

WHY SOUTHERN FOOD IS SO HOT

EIGHT CLASSIC SOUTHERN FOODS.
SIXTEEN PLACES TO TRY THEM NOW.
ONE GIANT LOVE LETTER TO THE REGION
AND ITS EVER-POPULAR CUISINE.

BY
PAULA
DISBROWE

A feast of Southern delights at
Chicken Scratch in Dallas.



Thanks to our collective yearning for food with a distinct sense of place, down-home Southern staples such as barbecue, bourbon and biscuits have never been hotter. Their reach is extending well beyond their humble beginnings in diners and fry shacks to upscale restaurants devoted to baskets of fried chicken and the simple pleasures of, say, homemade pie. Here are eight iconic foods that embody the soul of the South and make for some mighty good eating. We asked the best chefs in the region why they matter, then picked great highbrow and lowbrow spots that do right by them. So roll up your sleeves and come hungry.

MORE 

[editorial]



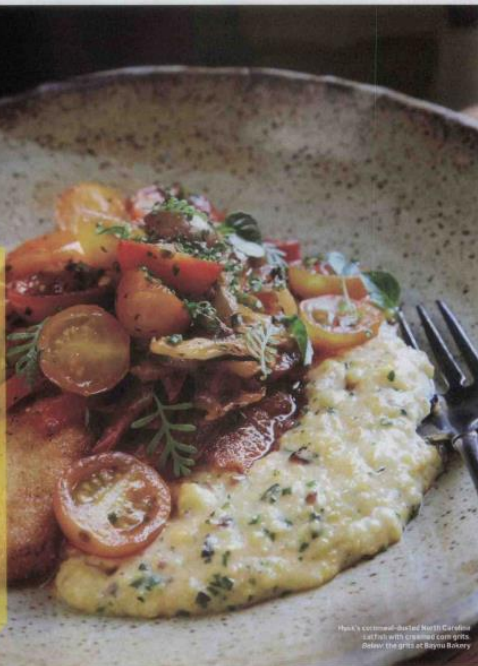
[The Reynolds Group Inc.] [www.thereynoldsgroupinc.com]

GRITS

HI HUSK

CHARLESTON, SC

In the South, ground cornmeal means grits. They're a breakfast staple in Southern diners, where they're served with butter, hot sauce and maybe a sprinkling of sugar or a river of gillet gravy. More upscale spots might anchor them to a braised shank. Today, innovative chefs pay attention to sourcing, seeking out organic and heirloom varieties of grain. Sean Brock, the acclaimed chef at Husk in Charleston and Nashville, highlights local producers throughout his menu, in dishes such as baked Geeshie boy grits with Abbey oyster mushrooms and Tennessee cheddar. husksrestaurant.com



Husk's cornmeal-dusted North Carolina grits with oyster mushrooms from Bayou Bakery.

LO BAYOU BAKERY

ARLINGTON, VA

David Guas, chef at this Louisiana-inspired bakery, gets his cornmeal freshly ground to order, from George Washington's 300-year-old gristmill. "I take my commitment to locally sourced ingredients seriously," he says. That devotion doesn't always come easy. The first president's gristmill is not accustomed to selling to restaurants, and they don't deliver. "I physically go to Mount Vernon to pick up my cornmeal every week," laughs Guas. "We make it work." bayoubakeryva.com



PHOTO: HUSK RESTAURANT; BAYOU BAKERY; GEORGE WASHINGTON'S GRISTMILL

FRIED CHICKEN

HI CHICKEN SCRATCH

DALLAS, TX

Tim Byres, the chef at Smoke in Dallas, has devoted himself to the kind of satisfying scratch cooking he experienced on a barbecue- and fried chicken-inspired road trip. His new restaurant, Chicken Scratch, serves "knife and fork" biscuit sandwiches stacked with combinations such as fried chicken, collards, an over-easy egg and hot sauce (pictured right). It also offers baskets of crispy fingers and drumsticks. "I think fried chicken is the one big American taste memory that brings us all back in a personal way," says Byres. cs-ff.com



One of chef Tim Byres' signature biscuit sandwiches.

LO PRINCE'S HOT CHICKEN SHACK

NASHVILLE, TN

Soaked in buttermilk, dredged in seasoned flour and fried until crisp and juicy, fried chicken is part of a Southerner's DNA. Nashville Hot, a style made famous at Prince's Hot Chicken Shack, has amassed a cult following in Music City, thanks to its hot sauce brine and cayenne-dusted coating.



The cayenne-dusted fried chicken at Prince's Hot Chicken Shack.

HOT NEW SOUTHERN RESTAURANTS

JEFFREY'S Austin, TX
jeffreysaustin.com

THE OPTIMIST Atlanta, GA
theoptimistrestaurant.com

THE PASS & PROVISIONS Houston, TX
passandprovisions.com

ROLF AND DAUGHTERS Nashville, TN
rolfanddaughters.com

BISCUITS



Biscuits and homemade preserves from Blackberry Farm. Right: The Cathead at Big Bad Breakfast is a classic country fare, including fried egg and home fries.



HI BLACKBERRY FARM
WALLAND, TN

One of the most revered foods in the South relies on a handful of basic ingredients—flour, butter or shortening, buttermilk, baking powder and salt. There might be a pinch of sugar or a few grinds of black pepper or grated cheese and chopped onion. But in the hands of a true Southern baker, the golden, flaky results are definitely greater than the sum of its parts. Luckily, that finesse abounds, from diners to the luxurious Blackberry Farm, where chef Josh Feathers' biscuits are served with sorghum butter and homemade preserves. blackberryfarm.com

LO BIG BAD BREAKFAST
OXFORD, MS

"Given to one set of hands, biscuits can be transcendent, to another, an abomination," says chef John Currence. The biscuits coming out of his Oxford empire, which includes Big Bad Breakfast, certainly fall into the latter category. bigbadbreakfast.com



A bowl of seafood gumbo at Shuck's. Right: Chicken and sausage gumbo at Cochon.

LO SHUCK'S
ABBEVILLE, LA

Creole gumbo, the most common variety in New Orleans, is made with tomatoes and okra. Cajun-style gumbo is typically made with sausage and chicken (or game). In fishing villages along the coast, at casual spots such as Shuck's, seafood gumbo is brimming with shrimp and crab. A note on garnishes: Gumbo is topped with rice or potato salad (the favored garnish in Cajun Country) and sliced green onions. shucksrestaurant.com

HI COCHON
NEW ORLEANS, LA

"It wasn't until I made my first pot of gumbo that I realized that cooking was all I wanted to do," says Donald Link, chef at Cochon and Herbsaint Bar & Restaurant in New Orleans. Chicken and sausage gumbo is his staple, but the chef makes seafood gumbo every year on Super Bowl Sunday. cochonrestaurant.com

GUMBO



PIE



A selection of pies from Scratch Bakery includes buttermilk, sweet potato and chocolate chess.

HI SCRATCH BAKERY
DURHAM, NC

Of late, the appeal of pie as an affordable, everyday luxury has captured the imagination of smart pastry chefs throughout the region. Phoebe Lawless, owner of Scratch Bakery, left fine dining kitchens to open her own bakery devoted to old-fashioned pies such as lemon chess, buttermilk sugar and banana cream, and tarts that showcase regional ingredients such as Muscadine and North Carolina peanuts. piefantasy.com

LO GOODE'S BBQ
HOUSTON, TX

There's always room for pie in the South: goopy pecan, warm apple with homemade vanilla ice cream, coconut custard, crispy-fried hand pies filled with fresh blueberries or peaches. In Texas, Goode's BBQ ships its famous pecan pie (pictured left) around the country to Southern natives homesick for the sound of nuts clattering down a tin roof. goodecompany.com



PHOTOS: THE GREAT COLLECTION OF BLACKBERRY FARM; SHUCK'S; HERBSAIN'T BAR & RESTAURANT; SCRATCH BAKERY; GOODE'S BBQ; COCHON; HERBSAIN'T BAR & RESTAURANT; THE CATHEAD AT BIG BAD BREAKFAST

LD SKYLIGHT INN BBQ

AYDEN, NC

Great pitmasters are revered, and many learn the craft from their fathers and grandfathers. Schooled by his grandfather, Pete, who opened the restaurant in 1947, Sam Jones cooks whole hogs over wood at Skylight Inn BBQ in Ayden, North Carolina. skylightinnbbq.com



Chopped pork sandwich topped with coleslaw from Skylight Inn BBQ. Right: a platter of ribs and sauce from Jim & Nick's.

PORK BBQ

HI JIM & NICK'S BAR-B-Q

BIRMINGHAM, AL

More than any other meal in the South, barbecue brings folks together. And in most of the region, barbecue means pork: saucy ribs, tangy pulled pork on a soft white bun with pickles or whole hog. A new wave of restaurants is committed to using naturally raised pigs to deliver the best flavor. Jim & Nick's uses Heritage hogs born and raised in Alabama. jimnicks.com



COLLARD GREENS



Hog & Hominy in Memphis combines elements of Italian and Southern cooking.

HI HOG & HOMINY

MEMPHIS, TN

Leafy, nutritious greens such as collards, mustard and kale have been cultivated and eaten for centuries. Bundles of the deep green leaves are staples at Southern markets, particularly in the spring, fall and winter when the leaves flourish in cooler temperatures. Inspired by their Italian grandmothers but true to their Southern roots, Memphis chefs Andy Ticer and Michael Hudman serve *(Continued on page 134)*

OXFORD: THE PARIS OF THE SOUTH?



When it comes to books, bourbon and soulful Southern cooking, all roads lead to Oxford, Mississippi. It's the hometown of Faulkner as well as Southern Foodways Alliance, an arm of U-Miss whose mission is to document and study Southern food traditions. Today, star chefs such as John Currence reside in Oxford (his latest cookbook, *Pickles, Pigs & Whiskey* is out now) as do his pals Tom Franklin and poet Beth Ann Fennelly, the husband-and-wife team behind the historical novel *The Tilted World*. In true Southern style, the three friends celebrated the release of their books with a barbecue last month—the whole hog with all the fixings, a 1920s jazz band and "Floodwater Punch," (inspired by the novel's spunky heroine, an accomplished moonshiner). "Books, barbecue, bourbon—these are the things that bring our community together," says Fennelly. "That remind us who we are and why we're great and what we have to share." —P.D.

(Southern Food continued from page 85) collards in fresh ways at their hip new spot Hog & Hominy and their upscale Anthony Michael Italian Kitchen, and praise them in their cookbook, *Collards & Carbonara*. hogandhominy.com



LD 12 BONES SMOKEHOUSE

ASHEVILLE, NC

Mature collards are typically braised with bacon, onions and garlic and finished with a splash of vinegar or hot sauce and served with their porky pot likker (the flavorful cooking liquid) and a hunk of corn bread to sop up the juices. Young, tender collards can be thinly sliced and served as a slaw. Collards and corn bread can make a meal or round one out—they're typically served alongside roasted meats and barbecue. 12 Bones Smokehouse serves 'em with slow-smoked baby back ribs. 12bones.com //



PHOTOS COURTESY OF: (TOP) SKYLIGHT INN BBQ; (MIDDLE) JIM & NICK'S BAR-B-Q; (BOTTOM) HOG & HOMINY

[editorial]



[The Reynolds Group Inc.] [www.thereynoldsgroupinc.com]