

THE RADAR FOOD

BY SARAH GLEIM

PHOTOGRAPHY BY YVONNE BOYD

ACT THREE *The curtain is about to rise on Atlanta's newest chef phenom, Jeremy Lieb, of Trois.*

It's lunchtime and Whole Foods in Buckhead is packed. I'm doing my best to keep up with 34-year-old Jeremy Lieb. He's the new executive chef for Trois, Concentrics Restaurants' biggest and boldest venture yet, which opens next month. (Concentrics is the culinary force behind ONE. midtown kitchen, TWO. urban licks and Piebar, to name a few.) Lieb is just learning his way around Atlanta after leaving Las Vegas and his job as executive chef at the famed French restaurant, Le Cirque. But he has no problem navigating the produce department, where he leads me from vegetable to vegetable, calmly chatting about his favorite foods. "Look at this celery root," he says, as he spots the rather knobby, ugly brown vegetable. "I'd never use it this time of the year because summer is about the only time it's out of season and I'm all about seasons." Next he spots a selection of softball-sized golden beets. "Now these are gorgeous," he says, before moving on to a stack of baby carrots. Finally he reaches for a bunch of bright green, jagged-leaved dandelion greens. "Have you ever tried this?" he asks. "It tastes pretty bitter, but I love bitter flavors."

Our stroll through the produce section is just one of several times we've met, and throughout all of our conversations, Lieb is both modest and enthusiastic, and quite soft spoken. He talks honestly about his passion for cooking and how he believes most of life's fondest memories



Trois' executive chef Jeremy Lieb

revolve around food. "I think my mom makes the best meatloaf, but is it really the meatloaf that's so great or is it the memories surrounding the meatloaf?" he says. "Being a good chef means you have it here, here and here," he says, pointing to his head, heart and hands.

I'll admit, his down-to-earth attitude isn't what I expected from someone who could easily be considered Atlanta's hottest new chef—he's the exact opposite of many egocentric chefs I've met.

Lieb was selected by Concentrics' partners Bob Amick and Todd Rushing in July from a group of elite chefs considered the *crème de la crème* of the industry. "Everyone we met with was excellent," CONTINUED...



LEFT TO RIGHT: Lieb's upcoming creations at Trois will include snapper with crispy potato shell, flounder Parisian and duck with clementines.

...CONTINUED Amick says. "But we wanted to see who had the passion. Jeremy really understood our vision for Trois and where we want to take it."

And that's straight to the top.

Located in the new 1180 Peachtree Tower at the corner of Peachtree and 14th Streets across from the Four Seasons, Trois will eventually face the front door of the new Symphony Hall. It will include three different levels: a main dining room, an exclusive bar and lounge area, and a private dining room large enough to accommodate seated dinners for up to 150. The restaurant's design, conceived by Atlanta interior designer John Oetgen and North Carolina architect Kenneth Hobgood, includes expansive glass walls, a dramatic staircase connecting the upstairs bar and the main dining room, pinpoint lighting, suspended artwork, and both aluminum and white travertine floors. "Trois is going to be very modern and sophisticated but approachable," Amick says. "But the building is just the stage. The food and the menu will be the play, and that's where Jeremy's role begins."

Lieb has been developing the restaurant's French brasserie-style menus, which will change daily, since July. He's tailoring the cuisine at

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Trois to include simple dishes using only the freshest ingredients ("I believe in farm fresh to the table," he says), including ones incorporating celery leaves and potatoes—they're among his favorites. And don't be surprised to see several creative dishes, as well. His bread-crusted flounder with andouille emulsion and soft potato gnocchis wowed Amick at Lieb's mystery basket-style tasting (i.e., Lieb didn't know any of the products

he'd be allowed to cook with until he walked into the kitchen). "The gnocchis were like pillows of goodness," Amick says. "And the bread was so thin and crisp. It was a great use of the product."

On top of creating the daily menus, Lieb will be in command of all four kitchens and a large staff—a high-pressure role that will certainly benefit from his calm demeanor. "I'm at my best under pressure because I love what I do. It comes easy to me," he says. "But I also respect my staff. I am nothing without them."

Running four kitchens is a tall order for any chef, but Lieb's culinary resume is part of the reason Amick hired him in the first place. Lieb spent time working for famed French chef Bernard Loiseau at France's Côte d'Or before his death in 2003. (Lieb actually lived above the restaurant and earned only \$100 a week.) He also spent five years at Cincinnati's Mobil Five Star restaurant, The Maisonette, where he was eventually sous chef, and was on the opening teams at Restaurant Medici at The Ritz-Carlton, Lake Las Vegas, and at Daniel Boulud's famous bistro, Café Boulud, in New York City. Before opening Café Boulud, Lieb worked as a line cook at Boulud's fine dining restaurant, Daniel—one of the most coveted culinary positions in the country for a young chef—and eventually landed the position of chef de partie. "It was one of the toughest jobs I've ever had," Lieb says. "But learning to deal with the pressure was a great experience. All of my jobs have prepared me for this position at Trois."

Ask Lieb what his biggest goal is for Trois and you'll get two answers: "I want people to get excited about food, and I want people coming back—I want regulars," he says—something he had to work extra hard to achieve in Las Vegas, where many of his diners were vacationing. He's also looking forward to being part of the dining scene here in Atlanta at such an opportune time. "I've heard great things about Atlanta," he says, "and what I like a lot is that you can go out and have a great meal that's affordable." In Vegas, he says, he couldn't dine out with his wife, Bridget, for less than several hundred dollars. But, Lieb, who says he can't imagine doing anything else, is also quick to admit this job is going to be a challenge. "I try to take things on that are bigger than myself," he says. "If you're good, it will show. The truth of my performance always prevails." Well then, let the show begin. *Trois*, 1180 Peachtree St., 404.815.3337 or www.trois3.com. 