

Barry Hannah's  
Wild Stories


Nashville's  
Sweetest Spots

A Quail Lodge  
That Rocks

# GARDEN & GUN

NOVEMBER 2008

SOUL of the NEW SOUTH



## The Best Southern Foods

100 Things You Simply  
Must Eat Before You Die\*

A Perfect  
Caribbean  
Hideaway

The Man  
with 7,000  
Turkey Calls

The skillet  
cornbread at Highlands  
Bar and Grill in  
Birmingham



GARDEN & GUN

# Good Eats



100  
Southern Foods  
You Absolutely,  
Positively Must Try  
Before You Die

By  
John T. Edge



### How to Read This

Menu items have been divided into the following categories: Meat; Seafood; Sides & Such; Breads; and Sweets. For a state-by-state listing of the dishes, you can refer to the index on page 76. Finally, visit our Web site ([gardenandgun.com](http://gardenandgun.com)) to see an interactive map of the foods we've listed. And then go eat some of them.

**Spicy Goodness:**  
Fried Chicken at Prince's  
Hot Chicken Shack,  
Nashville, Tennessee

# Southern food is all about the low and the high.

On the one hand, it's a pig ear sandwich, devoured beneath the glare of an overhead fluorescent at a stand-up counter in Jackson, Mississippi. On the other, it's a pâté of chicken liver, savored, with a tumbler of bourbon, at a damask-draped table in Charleston, South Carolina. This roster includes both of those dishes. And it maps both extremes. ¶ For fifteen-odd years now I've been documenting the stories told at our collective table, paying homage to our cooks by way of words. Still, the compilation of this list was an exercise in folly, attempted with a 100-count bottle of antacids and a modicum of hubris. I'm sure I'll be roundly condemned for leaving out the hog's temple boudin stuffed and steamed by Bubba Frey, proprietor of the Mowata Store, near Eunice, Louisiana. Perhaps I'll be called a jackass for failing to recognize that the best chess pie in Christendom is baked by the nice ladies at the Whole Truth Lunchroom in Wilson, North Carolina. ¶ But in the bites that follow, I hope that you recognize the diverse and delicious South I know and love. My idea was not to codify the best Southern eats. My aim was to assemble a sample of the sort of bounty that beckons the curious and the hungry. Upon first bite, each dish announces its peculiar *terroir*. And commands a second bite. Then a third. ¶ Enjoy.

## Meat

### Beef Jerky *Bourgeois Meat Market*

Thibodaux, Louisiana

Imagine a salted beef loin that has shriveled to one-tenth its original size. Imagine that, in the process, said petrified loin twig becomes the embodiment of umami. That just about explains this inexplicably good jerky. (985-447-7128)

### Burger with Gin Sauce *Pirate's Cove*

Josephine, Alabama

The drive takes forever. When land finally gives way to bay, a shack emerges from the sand. Pirate flags flap. There's good country on the box. The booty to be had is a burger, not too thick, not too thin, swabbed with a sauce of mustard and gin. ([piratescoveriff.com](http://piratescoveriff.com); 251-987-1224)

### Catfish of Pork *B.E. Scott's Bar-B-Que*

Lexington, Tennessee

Ricky Parker, longtime owner and pit master, calls it the "catfish." Says it's the tenderest cut from the tenderloin of a hog. No one argues anatomy and genus with Ricky. They just step to the window and name the part of the hog—shoulder, belly, ham, or, yes, catfish—they want pulled for a sandwich. (731-968-0420)

### Cheesy Western *Texas Tavern*

Roanoke, Virginia

It starts with an omelet of sorts, a disk of egg and peppers. But it only achieves greatness when married with a greasy, griddle-cooked burger. A drenching in mustard relish helps. ([texas-tavern-inc.com](http://texas-tavern-inc.com); 540-342-4825)

### Chicken Liver Pâté *FIG*

Charleston, South Carolina

If this is poor man's foie gras, I'll settle for a double-wide, a bottle of Ripple, universal health care coverage, and a lifetime supply of chef Mike Lata's exultation of offal. ([eatatfig.com](http://eatatfig.com); 843-805-5900)

### Chicken Salad and Saltines

*James Food Center*

Oxford, Mississippi

Minced almost to a pulp, the sweet dill relish becomes so much green sawdust. The chicken salad needs a little texture; that's why I ditch the white bread in favor of crackers. (662-234-5991)

### Chicken Stew *Midway BBQ*

Buffalo, South Carolina

Ropy with threads of tender chicken,

speckled with black pepper, this buttery and milky concoction has few, if any, barbecue house analogues. After slurping down a bowl, I like to walk the sawdust-strewn floor, perusing refrigerator cases stacked with streak o' lean. (864-427-4047)

### Chili-Slaw Dog *Nu-Way Weiners*

Macon, Georgia

I taste cinnamon. Maybe cumin. I taste Miracle Whip. Maybe onion. Such are the flavors that come to the fore when I bite into a shockingly red weenie, loaded with chili and slaw, dished by this Greek-owned diner since 1916. ([nu-wayweiners.com](http://nu-wayweiners.com))

### Conecuh Sausage Dog

*Conecuh Factory and Retail Store*

Evergreen, Alabama

Sausage is about hog oddments; about offcuts and by-products, spiced with sage and cayenne and such. Artisan sausage makers are much in vogue nowadays. Conecuh links, on the other hand, can be bought on the cheap at grocery stores. And samples are free at the factory. ([conecuhsausage.com](http://conecuhsausage.com); 251-578-3380)



### Cornish Game Hen *Cozy Corner*

Memphis, Tennessee  
Since the 1970s, the Robinson family has been working an aquarium-style smoker on which they cook the best ribs in town. They excel at stick bologna, too, known to some as Mississippi round steak. But their Cornish game hens, suffused with charcoal-flamed goodness, trump all. ([cozycornerbbq.com](http://cozycornerbbq.com); 901-527-9158)

### Cuban Sandwich

#### *Kool Korner's Grocery*

Atlanta, Georgia  
I'm well aware that Miami is the capital of Cuban sandwichdom. But dig around and you'll learn that Tampa was the original beachhead. From there it's a straight shot up I-75 to Atlanta, where this skyscraper-ringed shotgun shack sells mojo-drenched exemplars of the *plancha* art. (404-892-4424)

### Fried Chicken

#### *Willie Mae's Scotch House*

New Orleans, Louisiana  
The levee breaches in the wake of Hurricane Katrina flooded the Scotch House, Willie Mae Seaton's Tremé neighborhood restaurant, in business since 1972. Her home went under, too, for they shared a roof, with the left-hand side of the double shotgun for living, and the right-hand side for cooking. Rebuilding took longer than expected. Volunteers raised money and swung hammers. Nearly two years passed before Willie Mae Seaton stood tall, once again, by her fry baskets. And it was already too late. Age and inactivity had taken their toll on the nonagenarian. In stepped her great-granddaughter, Kerry Seaton. Today, Kerry's clapboard corner restaurant stands as a beacon of recovery, dishing deep-fried paprika-spiced chicken enrobed in a parchment-thin crust, an apt homage to the grit and spunk of Willie Mae, a woman who has given her life to the cookery of creolized soul classics. (504-822-9503)

### Fried Rabbit Livers with Pepper Jelly *Cochon*

New Orleans, Louisiana  
Cochon started with chicken livers. Lately, rabbit livers have taken the lead. No matter. Pepper jelly—sweet and spicy and

pleasantly gooey—is a constant. And so are shaved raw onions and torn parsley. And that trencher of toasted bread on which this study in magnificence rests. ([cochonrestaurant.com](http://cochonrestaurant.com); 504-588-2123)

### Hash and Rice *Neal's Barbecue*

Thomson, Georgia  
Trotters go in the cast-iron washpot. Jowls, too. Cooked down, over a wood fire, they become hash, kissing cousin to Brunswick stew. At Neal's, rice is the preferred ballast, but a half pound of hacked whole hog works, too. (706-595-2594)

### Hot Fried Chicken

#### *Prince's Hot Chicken Shack*

Nashville, Tennessee  
I fear the apocalyptic burn of the skillet-cooked and cayenne-swabbed chicken dished by Andre Prince Jeffries the way I fear the wrath of the Lord. So should you. One taste of a Prince's drumstick rouses me from a twelve-pack stupor. (615-226-9442)

### Hot Sausage Wrap

#### *Southside Market*

Elgin, Texas  
One bite and your shirtfront will splotch. Two bites and your eyeglasses film. Locals once called these sausages "hot guts." They're a little less spicy these days, but the grease within still packs a flavor wallop. I use the so-called wrap of white bread as a napkin. ([southsidemarket.com](http://southsidemarket.com); 512-285-3407)

### Hot Tamales *White Front Café, aka Joe's Hot Tamale Place*

Rosedale, Mississippi  
Vestiges of early-twentieth-century Mexican farm worker immigration, tamales are the Delta's fabled snack food. Barbara Pope's hand-rolled cylinders of beef and garlic and chili powder are, by the way, the perfect accompaniments to a tall boy. (662-759-3842)

### Inside-Out Hot Brown *Wallace Station*

Versailles, Kentucky  
The original Hot Brown, served at the Brown Hotel in Louisville, is an open-faced turkey sandwich, smothered in Mornay sauce, crossed with bacon. This retrofitted country store goes Brown one better, tucking the goo inside and panini-



Cornish Game Hen, Cozy Corner, Memphis, Tennessee



Roast Beef Po'boy, Parasol's, New Orleans, Louisiana



pressing the whole. ([wallacestation.com](http://wallacestation.com); 859-846-5161)

### Mutton Sandwich *George's Bar-B-Q*

Owensboro, Kentucky  
Pulled from the shoulder of an older lamb, streaked with yellow fat, smoked with a swirl of sassafras and hickory, the mutton that emerges from George's pits will turn the heads and shock the palates of the pork-centric. (270-926-9276)

### Pig Ear Sandwich *Big Apple Inn*

Jackson, Mississippi  
Get in touch with the frugal roots of our region's vernacular cookery. Gum into this offal sandwich, slathered with yellow mustard, stuffed into a brown-and-serve roll. It's all about texture. Or the lack thereof. (601-354-9371)

Heaven on Toast: Fried Rabbit Livers with Pepper Jelly at Cochon, New Orleans, Louisiana





**Pimento Burger** *Kingsman Restaurant*  
Cayce, South Carolina  
Pimento burgers are the national food of Columbia, a statement complicated by the fact that Columbia is not sovereign. But never mind that. And never mind that the Kingsman is technically in the Columbia suburb of Cayce. When a hot patty hits a cool patch of pimento cheese, melt is achieved and goodness blossoms. (803-796-8622)

**Pork Chop Sandwich** *Snappy Lunch*  
Mt. Airy, North Carolina  
Charles Dowell, the owner, stakes his claim to greatness on the Tenderator, the device he uses to accordion-cut pork chops. But I'm thinking it's more about technique—the one Dowell honed over decades—about how he milk-batters and fries pink slips of pig before slathering the buns with mustard, slaw, and chili sauce. (*thesnappylunch.com*; 336-786-4931)

**Pork Neck Bones and Rice** *The Sands*  
Nashville, Tennessee  
A steam-table warhorse, dishing gut-punch eats for twenty-first-century field hands, the Sands excels at pot food, like cartilaginous neck bones with a stout and soulful gravy, served over white rice or sauerkraut, sopped by buttermilk flatbread or hot-water cornbread. (615-742-1652)

**Pork Rinds** *Kim's Processing Plant*  
Clarksdale, Mississippi  
Fried on-site in woks by the Wongs, a Chinese family of long standing in the Mississippi Delta, these pig skins (as well as chicken skins) taste somehow of Guangdong, somehow of Chinese five-spice powder. (662-627-2389)

**Porterhouse Steak** *Doe's Eat Place*  
Greenville, Mississippi  
A splatter of oil from a skillet full of fries. The forearm hair sings from the roaring back-porch broiler: Doe's leaves its mark on cooks. The porterhouse, cut from the bone, and swimming in butter and blood, writes its legacy in the arterial plumbing of diners. (*doeseatplace.com*; 662-334-3315)

**Redneck Taco** *Martin's Bar-B-Que Joint*  
Nolensville, Tennessee  
I don't like the slur, but I love the sandwich.

How to do it the way Pat Martin does it: Take an oversize hoe cake. Pile it high with threads of hickory-smoked whole hog. Gild the whole of it with slaw and sauce. Rake in the acclaim. (*martinsbbquejoint.com*; 615-776-1856)

**Ribs** *Archibald's Bar-B-Q*  
Northport, Alabama  
Loosening meat from the bone requires a good tug. Not a pull, mind you. Just a brief application of the incisors, and hickory-kissed pork strips fall away. The sauce, which you should apply with caution, is orange hued and vinegar nosed. (205-345-6861)

**Roast Beef Po'boy** *Parasol's Restaurant & Bar*  
New Orleans, Louisiana  
Garlic-bobbed gravy from this po'boy, served at the rear of a ragtag Irish Channel barroom, will trace its way down your forearms and find purchase in the crooks of your elbows. That's the promise. (*parasols.com*; 504-899-2054)

**Scrambled Hot Dog** *Dinglewood Pharmacy*  
Columbus, Georgia  
Oysterette crackers atop a drift of chili, puddled in a canoe-shaped bowl. Underneath, a chopped hot dog. And, somewhere, a bun. Scrambled dogs, dished at this mid-century soda fountain, are zeniths of the train-wreck school of cookery. (706-322-0616)

**Slaw Burger** *R.O.'s Bar-B-Que*  
Gastonia, South Carolina  
Imagine a shotgun marriage of Thousand Island dressing and finely mulched slaw. That's what they slather on burgers at this still-thriving drive-in. No matter the name, skip the barbecue; the smoke just gets in the way. (*rosbbq.com*; 704-853-8788)

**Sliced Pork Sandwich with Slaw** *Craig's Bar-B-Q*  
De Valls Bluff, Arkansas  
The wallpaper calls to mind an Arkansas duck hunt as captured by a Japanese pastoralist. The sandwich—sliced barbecue capped with a diced apple and cabbage slaw, smothered in something like enchi-

lada sauce—is a singular homage to the late pit master Lawrence Craig. (870-998-2616)

**Soul Spaghetti** *Collins Dream Kitchen*  
Jackson, Mississippi  
Fat ham hocks, bobbing in a primordial stock. Sweet cabbage, smothered within an inch of its life. The buffet line at Collins offers real-deal eats, but the best is soul spaghetti, a casserole of dishrag noodles, tomatoes, and hamburger meat, buckshot with black pepper. (601-353-3845)

**Spread** *McClard's Bar-B-Q*  
Hot Springs, Arkansas  
The dish looks like a Chia Pet, covered in a furry orange carpet of grated cheddar cheese. Beneath it all is a rick of tamales and chili beans, chopped beef barbecue, onions, and—this part is important—Fritos, for textural contrast. (*mcclards.com*; 501-623-9665)

**Stew Dog** *Harold's Barbecue*  
Atlanta, Georgia  
The barbecue isn't what it once was, but the cornbread is still shot through with cracklins. The Atlanta Federal Penitentiary is still the neighbor of note. And, of late, the Hembree family has begun ladling their peerless Brunswick on hot dogs. (*haroldsbarbecue.com*; 404-627-9268)

**Stewed Oxtails** *McKinley's Bar-B-Que & Soul Food*  
Ensley, Alabama  
Joe and Glow Moore, husband and wife proprietors of this brick hut of a restaurant, are certified soul cooks. Oxtails, back-of-the-stove stewed until the beef (and the bones) threaten collapse, remind you that good food is imbued with both energy and poetry. (205-785-4101)

**Whole Hog Plate** *Scott's Variety Store*  
Hemingway, South Carolina  
The pig, split down its belly, leaves the smoke-shrouded pit house, bound for the chopping room, on a repurposed hospital gurney. Once it's inside, the ladies cut the rind free with shears and pull the meat into necklaces of hickoried swine. Grab a loaf of white bread, if you like. (*unreachable by phone*)

# Seafood



**Hidden Pearl:**  
Bowens Island, Charleston, South Carolina, famous for its Roasted Oysters.

**BBQ Crabs** *Sartin's Seafood*  
Nederland, Texas  
Think barbecue shrimp, that odd New Orleans neologism. But sub blue crabs for pink crescents. Sprinkle carapaces with a barbecue rub. Fry in deep oil until the meat is sweet and the rub turns caramel.

That's how they do it. (*sartinsnederland.com*; 409-721-9420)

**Boiled Crawfish** *Hawk's Restaurant*  
Rayne, Louisiana  
Purge is the word. At Hawk's, set among sinewy rice fields and glassine crawfish

ponds of Cajun country, they run extra-large specimens through a water bath. A quick boil follows. And soon, a waitress arrives with a plastic beer tray, piled high with steaming crimson beauts. (337-788-3266)

**Campechana Extra** *Goode Company Seafood 1*  
Houston, Texas  
A riff on the traditional Mexican flotilla of tomato, onion, cilantro, lime, and shellfish, served in a pedestal glass, this kissing cousin to *escabeche* comes chunked with sweet lumps of crab, emerald hunks of avocado, and pink commas of crisp shrimp. (*goodecompany.com*; 713-523-7154)

**Crawfish Fried Rice** *Hank's Cajun Crawfish*  
Houston, Texas  
This low-rent café turns out Chinese-American fried rice chock-full of Louisiana-raised crawfish as cooked by recent Vietnamese immigrants. On each table are lazy Susans, spinning with chili sauce, Tabasco, and panda-blazoned bottles of soy. (*drclaws.com*; 281-988-8974)

**Deviled Crabs** *Wall's Bar-B-Que Restaurant*  
Savannah, Georgia  
At this back-of-the-lane lean-to, the deviled crabs, stuffed into aluminum shells, are textbook lessons in the stretching of precious resources by stirring in all manner of filler, from celery to cracker meal. (912-232-9754)

**Fish and Chips** *Avenue Sea*  
Apalachicola, Florida  
For the fish in his fish and chips, David Carrier uses grouper cheeks and collars. The former are the size of Oreos; the latter recall winged creatures from the Cretaceous era. Both are great battered and fried and served nestled in yesterday's newspaper. (*gibsoninn.com*; 850-653-2193)

**Fried Mullet Gizzards** *Chet's Catering and Seafood Restaurant*  
Pensacola, Florida  
Springy nubs of cubed calamari. That's what they resemble. Don't be dissuaded.



Since catfish swam upstream, mullet may be the last of the so-called trash fish. And nothing's trashier than mullet gizzards. (*chetsseafood.com*; 850-456-0165)

#### **Fried Red Snapper Throats**

##### *The Bright Star*

Bessemer, Alabama

There's an old saying—something about the sweetest meat lying closest to the bone. Or, in this case, the fin. I'm talking about that arc of flesh suspended between a red snapper's gills and ventral fins. Battered and deep-fried, it's an angler's treat that shows up on too few menus. (*thebrightstar.com*; 205-426-1861)

#### **Fried Shrimp** *O'Steen's Restaurant*

St. Augustine, Florida

Reverse-butterflied local shrimp, cosseted in a thin batter, fried to a vellum crisp. At O'Steen's, a working man's grub hall run by Minorcan descendants, those shrimp outshine a pilau that would be the pride of any restaurant in the South. (904-829-6974)

#### **Grouper Sandwich**

##### *Seagrove Village Market Café*

Seagrove Beach, Florida

Open for more than fifty years, which makes it a beach fossil, Seagrove fries a perfect fish sandwich and mixes a keen side of horseradish-spiked slaw. You eat on a screened back porch, stalked by feral kittens. (*villagemarketcafe.com*; 850-231-5736)

#### **Hot Fish Sandwich** *Bolton's Spicy*

##### *Chicken and Fish*

Nashville, Tennessee

Most hot-fish vendors fry whiting fillets, stack them on mustard-swabbed white bread, pile on pickle and onion slices, and dribble hot sauce. But Bolton Matthews and Dollye Ingram drag their fish through a hail of "secret" spices that taste suspiciously like straight-up cayenne. Sniff before you bite, and a six-sneeze fit follows. (615-254-8015)

#### **Oyster Po'Boy**

##### *Bozo's Seafood Restaurant*

Metairie, Louisiana

The family relies upon Leidenheimer French bread. And oysters, trucked up

from the crow's food delta below New Orleans. When you order a loaf, Chris Vodanovich shucks before he fries, which is what God, the original po'boy maker, intended. (504-831-8666)

#### **Oyster Stew** *Speed's Kitchen*

Shellman Bluff, Georgia

A collision of three house trailers south of Savannah, this is among the most rudimentary of restaurants. Same formula applies to its oyster stew, a simple—but not simplistic—complement of milk, butter, and brackish bivalve. (912-832-4763)

#### **Pan-Fried Trout and Scrambled Eggs**

##### *The Greenbrier, Main Dining Room*

White Sulphur Springs, West Virginia

Few cooks get the eggs fluffy enough. Or they stint on the butter. Not so at this grand old resort, where they know how to pan-fry trout, harvested from nearby streams, until the flesh goes from quivering fresh to pink and firm and sublime. (*greenbrier.com*; 800-453-4858)

#### **Roasted Oysters** *Bowens Island*

Charleston, South Carolina

Clusters of diminutive oysters snatched from the pluff mud that encircles the island, tossed atop a gas-fired flattop, smothered in a seawater-soaked croaker sack—that's what Robert Barber and company serve to pilgrims who make the trek to this marsh-side locale. (*bowensislandrestaurant.com*; 843-795-2757)

#### **Rolled Oysters** *Mazzoni's Café*

Louisville, Kentucky

It's a croquette. But no local would call it that. Louisville oyster rolls are barroom food. Although Greg Haner's long-lived saloon now fries in the suburbs, its stewardship of these beloved hunks of dough and bivalve remains stalwart. (502-451-3586)

#### **Salmon Croquettes** *Watershed*

Decatur, Georgia

Canned red salmon has long been the standard. But not for Scott Peacock. He uses the fresh stuff, which makes for a better croquette. Especially when mixed with chopped onions. And fresh bread crumbs. And bound with melted butter. (*watershedrestaurant.com*; 404-378-4900)

#### **Shrimp Buster** *Herby-K's*

Shreveport, Louisiana

It's a long way from the Gulf, but they know what to do with shrimp: Pound thin, until the tails splay flat and the heads resemble tennis racket heads. Fry hard. Serve open-faced, on a crusty roll, with a side of house-made tartar sauce. (*herbyks.net*; 318-424-2724)

#### **Smoked Mullet Dip**

##### *The Wheelhouse Café*

Apalachicola, Florida

Bottom-dwelling mullet is oily. Which means it takes well to smoke. Which means it takes well to being flaked and mixed with mayo or cream cheese. The Wheelhouse Café, set on Scipio Creek within sight of a flotilla of gutbucket fishing boats, is a rough and randy bar where, for the most part, food is fuel for drinking. But the mullet dip calls to mind a puree of piscine foie gras. Or a froth of alder-smoked trout. Pick your metaphor. And be sure to bring a cooler to lug home a quart or three. (*wheelhousetours.com*; 850-653-2177)

#### **Thick Fried Catfish**

##### *Taylor Grocery & Restaurant*

Taylor, Mississippi

The fillets that swim from Lynn Hewlett's fryer baskets are sandy brown, strafed with salt, black pepper, and cayenne. Eating them is a sacrament in the conversion of the great unwashed to the gospel of catfish. (*taylorgrocery.com*; 662-236-1716)

#### **Thin Fried Catfish** *Middendorf's*

Manhatt, Louisiana

Conjure the love child of a salt-lick potato chip and a white-flake catfish fillet, dished at a water-girded roadhouse. Now pile slice after slice of that papyrus-cut deep-fried fish on a platter. Sprinkle hot sauce. Spritz half a lemon. Bliss. (*middendorfsrestaurant.com*; 985-386-6666)

#### **Trout Caviar** *Sunburst Trout Farm*

Canton, North Carolina

The pop is audible. Bite into one of these golden orange eggs, and you'll hear it. What's more, you'll taste the sweet and delicate brine of the fish it came from and, by extension, the rock-strewn rivers in which the fish swam. (*sunbursttrout.com*; 828-648-3010)

#### **Steaming Red:**

The crawfish at Hawk's Restaurant in Rayne, Louisiana







# Sides & Such

## Beans All the Way *The Bean Barn*

Greeneville, Tennessee

Beans are a working man's feed. A food born of poverty, refined by generations of home cooks, best served with a coarse tile of cornbread and a slice of onion. At this chicken-coop-size diner, the owners honor both tradition and innovation, serving a bowl of soup beans with a floater of beef stew. (423-638-8329)

## Deviled Eggs *Sally Bell's Kitchen*

Richmond, Virginia

Step up to the glass-fronted case and order the box lunch of a chicken salad sandwich, a cup of macaroni salad, one half of a deviled egg, a pecan-crowned cheese wafer, and a pineapple cupcake. All will wow, but the deviled egg, with that satiny bull's-eye of yolk, will slay. (sallybellskitchen.com; 804-644-2838)

## Egg and Green Olive Sandwich *Trowbridge's*

Florence, Alabama

Wrapped in tissue paper, sandwiches at this 1918 lunch counter and ice cream parlor are comparable to crust-trimmed home-style jobs. Begin with the creamy egg and olive, then move on to salty chicken salad. For dessert, orange-pineapple ice cream. (256-764-1503)

## Fried Black-Eyed Peas *Ashley's, Capital Hotel*

Little Rock, Arkansas

They crunch when you think they should go smoosh. They taste earthy and righteous. They reference *acarajés*, the black-eyed pea fritters of West Africa. And they taste great with a martini. (capitalhotel.com; 501-374-7474)

## Fried Green Tomatoes *Arnold's Country Kitchen*

Nashville, Tennessee

That's craggy Jack Arnold, wearing a foulard bow tie and overalls, shuttling pans of collard greens from the kitchen. His wife, Rose, works the register, dealing butter pats from her cornbread deck, pouring

sweet tea by the gallon. Kahlil, their son, a hipster with a megawatt smile, runs his knife through a haunch of garlic-studded roast beef, draping slices onto plates heaped with creamed potatoes and braised collards, spooning oily *jus* over all. Set in a cinderblock building on the industrial fringe of downtown Nashville, the Arnold family restaurant sets the standard for Southern meat-n-threes. Button-down bureaucrats on a break from paper pushing. Tar-splattered roofers. Bed-headed Vanderbilt coeds craving a taste of home. All slide their trays along the steam-table track, angling for an order of herb-battered fried green tomatoes. Fresh from the oil, sour-sweet, and brittle as can be, they taste like indictments of the lowest-common-denominator norm. (615-256-4455)

## Grits with Butter *Zada Jane's Corner Café*

Charlotte, North Carolina

The place is earnest, and a little fey. But never mind that. They serve two-buck bowls of stone-ground Anson Mills organic grits. Cooked until thick but not pasty, they come gobbled with butter. (zadajanes.com; 704-332-3663)

## House Salad with Comeback Dressing *Mayflower*

Jackson, Mississippi

A nest of torn iceberg leaves. A couple of olives. Three grape tomatoes. And a clump of feta. Boring stuff, until you drench it in Comeback, the Jackson dressing of choice, the bastard child that legions of Greek restaurateurs have honed from that Thousand Island stuff. (601-355-4122)

## Italian Salad *Mary Maestri's*

Tontitown, Arkansas

Powdered garlic, left to steep in vinegar for two weeks—that's the secret. The smell will knock you flat. And pave you over. Although the restaurant has gone country club staid, its collapsed iceberg salad bullies its way onto your palate and announces its Italian-American heritage. (479-361-2536)

## Kool-Aid Pickles *Eastend Grocery*

Cleveland, Mississippi

Beverly Boddie pierces her dills like pin-cushions before pouring on the sugar and double-strength Kool-Aid. That aids the seep and catalyzes the process whereby a onetime vegetable shades toward sour candy. (662-843-1111)

## Krinkle Kut Fries with Milo's Sauce *Milo's Hamburgers*

Birmingham, Alabama

Not all great food need be farm-to-fork precious. These potatoes go directly from the freezer bag to the deep fryer. Next comes a shake of seasoned salt. And a dunk in a black-as-August-asphalt sauce that owes a debt to A.I. (miloshamburgers.com)

## Macaroni and Cheese *L.D.'s Kitchen*

Vicksburg, Mississippi

On Catfish Row, where the Mississippi Delta peters out, L.D.'s dishes a macaroni and cheese that manages to be moist but neither greasy nor crunchy. Served by a waitress named Sweetie Pie, it reveals a range of hydrologic complexities, from whorls of egg to eddies of cheese. (601-636-9838)

## Okra Soup *Bertha's Kitchen*

North Charleston, South Carolina

Relaxed and luxuriant. Almost sexy in its languidness, its looseness, its ooze. Okra soup is the steam-table grail at this restaurant secreted away in industrial North Charleston. (843-554-6519)

## Pimento Cheese and Crackers *Blackberry Farm*

Walland, Tennessee

Silky and served in a silver chalice, Blackberry Farm's pimento cheese tastes like it's made from equal parts butter, cheddar, and mayo, with errant bits of house-roasted pimentos for color contrast. (blackberryfarm.com; 865-984-8166)

## Pot Likker Soup *Mary Mac's Tea Room*

Atlanta, Georgia

You receive a stubby pencil and an order



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long been cooked from St. Augustine, Florida, up through Charleston and beyond. At Hominy, a binder of eggplant is the secret. ([hominygrill.com](http://hominygrill.com); 843-937-0930)

Soufflé Potatoes with Béarnaise Galatoire's

New Orleans, Louisiana

Fat and poofy and featherweight, the potatoes resemble tiny dirigibles. Dunked in a saucer of béarnaise, enjoyed in this mirror-lined reliquary of creole cookery, they are the queerest and loveliest of appetizers. ([galatoires.com](http://galatoires.com); 504-525-2021)

Sriracha Remoulade Reef

Houston, Texas

Houston is a city of immigrants. It happens to be a short drive from New Orleans. That's how Thai Sriracha sauce (the stuff in those rooster-blazoned bottles) and creole remoulade came to have a baby, with chef Bryan Caswell as midwife. ([reefhouston.com](http://reefhouston.com); 713-526-8282)

Stewed Tomatoes Niki's West

Birmingham, Alabama

Scalloped tomatoes, tomato pudding—no matter the name—they're midday fixtures in the Deep South, marriages of stale white bread, heaps of sugar, and lobes of tomato. Niki's, a second-generation Greek-owned meat-n-three, serves a sweeter (and better) version than the norm. ([nikiswest.com](http://nikiswest.com); 205-252-5751)

Sweet Potato Casserole

Weaver D's

Athens, Georgia

An avalanche of mashed orange tubers, kissed with citrus and nutmeg. That's what Dexter Weaver, the gospel-singing, personal-improvement-preaching proprietor wants to heft onto your plate alongside a pork chop, a scoop of squash soufflé, and a mess of greens. (706-353-7797)

Turnip Greens Taqueria del Sol

Atlanta, Georgia

Chile de árbol. Eddie Hernandez, a native of Monterrey, Mexico, spikes his turnip greens with those squat pods. And he forgoes pork in favor of chicken stock. The result violates all the rules and, in turn, sets a new standard. ([taqueriadelsol.com](http://taqueriadelsol.com))

blank. Get whatever you like from the country-come-to-town roster of favorites, but don't forget the pot likker soup, a kind of supercharged turnip green bouillon. ([marymaes.com](http://marymaes.com); 404-876-1800)

Red Beans (and Drumsticks)

Frenchy's Chicken

Houston, Texas

Frenchy's cooks red beans and sausage until they collapse, slumping into a piquant

brown slurry. Ask the counterwoman to hold the rice when she dishes your bowl and you can dip a drumstick into what you might as well call red bean sauce. ([frenchyschicken.com](http://frenchyschicken.com); 713-748-2233)

Red Rice Hominy Grill

Charleston, South Carolina

Think of it as a Lowcountry jambalaya. But don't think it's an act of culinary mimicry. Purloo, sometimes known as red rice, has

# Breads



Just Add Butter: Praise the Lard Biscuits at Beacon Light Tea Room, Bon Aqua, Tennessee

Buttermilk Biscuits Biscuitville

Greensboro, North Carolina

Most grab-and-go biscuits suck. Even Hardee's, which jump-started the trend, now serves pitiful pucks. Not so Biscuitville, a family-owned enterprise with fifty locations in North Carolina and Virginia. Biscuitville is a fast-food chain.

No apologies there. It fries and dumps hash brown planks, just like McDonald's. But Biscuitville is also a living history exhibit. Chances are good that you'll spy an apron-clad woman in the kitchen as you stand in line for your bacon- and egg-stuffed behemoth. She'll look like someone's grandmother. And she'll be stirring.

together buttermilk, flour, and shortening. Cutting rounds of dough. And baking honest biscuits. ([biscuitville.com](http://biscuitville.com))

Cathead Biscuit with Tabasco Bacon

Big Bad Breakfast

Oxford, Mississippi

The biscuit is oversize and the bacon is rude, in that saltier-than-a-drunken-sailor sort of way. Spicy, too, thanks to the Tabasco mash cure that John Currence rubs on his house-smoked bellies. ([bigbadbreakfast.com](http://bigbadbreakfast.com); 662-236-2666)

Cheese Straws McEntyre's Bakery

Smyrna, Georgia

Raspy tongues of cheddar and cayenne, these evanescent rectangles are best bought by the box and best eaten with a colder-than-cold twelve-ounce bottle of cane sugar Coke, bootlegged in from Mexico. ([mcentyresbakery.com](http://mcentyresbakery.com); 770-434-3115)

Cornbread Highlands Bar and Grill

Birmingham, Alabama

I've always eaten well at Highlands, Frank Stitt's quarter-century-old showcase of French and Southern sensibilities. I recall fondly a "pork on pork" of shoulder and belly in bourbon sauce. But, recently, a skillet cornbread trumped all. When I checked his cookbook, I knew why: a half cup of bacon grease. ([highlandsbarandgrill.com](http://highlandsbarandgrill.com); 205-939-1400)



Cheese Straws, McEntyre's Bakery, Smyrna, Georgia





### Corn Muffins *Martin's*

Montgomery, Alabama  
Exteriors crisp as all get-out. Interiors that are downy and redolent of freshly ground corn and butter. As served at this onetime-George Wallace hang, they are paragons of the craft. (334-265-1767)

### Cracklin' Hoe Cake

*Brooks Shaw's Old Country Store*

Jackson, Tennessee  
The Old Country Store trades in Southern tchotchkes. Its take on flat cornbread, shot through with chewy hunks of rendered pork, is as honest as the day is long. (caseyjones.com; 731-668-1223)

### Pigfat Cornbread *Skylight Inn*

Ayden, North Carolina  
A shingle of cornmeal, salt, and lard—the latter a by-product of hickory smoking whole hogs. Balanced atop a tray of hacked pork barbecue, that little ol' hunk of bread steals the show. (252-746-4113)

### Praise the Lard Biscuits

*Beacon Light Tea Room*

Bon Aqua, Tennessee  
They stew down preserves every week, apple in the fall, blueberry in the summer. Preserves, however, are mere gilding for the biscuits. Silver dollar size and lard cut, they arrive, six to the order, in wicker baskets, begging to be ravished with butter. (931-670-3880)



Loaves of Love: *Parasol's*, New Orleans, Louisiana



Care for Dessert?  
Coconut Pie at Jim  
'N Nick's Bar-B-Q,  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Boiled Peanut Cotton Candy** *McCrady's*  
Charleston, South Carolina  
Playfulness gets short shrift in too many restaurants. Not at McCrady's, a brick and timber tavern dating to 1788. Chef Sean Brock is a devil child genius who, working

with various Rube Goldbergian devices and sundry chemical compounds, fashions lobster-scented Cheetos and barbecue-flavored Dippin' Dots. Of late, he's been fiddling around with cotton candy, the spun-sugar conceit that Australians

call fairy floss. Bacon cotton candy has emerged from his kitchen. Ham cotton candy, too. What's more, he has been known to whip boiled peanuts into a cirrus of spun filament and float said cirrus atop almost anything, most remarkably a consommé of foie gras.

(mccradyrestaurant.com; 843-577-0025)

### Caramel Cake *Buck's One Stop*

Calhoun City, Mississippi  
Mark Goodson sells cardboard pizza by the cash register. But alongside, in a glass-fronted case, house-made caramel cakes sparkle. Their icing has a supple and durable drape that might be best understood as a cross between fondant and armor. (662-628-6822)

### Chocolate Peanut Brittle

*Good Earth Peanut Company*

Skippers, Virginia  
This clapboard two-story country store sells peanuts. Butter parched. Salted to hell and back. And, best of all, fused into a brittle, broken into squares, and double dipped in chocolate. (goodearthpeanuts.com; 800-643-1695)

### Coconut Pie *Jim 'N Nick's Bar-B-Q*

Birmingham, Alabama  
The bouffant on top calls to mind an nouveau riche belle, fresh from a midday curl and tease. The coconut curd beneath smells like Coppertone, circa 1976. And I mean that in a good way. (jimnicks.com)

### Devil's Food Donut *Spalding's Bakery*

Lexington, Kentucky  
Gnarled and misshapen and beloved, these devil's food cake doughnuts look and taste like Beelzebub's idea of a bonbon. Less dramatic, but no less delicious, are the everyday glazed yeast rounds that emerge, crisp and grease sheened, from Spalding's fryer banks. (859-252-3737)

### Fried Coconut Pie

*Mrs. Armstrong's Fried Pies*

Centerville, Tennessee  
Bite into a crisp half-moon of dough, and a curd of coconut reveals itself, creamy and sticky, a platonic treat. Dark and gritty with sugar, Carolyn Armstrong's fried chocolate pie lags by a quarter mile, but it's still pretty



Fried Peach Pie, the Varsity, Atlanta, Georgia



Pink Velvet Salad, Crystal Grill, Greenwood, Mississippi



much kicks any other pastry's arse. (sweetnothingsfriedpies.com; 931-729-1470)

### Fried Peach Pie *The Varsity*

Atlanta, Georgia  
I speak fluent Varsity, which means I know the difference between a naked steak and a glorified steak. And I know that the sleeper eat at this drive-in on steroids is the fried peach pie, a pillow of dough encasing a cobler of goodness. (thevarsity.com)

### Modjeska *Muth's Candy Store*

Louisville, Kentucky  
Named for a Polish actress I'd never heard of, this caramel-coated marshmallow slider of a candy is pleasantly pliant. Which means you'll pop three in your mouth like Tater Tots and soon dog cuss the way they

entangle your molars. (shopmuthcandy.com; 800-55MUTHS)

### Muscadine Meringue Tartlette

*Carrboro Farmers' Market*

Carrboro, North Carolina  
Grape hull pies are age-old, and "Farmer's Daughter" April McGregor is a whipper-snapper of a baker. From a stall at her local farmer's market, she peddles all manner of old and new sweets, including this diminutive pie wherein the natural muskiness of the grapes is tamped down by copious amounts of butter and whipped cream. (carrborofarmersmarket.com; 919-280-3326)

### Pecan Pie *Brigtsen's*

New Orleans, Louisiana  
Crust that's as tender (and brittle) as homemade phyllo. Caramel sauce that's as rich as a levee board politician on the take. Pecan nougat that shakes and shimmies like an Iberville Street hooker. And house-churned vanilla ice cream that glorifies the marriage of cow and cane. (brigtsens.com; 504-861-7610)

### Pecan Waffle *Waffle House*

Avondale Estates, Georgia  
Waffle Houses are interstate-off-ramp ubiquitous. But they somehow overcome their chain status. Pecan waffles help. Fresh from the iron, they deserve better than the sorry corn syrup Waffle House pours, which is why my son and I bootleg in little bottles of true cane or maple. (wafflehouse.com; 404-294-8758)

### Pink Velvet Salad *Crystal Grill*

Greenwood, Mississippi  
A jiggly mix of pineapple chunks, redder-than-red cherries, and pecans, bound by condensed milk and a bit of aspic, capped with Cool Whip, America's favorite nondairy topping. No wonder some call it nervous pudding. (662-453-6530)

### Strawberry Cake *Westside Bar-B-Que*

New Albany, Mississippi  
A pit, around back, belches smoke. But it's the layer cakes that matter. Red velvet is lurid. Caramel is glossy. But strawberry, pale pink and pocked with bits of berry, transcends. (westsidecakes.com; 662-534-7276)