

# DOWNTOWN

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## Smokehouse excellence featured at C.A.Y.A.

by Eleanor Heald

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If you're a foodie and have visited Thomas Jefferson's Monticello in Albemarle County, Virginia, you no doubt saw the outbuilding that houses a conventional brick fireplace built into an exterior wall where the flue discharges into an authentic smokehouse. Smoking food is truly American and is enjoying a revival.

Executive Chef Jeff Rose and co-owner Rachel Mandell did not intend a Jeffersonian imitation when they introduced the Wolverine Lake and nearby communities to house-smoked beef and pork in their new grill/bistro, C.A.Y.A. Smokehouse Grill, opened earlier this year. But they are part of an increasingly popular trend.

Smoked items are cooked for 10 to 14 hours using hickory, oak, maple, apple and cherry woods – a process ensuring all meats are fully cooked and naturally tender. A variety of woods produces a dark outer layer, referred to as bark, that caramelizes the meats' exterior.

The acronym C.A.Y.A. stands for "come as you are" and describes the casual ambience and modern menu, featuring foods made with local ingredients.

### One of a kind

Smokehouses generally have significant history behind the concept. C.A.Y.A. is located in the former Nifty Norman's building, which had been vacant for several years. Its industrial and rustic look emanates from a blend of modern metals and old-style wood. Rusted copper, barn wood and iron are principal design components.

Barn wood comes from the 1916 Fred Irwin Farm in Michigan. Each board was hand cut and matched by size and color. Cement brick interior walls, an exposed ceiling, industrial-style lighting and an onyx bar add uniqueness. The dining room seats 100 diners and when warm weather returns, an outdoor covered patio has seating for 60 guests.

### About the owners

Before renovating and opening C.A.Y.A., Executive Chef Jeff Rose was the opening chef at Michael Symon's Roast in Detroit and the executive chef for Toast, a Birmingham restaurant (203 Pierce Street). He has also done stints in the kitchens of Tribute, Big Rock Chophouse (245 S. Eton Street, Birmingham), and Iridescence in Detroit.

Co-owner Rachel Mandell's passions are great food and upbeat design.

### Let's eat

Menu prices are exceptionally moderate. A variety of starters from mussels to sliders run \$7 to \$9. Smoked Salmon with Yuzu vinaigrette and toasted sesame seeds is a winner. Various salads are priced from \$5 to \$12 and come in two sizes. The Roasted Beet Salad is delicious.



Butternut squash ravioli, pastrami pork belly, and cranberry sauce martini. Photo: Tracy Scarpati

For an almost unheard of \$8 price, a variety of 8-oz burgers (except salmon at \$9) are served on a brioche bun. Mains run \$17 to \$24 and include among others Seared Salmon, Trout, and a Pan Seared Duck Breast.

From the Smoker is a menu section that showcases the talents and ingenuity of Chef Rose. Baby Back Ribs are served one-half slab for \$13 and full for \$24. My favorite from the smokehouse is Asian Beef Short Ribs on the Bone at \$26. This generous serving is shareable and both rib selections are well complemented by a side of creamy Tillamook White Cheddar Mac & Cheese, \$5, or mashed potatoes with roasted garlic and cheddar, \$4.

Pulled Pork from the smoker is incredibly good at one-half pound, \$6, or full pound at \$12.

Six beers are on tap and many more by the bottle. Stella Artois is \$4. Wines are reasonably priced at \$5 to \$10 by the glass and \$18 to \$54 by the bottle.

Wolverine Lake may not be on a Birmingham or Bloomfield resident's radar. Yet this restaurant should be. Over the holidays, if you are expecting a full house of family and you'd like a break from cooking, take a ride to C.A.Y.A. – you'll be delighted.

**C.A.Y.A. Smokehouse Grill, 1403 South Commerce Road, Wolverine Lake, 245.438.6741, Tuesday to Thursday 4:30 to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday until 11 p.m. and Sunday until 9 p.m. Parking on premise.**

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