



# InTheKitchenWith HassanKargbo

By Brian Egston  
Photography by Brian Egston

Hassan Kargbo knows all about diamonds in the rough. His home country of Sierra Leone is known to many as the source of “conflict” diamonds, a global issue that has led to death, persecution and greed. But Kargbo has taken the lessons of determination and created a jewel of his own. One that he says is a gift to the community.

It's just after dusk on Wesley Chapel Road in Decatur, and the night is illuminated with neon signs of fast-food joints, but just off the road is a beaming blue sign boasting Kargbo's creation—Elegance. The walkway is covered with red carpet and a two-tier water fountain produces a small geyser, rising and falling with aquatic harmony. The restaurant's interior is a fusion of upscale lounge with posh dining room. The dining side is peppered with high-back white leather chairs and booths to match and white table linens. Mirrors line the walls and more cascading falls surround the dimly lit area. In the adjacent lounge section, more mirrors reflect bright colors. Glass trinkets and statues are abundant on tables and pillars as plasma televisions beam music videos above the bar. The restaurant windows are draped for privacy and lounge windows are camouflaged with glass stones. At any minute, it seems as though Shaft or Nino Brown might stroll through the door.

Elegance is heavy on appearances, yet the food, a mix of Caribbean, American, Italian and Tai, demands attention. The Elegance mixed grill entree is a combination of grilled shrimp, scallops and salmon with yellow rice and vegetables infused with a blend of herbs. Hassan's shrimp and scallop dish is filled with jumbo shrimp and perfectly pan-seared scallops tossed in linguini and a good balance of creamy garlic Alfredo sauce. The dish is teased with toasted parmesan garlic toast. The large portions make it difficult to save room for the signature warm pina colada bread pudding drizzled with a white rum sauce.

NFL rookie Demario Minter held a swank party at Elegance. The restaurant was packed with athletes, Minter's family members and friends. As the party lasted more

than five hours, the guests found themselves lost in the succulent treats and design of Elegance. Most of the partiers seemed shocked and surprised once inside the building.

With the décor and large selection of fine dining, one might be inclined to ask, “Why Wesley Chapel?” It is, after all, where many restaurants have gone to die.

“I wanted something nice for our community,” Kargbo explains while keeping a watchful eye over the establishment. “If you want to go to some place like this, you will have to go out to Buckhead,” he adds. Kargbo admits people tried to discourage him from opening his establishment in the area and predicted that failure was inevitable. “If you don't face challenges, you'll never be successful,” the risk-taker says. “I owned a boutique in Sierra Leone, and it was a challenge to make that successful. Life is about how you overcome challenges.”

The entrepreneur also owns a real estate company and commercial waste management firm. He has plans of adding two more restaurants to his stable of companies with locations in Atlanta's West End and the Greenbriar Mall area. “I want this to be infectious. I'd like for people to see a nice establishment and other people to open top-shelf businesses in the area,” says Kargbo. g

Elegance Restaurant & Lounge  
4207 Snapfinger Woods Drive, Decatur  
404-288-1332

Pan Seared Crab Cakes	\$7.25
Tropical Salmon Pasta	\$14.50
Elegance Mixed Grill	\$15.25
Pina Colada Bread Pudding	\$6.00

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