary regulation to control the size of new dwellings.

Near the King Center, plans call for older buildings to be razed along Auburn and Edgewood avenues and replaced with new residences and shops.

The list has no real power to protect buildings and places. But preservationists view it as an important spotlight that helps shape the discussion over what in the city is worth preserving.

For example, a developer intended to tear down a big portion of an 1895 mill near the Carter Center and build residential condos. The Atlanta Preservation Center got involved in that discussion, helped raise awareness of the plan for partial demolition, and successfully urged the city's historic preservation commission, called the Urban Design Commission, to protect the former DuPre Manufacturing Co., which now houses the Masquerade nightclub. The building made this year's list.

#### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- To learn more about this topic, go to [www.preserveatlanta.com](http://www.preserveatlanta.com)
- Photo

CHARLOTTE B. TEAGLE / Staff

A mixed-use project coming to this Auburn Avenue block is one reason the neighborhood is on a list of threatened Atlanta areas. The Atlanta Preservation Center compiled the list.

power to protect buildings and places.

Photo

BITA HONARVAR / Staff

The former DuPre Manufacturing Co. mill, which now houses the Masquerade nightclub, is one of 13 older buildings the Atlanta Preservation Center just listed as endangered. The list has no real power to protect buildings and places.

Graphic

#### THE ENDANGERED 13

- Academy of Medicine, 875 West Peachtree St.
- Atlanta Public Schools, five buildings
- Auburn/Edgewood avenues, commercial districts
- Brother Juniper's, 1035 Peachtree St.
- DuPre Manufacturing Co., aka the Masquerade, 695 North Ave.
- Huff-Feldman House, 4055 Randall Mill Road
- Paces Ferry Bridge across the Chattahoochee River, near the Lovett School
- Paschal's Restaurant and Motel, 830 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive
- Peachtree Heights West neighborhood, area including portions of Peachtree Battle Avenue, Habersham Road and Andrews Drive and all of Cherokee and Rivers roads
- Peachtree Hills Apartments, 2278 Virginia Place
- Ponce de Leon Methodist Episcopal Church, aka the Abbey, 163 Ponce de Leon Ave.
- Upchurch-Kelley House and Gardens, 4141 Wieuca Road
- Withers House, 1177 Avon Ave.

Source: The Atlanta Preservation Center

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# The Atlanta Journal and The Atlanta Constitution

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## NEIGHBORHOOD OF THE WEEK: Midtown

### Historic close-in neighborhood is undergoing a refreshing renaissance

*H.M. Cauley; For the Journal-Constitution*

Trying to keep up with the changing Atlanta landscape is always a challenge. With old office buildings being renovated into residential lofts, out-of-date shopping centers being bulldozed and new high-rises spiking into the skyline, the city has a distinctly different look from the one it sported a few years ago.

Perhaps nowhere in Atlanta is the cityscape changing as quickly and as drastically as in Midtown.

The neighborhood nestled between downtown and Buckhead, between the Downtown Connector and Piedmont Park, boasts numerous new places to live, eat and shop. Even folks who have lived in the community for a short time marvel at the metamorphosis.

"Just two years ago, it wasn't a comfortable walk down Peachtree from 10th Street to the Fox," said David Vannort, a real estate agent and Midtown resident since 1993. "In fact, that was a dicey stretch."

Today, the same Peachtree Street sidewalks are bustling with newcomers flocking to Midtown's exploding condominium market, enjoying the arrival of new restaurants and coffeehouses and reveling in a lifestyle that doesn't require a car to get around.

Much of the credit for the change goes to the neighborhood residents themselves, who for years have battled big-box developers in favor of mixed-use projects that would make their community less dependent on the automobile. And they've documented the area's significant structures and had the oldest sections listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

"The neighborhood and NPU (Neighborhood Planning Unit) have had a lot of input," said Randal Lautzenheiser, chairman of NPU-E, who lives with Vannort in a 1920s Craftsman bungalow they recently overhauled. "The major thing we do is make sure to balance the commercial and residential. The reason people like it here is because of that delicate blend."

The mix is drawing increasing numbers of new residents, particularly along the Peachtree Street corridor.

"People like it because we're here in the only community where you can walk to two subway stations, the theater, Piedmont Park, bars, restaurants and the Civic Center," said Alan Hanratty, a board member of the Midtown Neighbors Association and a six-year resident who agrees that, until recently, the neighborhood had several unsavory corners.

"There were parts that were nothing but trouble," he said. "At night, you'd hardly ever see anyone walking down Peachtree. Now, the kinds of people and the numbers are changing so quickly that it's stunned a lot of the people who live here."

A real estate agent, Hanratty continues to be amazed at the number of buyers he meets who are making Midtown their first choice for intown living.

"I've met a number of people who said they were looking in Ansley Park, Morningside and Virginia-Highland but wanted to see what was in Midtown, too -- and that never happened before," he said, with a laugh.

"A few years ago, people were trying to avoid it. But I think some of the problems we had at one time -- prostitution, street people -- are gone. Even events at (Piedmont Park) are more organized, and it's much cleaner. They're doing major work on the meadow there, putting in new paths and plants. And a lot of the small apartments that were seedy have gone condo with a totally different type of homeowners.

"Things are changing so quickly, it's an adventure just driving around. You drive by a building and 24 hours later, something's gone and there's a sign that something new is coming. It's truly exciting," he said.

Particularly exciting for homeowners are the steadily climbing property values. On the strength of the fiery condominium market, in both converted buildings and new units, budget-conscious condo buyers are lucky to find modest accommodations for around \$150,000, while the top end of the market has spilled over \$1 million.

In the single-family market, fewer than a half-dozen fixer-upper properties are on the market for less than \$300,000. A renovated gem will surpass the \$800,000 mark.

Vannort and Lautzenheiser recently completed a 1,600-square-foot addition with three bedrooms, a bath, media room, library and a big front porch, on the strength of the market.

"Buying in at such a reasonable price six years ago, it made economic sense to build what we wanted instead of going out to buy it," said Vannort. "For what we paid for this in 1993, you can't buy a one-bedroom condo in Midtown any more."

The escalating prices haven't proven a deterrent to families, some of whom are as eager as the young professional crowd to call Midtown home.

"I think the biggest difference we've seen here, along with the change from rentals to condos, is the number of children," said Bamby Ray, who lives in an 80-year-old house in

the heart of Midtown with her husband Bill. "That's a really great change. When we moved here nine years ago, I noticed very few children."

Ray admits that when they were house-hunting in the early 1990s, Midtown didn't even make the cut of top neighborhoods she considered.

"Our first choice was actually Inman Park, but there just wasn't anything there we could afford," said Ray, who organized the neighborhood's application for the National Register listing two years ago.

"We really wanted to be able to move in without doing a major renovation, but we wanted to be intown; here, we're within 10 or 15 minutes of anything we want to get to," she said.

The Midtown neighborhood grew in Ray's affection so much that she was inspired to start a walking tour of the area. The tour includes some of the historic buildings such as the Mansion and **the Abbey** restaurants on two corners of Ponce de Leon and Piedmont avenues. The tour is still available through the Atlanta Preservation Center's walking tours program.

Hanratty, who considered moving out of Atlanta just a few years ago, recently decided to put his Penn Avenue house on the market and buy a condominium.

Among his preliminary choices were renovated buildings such as 805 Peachtree or the Windsor over Peachtree next to the Fox, as well as new projects such as the Ansley on West Peachtree Street and 199 12th St., described by developers as a "brownstone-inspired" enclave of 11 multilevel homes priced from \$300,000.

But he narrowed the choice to Cotting Court, one of the area's premier residential projects, under construction across from the Margaret Mitchell House on Peachtree Place.

The 62 units, with 782 to 2,400 square feet, feature 10-foot ceilings, balconies, hardwood floors, fireplaces, gourmet kitchens and home offices. The building includes a lap pool, fitness center, sixth-floor terrace, security and concierge services and underground parking. Priced from the \$200,000s to more than \$900,000, the units were 25 percent leased before the project even broke ground.

Photo: Midtown is an eclectic, pedestrian-friendly blend of older homes, condos, offices, restaurants and shops. / MARLENE KARAS / Staff

Photo: Bamby Ray (left), lifelong Midtown resident Betty Sherwood and Alan Hanratty trace out the walking tour that Ray spearheaded. The district is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. / NICK ARROYO / Staff

Map: Map of Midtown.

Getting there: From downtown Atlanta, take Peachree Street north. Midtown's approximate borders extend north from North Avenue to 14th Street and east from I-75/I-85 to Monroe Drive.

Graphic: OTHER NEIGHBORHOOD SALES

A sampling of residential transactions in the past six months.

Address.....	Sales price
868 Penn Ave.....	\$620,000
722 Myrtle St.....	\$592,000
757 Charles Allen Drive..	\$337,500
199 14th St., unit 101..	\$301,000
805 Peachtree, unit 316..	\$294,000
898 Monroe Circle.....	\$285,000
200 Sixth St.....	\$265,000
175 15th St.....	\$261,500
805 Peachtree, unit 503..	\$250,000

Photo: House located at 310 Ninth St.

Photo: House located at 868 Myrtle St.

Photo: House located at 751 Charles Allen Drive.

Graphic: Recent home sales

\$574,900

310 Ninth St. This 2-year-old brick, frame and cedar two-story is built on less than 1/2-acre; it has three bedrooms and three baths; formal living and dining rooms; family room with masonry fireplace; kitchen with commercial appliances; master bath with skylights; finished basement; 10-foot ceilings; hardwood floors; security system. It sold for the asking price after 104 days on the market.

\$627,954

868 Myrtle St. This 80-year-old two-story frame traditional sits on less than 1/2-acre; it has four bedrooms and 3 1/2 baths; two-story foyer; formal living and dining rooms; family and music rooms; kitchen with butler's pantry; five fireplaces; attic workshop; porch and patio; 10-foot ceilings. Listed for \$675,000, it sold for \$627,954 after 23 days on the market.

\$300,000

751 Charles Allen Drive. Built on less than 1/2-acre, this frame bungalow is about 80 years old. It has two bedrooms and two baths with garden tubs; porch; entry foyer; kitchen with cherry cabinets; steam radiators and central air; 11-foot ceilings; pine floors; three fireplaces; deck and fenced yard. Listed for \$319,000, it sold for \$300,000 after 12 days on the market.

Graphic: History

The development of the area now called Midtown started around the turn of the 20th century as the city's growing population pushed north of downtown along the Peachtree Street corridor.

Before then, one of the few draws to the area was Piedmont Park, where the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition was staged. About 1 million visitors attended that event, including Booker T. Washington, President Grover Cleveland and John Philip Sousa. In 1904, the park became a 185-acre public facility.

The area continued to grow along Peachtree Street and Ponce de Leon Avenue. Atlanta's great **fire** in 1917 destroyed some homes in the area below Piedmont Park, but the bulk of the neighborhood was not damaged.

In the past 10 years, the movement of people back into the city has fueled Midtown's residential market. Abandoned buildings have been converted into condominiums, and

out-of-date structures have been torn down to make way for new high-rises and apartments.

Single-family homes have skyrocketed in value as more buyers discover the neighborhood's amenities -- close to shopping, the arts, public transportation and Piedmont Park.

Graphic: Households

About 5,000

Graphic: Amenities

Walking distance to shops, restaurants, major theaters and arts venues

Proximity to two MARTA train stations

Proximity to Piedmont Park

Graphic: Landmarks

Piedmont Park

Fox Theatre

The Woodruff Arts Center

The High Museum of Art

Graphic: Schools

Morningside Elementary, Pre-K-5; 404-853-4024

Enrollment, 745; student/teacher ratio, 17.7; students per computer, 11.5; Before-, after-school care: no, yes; students in gifted program, 30.6 percent; total suspensions, 23; 15.2 percent subsidized lunch; ITBS grade-level equivalency: Grade 3, reading, 5.2; math, 4.7; language, 4.6; social studies, 4.9; science, 5.1; reference materials, 4.8; Grade 5, reading, 7.6; math, 7.2; language, 7.2; social studies, 8.3; science, 8.4; reference materials, 8.4.

Inman Middle School; 6-8; 404-853-4017

Enrollment, 730; student/teacher ratio, 17.8; students per computer, 7.1; students in gifted program, 23.2 percent; total suspensions, 210; 38.2 percent subsidized lunch; ITBS grade-level equivalency: Grade 8, reading, 9.3; math, 9.8; language, 10.6; social studies, 10.3; science, 9.5; reference materials, 10.6.

Grady High; 9-12; 404-853-4000

Enrollment, 926; student/teacher ratio, 17.8; students per computer, 8.5; students in gifted program, 13.3 percent; dropout rate, .1 percent; 43.1 percent subsidized lunch; total suspensions, 957; 3 foreign languages, AP courses in 6 subjects; AA athletic classification; SAT scores (college prep) 542 verbal, 506 math; percent passing graduation test on first round: 88 language, 75 math, 64 science, 68 social studies, 80 writing.

Graphic: Housing trends in ZIP code 30308 in Fulton County

Sales of new houses: 16, down 36%

Sales of existing houses: 300, down 4.5%

Average sales price of new houses: \$170,563, up 0.5%

Average sales price of existing houses: \$138,507, up 17.2%

Housing trends in ZIP code 30309 in Fulton County

Sales of new houses: 311 up 498.1%

Sales of existing houses: 636, up 9.7%

Average sales price of new houses: \$201,326, down 20.1%

Average sales price of existing houses: \$236,247, up 19.4%

1998 data

Source: Smart Numbers

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