

Bonus: Recipes for Summer Suppers

Southern Living

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The Art Of Taste And Tunes

When Doug Gitter of New Orleans says he's an overachiever, it's like saying Picasso was a fair artist.

At the ripe old age of 29, he holds a law degree; has worked for Fortune 500 companies in New York; collects some of the best folk and

primitive art in the South; and has opened a restaurant, Doug's Place, that serves steaks that will make you applaud.

Begun a year and a half ago on Camp Street in the Warehouse District, Doug's Place joins such fine nearby restaurants

as Mike's on the Avenue and Emeril's—but with a twist or two.

In its first incarnation in the sixties, the building vibrated with Cosimo's Recording Studio, where such luminaries as Fats Domino, Aaron Neville, Little Richard, and Dr. John recorded. The studio produced such 45s as "Walking to New Orleans," "Barefootin'," "Mother-in-Law," and "Tell It Like It Is."

Several of those 45s hang above the bar, and all the background music played for hungry diners comes from tunes previously recorded there. The restaurant even set aside a niche for Fats Domino's bright-red piano (supposedly painted by Fats himself). And a new attraction, a walk of fame, displays musical notes embedded in the floor, each engraved with the name of the recording artist.

But back to the art. It's awfully difficult to choose an entrée from the menu while you're looking at a metal *Tyrannosaurus Rex* sculpture or the bulldogs that adorn the ice machine. Doug has been collecting folk and primitive art since age 23, actually



PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF DOUG'S PLACE/OWEN MURPHY

A view from the bar area at Doug's Place, which is filled with folk art, shows the open grill and entrance to the main dining room in the background.

going to the homes of artists all over the country, predominantly in the South, and developing a bond with them that he treasures.

"There are about 50 artists on display in the restaurant now," says Doug, "and I have a personal relationship with most of them. I'd say 75% have come in to eat at the restaurant, along with many of the recording artists who come in to tell their stories and listen to their music being played."

But I mustn't leave out the food. Doug and his wife, Cathy, import Prime aged beef from Chicago twice a week. Still the prices are very reasonable for such choice meat. A fillet runs \$15.95, as does a 12-ounce ribeye. The steaks come with knives, but tenderness makes those utensils seem extraneous. Doug's Place has been rated as one of the two best steak houses in New Orleans, and after just one perfectly grilled bite,

you'll know why.

"I like to combine the art of cooking, the art of music, and the art of painting," Doug says, looking around at his comfortable brick and exposed cypress-beam refuge. "Lots of artists have their work shown in museums on white walls. This is different. Here it seems alive."

And with that, it's hard not to forgive Doug for being so talented and successful at the tender age of 29—especially when he brings out the praline cheesecake while Aaron Neville is singing "Tell It Like It Is," and you notice Isaac Smith's sculpture of an alligator chasing a duck. To say that Doug's Place is a great place is one understatement worth checking out.

Wanda Butler

Doug's Place: 748 Camp Street, New Orleans, LA; (504) 527-5433. Hours: 11 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; 5-10 p.m. Monday-Saturday. ◇