

# Esquire

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★ CHEF OF THE YEAR ★

★ A RESTAURANT FOR OUR TIME ★

## BLUE RIDGE

WASHINGTON, D. C.

➔ Eat a few dishes prepared by Esquire chef of the year Barton Seaver, thirty, and you'll feel good about living on earth: aged country ham, a perfect chicken potpie with hot rosemary-flecked biscuits, sweet-potato fritters with honey mustard. Listen to him talk about how to save us all from destroying America's food chain (and ourselves in the process) and you'll feel even better about it. He's a voice of reason at a time when priggish, competing factions—from vegans to slow-food zealots—deal more in polemics than real solutions.

**ESQUIRE:** What is wrong with the current infatuation with "sustainable food"?

**BARTON SEAVER:** We've become slaves to words like *local*, *fresh*, and *seasonal*. We all want to be Thomas Jefferson's agrarian hero, but sustainable food is a difficult beast. You want to save the oceans? Eat more broccoli. Change the topography of your plate. Sixteen ounces of shrimp on a plate is not the best nutrition. And you don't have to eat farmer's-market organic broccoli or participate in some green revolution. Just eat broccoli. They have it at Wal-Mart.

**ESQ:** Shouldn't Americans eat more seafood, not less?

**BS:** Eat some shrimp, but start with making broccoli or beans more delicious for people. [See right.] Restaurants stress the protein. People read menu items left to right, with the protein first. I read descriptions right to left.

**ESQ:** So how would you describe your own cooking at Blue Ridge?

**BS:** It's my sensibility projected onto southern regionalism. But I stay out of the way of the ingredients—I want their essential flavors to speak for themselves.

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HOW TO COOK  
A VEGETABLE  
IN 80 WORDS  
OR LESS

BY BARTON SEAVER

*Broiled vegetables are the future. Simmer broccoli in salted water until it's soft. Take it out, put it on a cookie sheet, put a drop of mayonnaise on top of each piece, and put it under the broiler for a couple of minutes until it's crispy, even a little burned. Season with salt and pepper. Throw some chili powder on it if you want. Or cumin. It's awesomely delicious. I can't make it any easier for you.*