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I went to Texas recently to do a story for the new issue of the magazine, which is published next week. During my stay I visited many good restaurants but one in particular stays with me. Ellerbe Fine Foods is housed in a former petrol station in Fort Worth. It's been beautifully converted. Huge windows and sage-hued wood panelling combine to make the dining room a bright, airy and chilled-out space; out front, the old porte-cochère forecourt has been converted into a chic terrace, though this area is more popular in spring and autumn than in the searing heat of June, when I visited.

The kitchen is headed up by Molly McCook. Many of her dishes are family recipes – the restaurant is named after the house on Ellerbe Court Road, in Shreveport, Louisiana, where Molly learned to cook at her grandmother's knee. "My grandparents were big farmers and always cooked from their garden," says Molly (above, left), "so a lot of my recipes are memory foods from childhood." Popular Louisianan-inflected dishes include her New Orleans-style barbecue shrimp and Maw Maw's bread & butter pudding – a deliciously light confection based on her grandmother's recipe, served in a whisky sauce with pralined Texas pecans.

What's great about Ellerbe is that everything is so well-judged. From the airy, understated decor to the cheery, unfussy and quietly knowledgeable service, everything is just so. The food, too, taps right into the restaurant zeitgeist with its scrupulous commitment to the farm-to-table ethos. "I shop at the farmers market at least twice a week and try to use as much as possible that is locally grown.

"I love talking to my farmers. Sometimes they call me because they've got something growing that they didn't even expect to come up. So I'll go out to a field and, 'Oh my goodness, we have artichokes in Texas!'

"It's great to have that kind of relationship with the growers, to really understand what goes onto the plate. That's what we try to convey to our customers. There's a story behind our food and that's what I want people to see, and taste, and understand."

A case in point is her heirloom tomato salad with buttermilk dressing and blue cheese (above centre). The dish is simple to make, uses the freshest produce Molly can find and is effortlessly stylish. First Molly makes a dressing by whisking together 110g

mayonnaise with 60ml buttermilk, along with 2 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley, 1½ tbsp lemon juice, 1½ tbsp finely chopped shallot, 1 small finely chopped garlic clove, and a sprinkling of coarse kosher salt (sea salt is an ideal substitute).

Then she cuts 6 assorted large heirloom tomatoes into 2cm-thick wedges, which she places into a bowl with a finely sliced shallot and strips of thinly pared cucumber. To this she adds 2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, 1 tbsp fresh lemon juice, more kosher salt and some freshly ground pepper and tosses together. When I visited the restaurant, Molly had just picked up a consignment of plump watermelon radishes, which were newly in season at a local farm. She added a few thinly sliced slivers to her salad, the radishes' vibrant cross-section – from lime-green through white to a deep magenta interior – adding a glorious visual appeal. This is divided among 6 plates, drizzled with dressing, sprinkled with blue cheese and 2 spring onions, thinly sliced on the diagonal, and a scattering fresh flat-leaf parsley and basil leaves.

Served simply with a slice of griddled cornbread, the dish says everything about the restaurant. It's smart yet straightforward, making the most of fresh, seasonal produce. Earlier this year, Ellerbe was picked as one of the [10 Best New Restaurants in the US](#) by Bon Appétit magazine. Tucking into my salad, I could see why.

*Ellerbe Fine Foods is at 1501 West Magnolia Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas. Issue 21 of Jamie Magazine is published on 28 July, and is available at supermarkets and branches of WHSmith.*