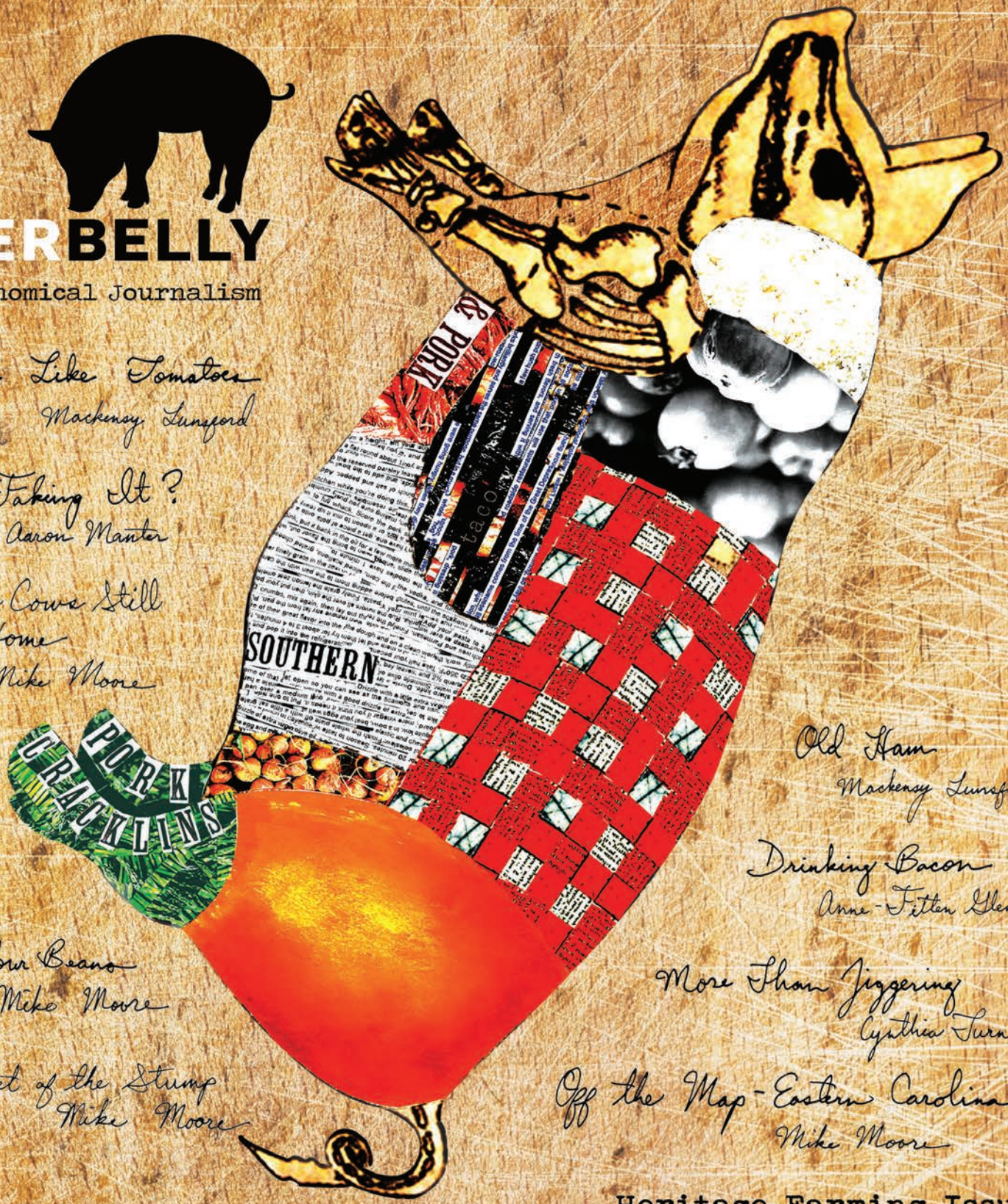
A QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF GASTRONOMICAL JOURNALISM

UNDERBELLY

Gastronomical Journalism



Heritage Farming Issue

Issue 1
Fall 2012
$14

CONTENTS

FEATURES

CONTENTS

FEATURES

UNDERBELLY
Gastronomical Journalism

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PRODUCED BY BLIND PIG OF ASHEVILLE

A LETTER FROM THE PIG

"He first met Claude Lantier in the Triperie, They had been going there very day, drawn by the taste of blood, the cruelty of street urchins amused by the sight of severed heads. A rust-colored stream ran around the pavilion. They dipped the tips of their shoes in it and made dams with leaves, which caused little bloody puddles. They were fascinated by the cartloads of offal, which stank even after thorough washings. They watched the unloading of bundles of sheep's feet, which were piled on the ground like dirty paving stones; huge stiff tongues still bleeding where they had been ripped from the throat; and beef hearts, like huge church bells, unmounted and silent."

-From The Belly Of Paris, 1873.
Triperie at Les Halles.

My days used to be quite different. 12 hour minimal night shifts began with strapping on a Safari Land bullet-proof vest and loading 11 steel jacketed hollow point rounds into a police issue Smith & Wesson. I've reflected quite a few times with lessons learned from my previous career and those of my current. You end up with a lot of war stories after years in public service- some funny, many sad, most of them scary and you reflect a lot on the things you learn about in life from having to deliver a solution with the problems of others on a day to day basis. It was a sacred job and one I'll always hold in respect but after six years on the force I had to let it go. The desire to create something and to travel had beckoned me. I found San Francisco. I needed a creative outlet, and to learn a craft; I found just that in the city by the bay.

Many times what is ironic is that the kitchen has been no different than the city streets I once patrolled and called my home- they both can be a battlefield. I've walked into kitchens where French chefs screamed bloody murder over the fact that the garde manger cooks served oysters with a speck of seaweed hanging from its shell. I've seen 17.5 hour work days. I've seen cooks work 3 weeks of lunch and dinner shifts straight with no end in sight. I've marveled over that solemn 14 minutes of peace and quiet that I had every morning on the barstool of a San Francisco coffee shop at before stepping across California Street into the kitchen doors at Aqua- and the next 12.5 hours of non-stop hell. I have stepped into situations on the line where I felt there would be no utter end. I have looked up to see tickets vomiting themselves out the printer when I have 18 already on the board just as the server grabs food from my window and takes it to the wrong table for the fifth time that night. Frustration. It is a test of stamina, patience, skill- all of the above.

As John Fleer recently told me: "There has been many nights where a chef has said, this night too will end just like the last." There is truth in that indeed. There is something mad about wanting to work in a kitchen as a line cook or chef; wanting to do it over and over again. You go to war everyday, you take fire, you're spit at, you're cussed at and you feel like you've just ran a marathon in the end. When it's all said and done and when every guest is happy during shifts end you find yourself sipping bourbon neat at the bar while writing out your misenplace for the next day. Tomorrow there are another 120 on the books from the start. Tomorrow everything has to be made once again and even better. What is it about the passion that keeps cooks and chefs driving? I'm sure everyone has an answer of their own. Surely, most definitely, without the shadow of a doubt, we're just a little bit insane for doing what we do- and we love it.

Braised HNG Beef Tongue, Kabocha Squash Puree, Pepitas, Buttermilk Foam, Crispy Sage.

This magazine is simply our tribute to every line cook out there that has every busted his or her ass and sat at the end of the night exhausted. This magazine is about food in which to be passionate about. We tell stories here. There are stories behind everything about food. It involves people, history, culture, science and art. We love food. Let's write about it. Thanks to all our friends and family that make this possible. Thank you Asheville. We can finally place pork belly, sweetbreads, fried chicken liver and goat on our menus- even on the same plate if we dare. You have arrived.

Welcome to Underbelly-Gastronomical Journalism.

Associate Editor & Founder of Underbelly
Mike Moore

THE SECRET OF THE STUMP

BLACKBEARD'S SECRET OYSTERS

WRITTEN BY MIKE MOORE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY AARON MORRELL

"As I ate the oysters with their strong taste of the sea and their faint metallic taste that the cold white wine washed away, leaving only the sea taste and the succulent texture, and as I drank their cold liquid from each shell and washed it down with the crisp taste of the wine, I lost the empty feeling and began to be happy and to make plans." - Ernest Hemingway

Every chef should know what makes a good oyster great- and even oysters know their terroir.

Oysters differ in size and flavor due to their habitat, the temperature of the water they live in and their variety. Virginia's Rappahanock River Oyster Company harvests deep in the heart of the Chesapeake Sound, which produces oysters that taste of ripe fruit and rhubarb. Rappahanock has harvested from ancient rivers and tributaries since the Civil War, and the company markets the oysters to high-end restaurants across the US with great success. Naked Roy's oysters, named after a funny character who harvested them from a particular point in Oregon's Samish Bay (while working on his full-body tan), have a clean, mild saltiness and with a beautifully white shell.

There is one oyster few gourmand experts or chefs know about in the "gourmet" market. It could very well be considered the poor country cousin to the Shigoku or Kusshi in terms of vague popularity, but it is relative in size and boasts a flavor that would rival the Japanese Chu Toro tuna belly. This oyster, small and dark brown to black in color is bright, fresh and clean with a tinge of sweetness like light honey and salt like a perfectly dirty martini. Its meat is plump and fresh and it bursts with flavor that pops like a firework. The Stump Sound oyster is harvested from a clean and protected basin of the New River, far east in North Carolina — and definitely in the middle of nowhere.

The "stump" in the name comes from ancient trees that stood tall during prehistoric times. In this area, the swamps are alive with numerous trees, a wide variety of animals, rare species of plants, birds and poisonous snakes. Geologists say an ancient sea once extended to the western border of this part of North Carolina to The Great Dismal Swamp Legend has it that an acid water can be found in the swamp — and the water is said to be healthy. It was reported that Blackbeard sailed near the Dismal and filled his barrels with the swamp's water to keep his men healthy.

Bordered by Topsail Island and the mainland of Onslow and Pender counties, Stump Sound is a shallow but productive estuary fed by numerous creeks. New River and Topsail inlets funnel in salty ocean water to the rich mix of nutrients that help drive the productive engine of the Sound and produce the absolute best oysters known to man. The poor cousin indeed, the Stump Bay oyster remains elusive to that part of the world, but everything special needs to be protected — and it's only a matter of time.

Since 2004, the NC Coastal Federation has developed and adopted programs with the state and federal government to protect this watershed. Ted Wilgis is the educational coordinator of the NC Coastal Federation and works to preserve and educate about the Stump Sound Estuary Restoration Act among the Topsail Island area of N.C.

More than 80 thousand bushels of oysters are deposited into Stump Sound and the New River in order to continue production. With nearby Morris Landing being a clean water preserve, grant funding has allowed for more than eight acres of oyster reefs, which act as a stockpile site for spent oyster shells. Why spent oyster shells? Oysters, around the world, reproduce through a large spawning event, April through September. During this time, larvae floats, sinks and has to attach to something hard where it will grow and develop into an oyster. Today, much of our oyster reefs and marine habitats are endangered for several reasons including pollution and mass development. If there are not enough shells under the water in these habitats after spawning, the oyster larvae will die. It's a complex problem, with a simple solution: preservation and restoration.

"I do not weep at the world I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife."
- Zora Neale Hurston

Look for further articles into Stump Sound, the Great Dismal Swamp and coastal NC in issue #2 Winter 2013.

Are We Faking It?

IS OUR FOOD BULLSHIT?

WRITTEN BY AARON MANTER

We need to do better, or just admit that The Emperor Has No Clothes.

If I go to 5 restaurants I'll probably eat 5 riffs on the same idea and flavors. Even among "good" restaurants.

To use the Mallrats analogy, we're just Tracers. Coloring in the things other people have done.

You can say that's how innovation happens, by taking things and slowly evolving them, but I disagree - and furthermore think it's a cop-out. What that says to me is "Let someone else do the heavy lifting and risk-taking. I'll catch up later. I'm tired".

We need to do a much better job of defining what flavor means to us personally. We can all make a nice satisfying risotto that scratches the fall itch. But it's just a risotto. What's your personality identified in a risotto? Mine was sassafras, crisp speck, a sous vide egg, olive oil, and alder wood smoked salt - root beer risotto as the line-joke goes. I mean, yeah, it's a little clever, but is it really art?

If cooking is about an artistic pursuit (which it should be at the level of "chef"), then chances are high that you're faking it. Just like me.

We get accolades and admirers telling us it's the best meal they've ever had. We smile and say thank-you-so-much-and-that's-so-nice-of-you-I'm-glad-y'all-came, but all I can ever think is, "I'm sorry - I should be doing better."

CRUTCHES

"It's fall, and fall tastes like braised meat with root vegetables." No it doesn't. It tastes like decay. Dead leaves, soil, loam, moss.

Braised meats are just comforting when it starts to get cold outside. That has nothing to do with fall but memory association from experience. When we talk about things tasting like abstract ideas (as-in "fall"), we're ultimately talking about synesthesia. What does "Green" taste like? I don't give a fuck about something like 'grass.' Don't be a pussy about it. To me it tastes like chlorophyll with some citrus - literally the stuff that makes plants green. That's me. How about you? Do you know what chlorophyll tastes like? Chef, if you're serious about this, then you should find out.

WHERE DO ALL OUR INGREDIENTS COME FROM?

MOSTLY THE SAME HANDFUL OF SUPPLIERS AND ARTISANS. NO WONDER IT'S ALL THE SAME.

Saying 'grass' to the question is amateur. Civilians would think you're a genius for putting wheatgrass in food and calling it "green". But you're not - and you know it.

Relying on the consensus of what tastes good together is culinary baggage. Someone else taught you that, and now you're just reiterating it.

"But I put xyz in it!" Fuck you dude, don't try to act like you're an original when you're serving roast chicken. Strike out on your own. Find what these flavors mean to you without the preconceptions that you learned from other people.

I never went to culinary school or staged at any restaurants. I don't even know how to make most classic food. It's thoroughly uninteresting to me. "Chef, can you make me a beurre rouge?" I cannot. I think it's butter and red wine vinegar? That's someone else's food. What does a classic French sauce have to do with me? NOTHING.

If I made one, it was by accident while thinking of what would taste good on this thing I was making.

THE REST OF US

So you're thinking, "Jesus man, calm down. I just want to cook." That's fine, but all you'll ever be is a shadow. Not everyone has to be the one on the edge, but if you're taking food seriously and trying to be creative, you'd better get with it and define what flavors mean To You. Fuck the customers. If you're in it for The Real Shit, it's about YOU. Not them. They pay the bills, and that's important, but they're coming to eat Your food, and you'd better be giving them something with your personality in it.

Furthermore, how about something you made? Where do all our ingredients come from? Mostly the same handful of suppliers and artisans. No wonder it's all the same. Try making something yourself. Cure a ham. Ferment some sauerkraut. Make yourself sick with some bad juju you've had in a container for a year. Miso came from someone having the sack to eat that thing that'd been out there all year.

ADRIFT AND UNMOORED

This isn't going to happen overnight for any of us, but I've decided I'm going to at least try harder. I've started making my own vinegars. I'm going to go out and drill pine trees for sap to combine with honey. I made toasted hay oil. Using non-culinary ingredients in food. Fucking tree bark and dirt. Burning leaves from the land around me. This leads into the French idea

of Terroir. Terra is the closest way to say it in English without sounding like a prick. Find what's around you. Make it yours. Experiment. PLEASE!

The more I create, the more I realize cooking is about subtraction and finding your real voice. Like someone realizing they can sing an amazing falsetto, but they're always afraid of being seen as a pussy, so they don't do it. They just do the things they've heard and are accepted.

MAYBE PUT A DIFFERENT SAUCE ON IT.

Come on chefs. There's so much out there to explore. Let's find things. Share information like giddy schoolgirls. "I found out you can eat acorns!" We should be emailing each other all the time with cool stuff. But we aren't and don't. Make friends. Help your fellows out. Go get drunk and talk about things with your line. Ask servers things about what they eat. Read books. Hurt yourself. Drive yourself off the cliff with self-doubt and creativity. Fuck Shit Up.

The Western Carolinas has the potential to be something amazing and we're watching the days go by.

We're fucking it up for everyone.
We're fucking it up for ourselves.
We're fucking up.

Another "Southern With a Twist!" place opened downtown. Serving the same $28 pork chop as every other restaurant in their zip-code. Welcome to commodified, pre-packaged, "new South" food. Same restaurant, different name.

Look you fucking jerks, "New" South ain't so new anymore. Now it's "Also-Ran South" and "Me-Too South". If you don't have something new to bring to the table then don't open a place and put a dish in front of me. And what balls you have! Charging The People $40 a cover for soul-food on fancy plates. I know I just don't feel like a meal is complete unless my over-priced wine rides in Riedel glassware. "House-made Blue cheese dressing." It sure as shit better be! Why would you feel the need to even bring that up unless you're trying to compensate for something?

I often hear the counterargument that there's room for both casual and fine dining. I reject this. First, it's only ever brought to the table by the owners of fine dining places trying to defend their costs and shitty attitudes about attire. If, as it should be, it's first about the food, and last about the environs, then serve me your food on less expensive plates and charge me

Caramelized 64 Degree Egg Yolk, Micro Greens Salad

a reasonable amount for it. We're doing a 4 course dinner here on the 31st for $25 - and we'll make money. Don't let these motherfuckers talk to you about labor and food cost. The labor is so high because they don't do anything themselves. How often are owners working the line at these joints? They're not. They're having cocktails with that woman from the paper telling them how great they are.

Look, every chef becomes a chef because they have a pathological need for praise. It's just like stand-up comics and actors. We need to be told we're good enough. Something in our brains isn't tuned up right. It's never all about "passion" (don't even get me started on that excuse for acting like an

asshole) from a psych standpoint. But when the media gets involved you're on another planet. They're paid to jerk you off. They didn't show up to talk bad about you. Treat them like every other customer. Let them pay like every other customer. You know who gets a little something extra at The Owl? Line cooks and servers. The walked-on and beaten-down amongst my profession. I'll give them a little shoulder rub and an It'll be alright with a free app. They deserve it sometimes.

People keep asking why our food is so cheap. Because we don't have any fat. You're not paying for salaries and houses of people that don't work in the restaurant. Why is their food

Aaron Manter with wife Justi

so expensive? Because it's inflated and bloated by location and surroundings.

It's class discrimination. Plain and simple. The people deserve well thought out, creative food just as much as the BMW Class. And while we don't mind dining at the same place as them, they sure as shit don't like someone in work boots near them while they dine on fish that's almost extinct.

So, yeah, Fuck Fine Dining.

AARON MANTER, Chef / Owner **The Owl** Greenville, SC
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CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT 1."Rising Sun" dinner, January 2012, chefs Drew Maykuth and Brian Canipelli. 2."Hemingway's Havana" dinner at Oddfellows Antiques, September 2012. 3. Pacific Sea Urchin, Chilli Salt at "Seven" dinner, July 2012. 4. Mackensy Lunsford, chef Suzy Phillips and Gabrielle Oviedo at "Women on Top" dinner, January 2012. 5. Chefs William Dissen and Anthony Lamas play with liquid nitrogen at "Seven".

Pee on Your Beans

Lily Duke Pridgen had a secret to her butter beans.

During the season, they were always on the dinner table. Near and far, folks wanted to sit at that table and taste those beans. In the South, you cooked your butter beans slow, with a fat knob of butter and a chicken neck bone, a knuckle of smoked hamhock or a piece of salt pork in the pot — nothing else. Simplicity.

Lily Duke Pridgen
Photo taken circa 1900.

There are two secrets to the perfect Dixie speckled butter bean: how long and slow you cook them is important (just until their natural starch is released). But how you grow them is, rightly so, a mostly guarded secret.

Lily Duke's husband would stand, hand tightly clutching the garden hoe, and shake his head when he noticed the evidence of his wife's every now and then squat in the garden row. If you stood just right along the row of pole beans, you'd see the paths of the streams trickling through the dry sand of the garden and into the next row. With a confident pride, she would make her way down the row, sometimes picking bad fruit or plucking stink bugs as she relieved herself of her morning coffee on the plants she felt needed it the most. Yes, the finest, juiciest and plentiful of legumes, those that ripened a bright speckled red in their green pods, were picked just as the sand gnats were abundant in the humid air of eastern Carolina. And they were grown with a deep, southern secret: fertile pee.

This story of true southern character and the love for growing exemplifies much of the cuisine of the American South to a 'T'. The imagery, history, the personalities and the stories behind the foods of the South are what separates it from much of the rest of American cuisine today.

If those farmers and folks, waiting in line at the kitchen door come supper time, had the faintest inkling of the real story behind Lily Duke's butter beans, they might not have wanted to eat them. But fruits, vegetables and livestock were more than just food back then, and more a way of life. Then, you took great pride in your tomatoes, your butter beans and your Christmas ham. You grew them from seed and saved more seeds for the following year. You knew when to plant, because you stocked your cupboard and larder, judging by the stages of the moon. You knew the right amount of salt and sugar and smoke to cure the best of swine.

You see, the thing about most southern cooks is that they know not only how to cook food well, but also how to grow it well. That tomato, those few rows of corn, those bushels of field peas or that pen of sows was most often all they had. Seven sows and one boar made for a farm that would always produce eight litters of piglets — that's an old southern fact. Customarily superstitious? Yes, we are very. That was life itself.

There were few other things as important as food, how you grew it and how you cooked it. Today in the American South, with its cooks, their tastes of the old world and their love for growing food, things haven't changed much.

We still pee on our beans every damn chance we get.

WRITTEN BY MIKE MOORE

Southern as Tomatoes

WRITTEN BY MACKENSY LUNSFORD

I'm a Yankee turned Southern food writer. That's how I tell it, usually.

I like it, the idea of the girl, raised on crab cakes, moving to the South to eventually make a living espousing the virtues of good fatback in a batch of beans.

I sit in a writer's unkempt office, coffee in a mason jar, spent garden patch outside of the window. The tomatoes are done growing for the season, though I'll start another generation from seed by February under a grow light. Fourteen years in Western North Carolina, and I only occasionally bemoan the lack of public transportation to whisk me to this or that of many closely-clustered metropolitan cities of the northern Atlantic, where there is more diversity in food and faces. I've got a hindquarter of a wild deer in my chest freezer. I'm learning to drive more slowly and patiently. And I know the names of my farmers.

I find myself renouncing my northern ways. But I can't pretend I'm a reformed Yankee any more than my mother could free herself from the desire to escape the South when she was younger.

MY FAMILY, TO ITS VERY ROOTS, IS AS SOUTHERN AS TOMATOES.

My grandfather Clarence grew tomatoes in Roanoke, Virginia, soil his whole life, just like his father and grandfather. Clarence's parents, Hugh and Hattie, were first cousins. The postcards they wrote to each other, when they were still courting long-distance (all of 20 miles back then), were filled with reports of the tomato harvest.

In a postcard sent through Troutville to Roanoke, dated September 2, 1909, Hattie wrote,

"Hugh I promised to let you know whether we was going to can Saturday night or not. I don't know what to tell you, we will have more tomatoes than we can work. But Mr. Atkins is talking about letting them stay over till Monday. You come down on No. 2 and come by home and if I am not there you will know where to find me. I hope he won't work us. I had rather be at home with you anyway. Hope this card will find you well. I am well but awful tired."

Hattie died giving birth to Clarence, her only child. Hugh sent the infant away to be raised by an Appalachian family with a house full of laughter, people and not much else. When Clarence was old enough to work the fields, Hugh reclaimed him. It was a prolific growing season in the South, and there were tomatoes to be picked.

My grandmother, Maryanne, was an orphan. Her once-kind father went crazy after serving in WWI, killed her mother, and disappeared into the Appalachians, so it goes. Clarence and Maryanne met as teenagers and married, and Clarence went to his own war shortly thereafter. Upon his return, to Maryanne's relief, he focused on building furniture, growing tomatoes, and reading and writing poetry, despite having only a fifth-grade education.

My mother grew up embarrassed by her drafty old house, torn down some time ago during the "revitalization" of downtown Roanoke, Virginia. But it was better than her mother's childhood house, which suffered from a dirt floor and an impenetrably dark cloud of Appalachian poverty.

My mother was more than happy to decamp north with my father when he left Roanoke. I grew up in Annapolis, Maryland, eating roasted duck, crab cakes and she-crab soup. We had plenty, but my mother never stopped putting hamhocks in the beans or ham in the biscuits, served with a side dish of sliced tomatoes, which I never touched. Even though we said we were northerners, we still lived 30 miles south of the Mason Dixon.

Mom and Dad tried to grow tomatoes in buckets on the roof of our century-old townhouse, but the roots burned on the heat of the tin. Since it didn't matter anymore whether they grew food or flowers, my parents laughed and planted hostas and impatiens on the shady perimeter of our brick courtyard instead.

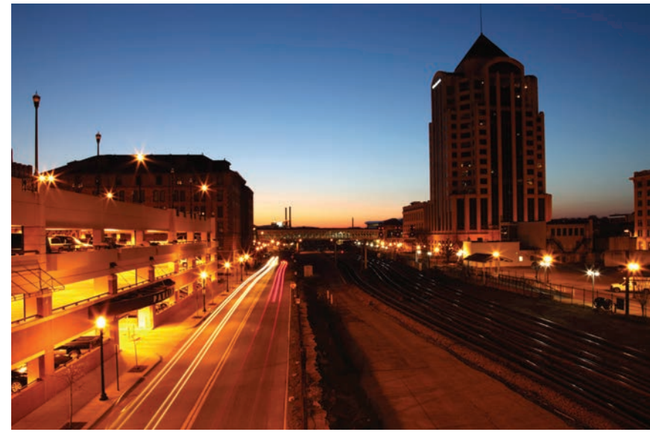
Roanoke became a twice-a-year whirlwind trip. It meant ham and deviled eggs, potato salad and buttercream sweets my family called jets. My mother, who still saw the dark cloud of poverty hovering over Roanoke, was always happy to escape, and I grew up believing the South wasn't terribly interesting or important.

When I was 20, I moved to Asheville, North Carolina, where there are Lunsfords everywhere. I planted tomatoes, even though I didn't like them. Through necessity, I learned to love what I grew. I also learned to love the South and its slow way of doing things, though I still drive like a Yankee.

My parents live in Roanoke again. They live on the same street as the mayor, and no longer associate the South with darkness. They go to the farmers markets and tend to their garden. They bring home-grown tomatoes to my grandmother Maryanne because, after 70 years of marriage to Clarence, who died in December, she's alone again — and she doesn't like the tomatoes at the grocery store.

Roanoke is called a "city on the rise" on the cover of the October 2012 Garden & Gun. An inside spread shows a hipster with a banjo, another in a coffee shop and a member of the new school of young, hip farmers. As a food writer, I plan stories like these every day: the hip agriculture student-turned-farmer selling heirloom tomatoes at the Asheville City Market, what the upstart chef is making with them. When the weather warms again, I will write of the incomparable flavor of a garden tomato for the thousandth time and I will know that it's trite, but that it's true.

And even though they don't grow well in my yard, I'll plant them again next year, and think of my grandfather, for whom tomatoes were not the news or remotely hip, but what tied him to his blood. And how the stories of the older farmers are disappearing like the ink on Hattie's postcards and family food traditions. And how food writing is both a documentary of the ephemeral and a preservation of those traditions.



Evening view of Roanoke, Virginia

I'm alive because of tomatoes. And I think that, as the South has risen, food writing has come home again.

OFF*the*MAP

Eastern, North Carolina

How a distinct food culture of Eastern North Carolina was born and died (and is rising again).

Eastern North Carolina is steeped in food history. As the English colonies of the new world were expanding, settlers of eastern North Carolina travelled by wagon or mule beyond the borders of tidewater Virginia and Charleston and into the eastern swamplands. With this emigration came the food of their culture, which would soon be transformed by the hunting, planting and gathering techniques of the Native Americans and the cooking techniques of Africa.

King Charles granted land ownership to those brave enough to try to homestead these untamed and hardscrabble areas. The earliest inhabitants were Native American people of the Tuscarora tribe, but by the early 18th century, most of the tribe had been displaced by the emmigration of European settlers. The remnants of the tribe migrated north to merge with other members of the Iroquois Confederacy, but some of their hunting and gathering traditions stayed behind.

Europeans brought African slaves into the area, adding African food staples — yams, peanuts and collards — to the mix, creating a very distinct food culture.

Subsistence farming and husbandry was learned through trial and tribulation. The region's hot and humid summers, cold and wet winters, the sandy clay-based soil and the prevalent swamplands were fairly non-conducive to farming. Still, through much effort, homesteaders produced their own crops and livestock to feed their families and, over the winter, communities shared the preserved harvest and cured and smoked meats. Mass agriculture was virtually non-existent.

But more settlers came to the area as the Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad lay tracks through Wilson, Nash and Edgecombe counties. The eastern Carolina pine unexpectedly proved to be a cash crop, and the extraction of turpentine became an industrial gold-mine. The tar, pitch and turpentine culled from the vast pine forests is said to be the origin of North Carolina's nickname as the Tar Heel state.

It was the stripping of pine from the swamps and improved drainage by the US Army Corps of Engineers that helped to tame the floodwaters and rivers into tributaries and creeks, drying out much of the swampland and changing the face of agriculture in the region.

But industrialization brought a slow change to the way of life in eastern North Carolina, with the introduction of cash crops came the decline of sharecropping and home-grown goods. The demand for flue-cured tobacco would further the trend.

The hot summers and sandy, loamy soil, once a detriment to farming, was a boon for growing tobacco. By the 1900's, tobacco had become the area's main cash crop and tobacco made families wealthier — to a degree.

Meanwhile, pesticides and fertilizers were altering the composition of the fertile fields. Mercantile and grocery stores were replacing home gardens and subsistence farms and with them the pigpens and preserves. In time, fast food restaurants rose to popularity and the family dinner table was replaced with television.

Though this change happened all across America, the effects were more dramatically felt in the areas where, not 20 years earlier, heirloom corn grew in rows and tomatoes hung from the vine behind nearly every home in the summer. But a mass movement to revive the true cuisine of the region (as well as organic growing methods) is well underway.

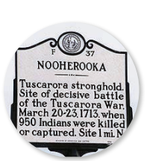
Chefs and restaurants across eastern North Carolina (and the rest of the state) offer farm-to-table fare, turning the clock back on the food culture of the South and its indigenous ingredients. Family farms are once again raising meat. The African American culture is thriving, and soul food restaurants pay homage to the food that the region and its inhabitants molded.

The Old Johnston Farmstead - Smithfield, North Carolina

Ashley Christensen of Poole's Diner in Raleigh, for example, celebrates the region's heritage through her food, a mix of farm to table and seasonal menu philosophy and with a flair for spotlighting the local culture, but also through volunteer work and support of organizations like the Southern Foodways Alliance. Soul food kitchens like Mama Dips of Durham, NC lead by the iconic and glorious Mildred Council and The Whole Truth Restaurant and Grocery in Wilson, NC with a cooking brigade of frying pan expert grandmas and church volunteers, focus on Southern mainstays like neck bones and collards greens; braised pigtails with hen-pecked mustard salad; hushpuppies and pimento cheese; blueberry biscuits; and old-fashioned chess pie.

These chefs have helped pave the way to a renaissance of Southern culture by paying homage to its history on their menus. They know that, to truly understand the foods of the South, knowledge of its history and culture is as important as the salt and pepper seasoning any great dish.

WRITTEN BY MIKE MOORE



1716
The remnants of the Tuscarora tribe migrated north to merge with other members of the Iroquoian Confederacy after their defeat in the Tuscarora War of 1716.

1740
European and African slaves moved into the area around 1740.

1839
The Wilmington and Raleigh Railroad completed the laying of tracks through the area.

1840
The beginning of mass agriculture in Eastern North Carolina.

1860-1880
Cotton was the primary cash crop in Eastern North Carolina.

1920
Parts of Eastern North Carolina came to be known as the **"World's Greatest Tobacco Market."**

1750-PRESENT
Retrospect. Recognition of the importance of qualities of yesteryear prior to the mass industrializations and moves to pay homage to the food and culture that was present before then.

Drinking Bacon

A PORK-TASTIC CRAFT BEER CONCOCTION

WRITTEN BY ANNE-FITTEN GLENN

Pisgah Brewing Company and Blind Pig have collaborated to create a limited-edition craft beer — one that's chock full of locally sourced ingredients and one of the most beloved of foodstuffs, bacon.

And it's not just any bacon; it's Allan Benton's world-famous hickory-smoked pork belly, cured in Madisonville, Tennessee, with the simplest of ingredients: salt, brown sugar and pepper. One hundred pounds of the marbled swine will be infused into nine barrels of dark, hearty stout. The aptly named Benton's Bacon Snout was released on Sunday, Nov. 11, at Blind Pig's Preserve dinner, a celebration of southern-Appalachian cuisine.

Pisgah Brewing's Benton Wharton and Native Kitchen & Social Pub chef Chris Saffles chop slabs of Benton's Bacon to cook down for the brew.

Pisgah Brewing brewer Ryan Frank fries up Benton's Hickory Smoked Bacon. One hundred pounds of the world-famous bacon was steeped in a special Pisgah stout to create the aptly named Benton's Bacon Snout.

To create the liquid nectar, the team also procured sorghum molasses from Asheville's Coates Farm and Produce, as well as artisan malt from Asheville's Riverbend Malthouse.

Brewmaster Garrett Oliver of Brooklyn Brewery first used Benton's to make a bacon beer back in 2009. At that point, no one had experimented with marrying the two commercially, and Oliver was widely quoted as saying, "Either this will be the most amazingly disgusting thing you've ever tasted in your life … or I shall rule the earth." We're pretty sure the latter came true.

Jason Caughman and Jeremy Austin of Pisgah got a chance to pick Oliver's world-changing brain at the recent Great American Beer Festival in Denver.

"Talking to Garrett about the brew process was really helpful," Austin says. "We're so excited to be doing this beer and doing it with so many great local businesses."

While this is the third year that Pisgah has brewed a bacon stout, the recipe has differed each time. In the first version, the team used a maple-cured bacon. The maple flavor came through, but it overwhelmed the bacon, according to brewer Ryan Frank.

In the second year, brewers learned to add the rendered fat to the beer to produce more bacony goodness. The problem with that, of course, is that greasy beer isn't particularly appetizing. Also, any kind of fat or oil can kill the foamy head on a brew.

"You could almost see the grease in the glass," Frank says. "But there was a noticeable difference in the flavor. You could taste the bacon."

This year, the brewers reheated the fat rendered from frying the bacon, then put it into the conditioning tank before adding the stout. Previously, they had introduced the fat after the beer was in the tank, which immediately coagulated and sank to the bottom. After that, they let the strainer bags full of cooked bacon steep in the brew for at least two weeks.

Yes, we're talking bacon tea bags.

The brewing team tasted the beer every day while it was on the bacon. Deciding when the beer has reached the ideal bacon-infused balance is an art and a group effort. They then kegged it off, watching the lines carefully to make sure no fat solids traveled into the final product.

In addition to the Snout's release at the Preserve event, the brew will be available on draught at a few restaurants around town and at Pisgah's Black Mountain-based taproom. It's not likely to be around for long, however.

Back in the day, settlers in Western North Carolina had to use whatever was at hand to make beer — ingredients such as locust pods, persimmon and even seeds often made their way into the brew kettle. Today, we're lucky enough to have some of the most legendary bacon in the world in our local brew.

(To learn more about Allan Benton and his meats, see Mackensy Lunsford's story on page 21).

Freelance writer and beer educator Anne Fitten Glenn, aka Brewgasm, recently wrote a book titled, "Asheville Beer: an Intoxicating History of Mountain Brewing. She has the best job in the world.

CRACKLINS

Cracklins are the skin with the layer of fat beneath the skin of the hog. They are deeply woven in Southern culture, especially among African American and Mexican immigrants. In Puerto Rico, Mexico, and the Philippines, they're Chicharrons con Gasa. In New Orleans, they're called Grattons.

ACTIVE TIME: 10 min.
TOTAL TIME: 3 hr. 15 min.

Ingredients: Pork skins with fat attached and, if possible, a layer of meat at the bottom.
Order raw shoulder or raw ham (skin on) from your butcher. Cut the skin and fat layer off the meat leaving ¼".

Do This:
Combine spices
4 Tbsp Garlic Powder
4 Tbsp Onion Powder
Generous pinch of Kosher Salt
Generous pinch of Black Pepper
2 Tsp Juniper Berry Powder
2 Tsp Chipotle Powder

1. Wipe the skin clean. The skins are hard to cut, even with a sharp knife. Place the skins in the freezer for 30 to 45 minutes and they will stiffen and be easier to cut.
2. With a sharp knife, cut the skins into strips about 1" wide.
3. In a large pot, cover the skins with water and boil for about 30 minutes with the lid on. Discard the water and rendered fat. This step renders a lot of fat and breaks down the fibers that make the skin impenetrably hard.
4. Place the strips fat side down in a smoker or grill and smoke over indirect heat at about 225°F for an hour. Then crank the heat to 400°F to render more fat for 45 minutes or more until they are golden but not dark brown. If you have charcoal grill, move them over direct heat and put a pan with water between the cracklins and the flames.
5. While they are still warm, transfer to a bowl and sprinkle liberally with the spice mix. Let them cool for about 15 minutes and cut them into squares.

Old Ham

Allan Benton becomes an overnight sensation, 39 years later

WRITTEN BY MACKENSY LUNSFORD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CINDY KUNST

Chefs are a pork-centric lot. And the temple of pig before which many of them kneel is an unassuming smokehouse in Madisonville, Tennessee, owned and operated by Allan Benton.

Since 1973, Benton has made what some consider to be the best bacon and country ham in the world. He's been featured in various magazines of note, Gourmet and Esquire among them, and was prominently featured in the center of David Chang's meaty 2009 Momofuku cookbook. Chang, along with chefs like former Blackberry Farms chef John Fleer and Louisiana chef John Besh, is a devotee.

So it's hard to reconcile the image of the god of cured pork with the real Benton, a self-described hillbilly, humble as the cinder block, not-quite-30,000 square-foot warehouse where Benton's bacon and country hams are made.


The salting process of pork belly

There, piles of hams and bellies are cured, hung and cured again, aged, smoked, packed and shipped off to various cities, near and far-flung. Brown paper packages await the Fed-Ex truck, names of famous restaurants scrawled on the bags in magic marker. Every last surface, including the T-shirts that Benton sends to chefs who ask, is deeply infused with the scent of smokehouse. It takes several showers to work the campfire smell out after a visit.

To hear Benton tell it, it's a palace. Unlike the previous location, which Benton claims could fit inside his current sales room, it has an indoor, flushing toilet. "To say it was humble is an understatement," Benton says. "When I moved over here, I thought this was the Taj Majal."

Still, Benton wants to expand again, which greatly unnerves his accountant. That's because, even if Benton gets a bigger warehouse, he doesn't intend to sell any more hams — just age them longer.

"My accountant said, 'You're selling all of your hams now, right? I don't get it.'" Benton recounts in a slow and buttery Southern drawl. "And I said, 'I'm planning on doing this a while longer. And quality is everything.'"

BRINGING HOME THE BACON

Benton's history could have been written in a very different way, had he proceeded with his plan to be a teacher. Instead, he veered sharply from education — and a teacher's salary — in 1973. It was that year that a man named Albert Hicks, a Tennessee backwoods dairy farmer who had smoked hams in a little wooden shack behind his house since 1947, decided to give up his business. Benton, who grew up on a Virginia farm eating the hogs his family raised, saw an opportunity.

"I asked him if he'd lease me that little building in his back yard and let me start making ham and bacon, and he agreed to," Benton says. "The first thing I did was to start learning more about

I think the chefs have figured out that the good old boys can make something just as good as our European cousins can."
- Allan Benton

Slabs of cured Pork Belly ready for smoke
Benton's Smoky Mountain Country Hams

what I was going to do. We'd done it on the farm, and I knew how to do it, but I wanted to learn more, and I wrote to every university everywhere, trying to study everything I could about what I was going to do. When I got into it, my determination was to make something as good as anyone was making."

To that end, Benton unearthed his grandparents' recipe for country ham, which they made in a smokehouse behind the home where he was born. Benton carefully — and slowly — replicated what he learned, barely eking out a living with his long-cure methods.

It was a far cry from the way that Hicks had run the business. As country hams go, Hicks was a turn and burn man, curing as quick as he could to push the product out the door. But Benton never wavered in his determination to be old-fashioned.

"When most of the country ham industry here, when they were trying to make it faster, we were sticking with that old traditional way," Benton says. "And it's a miracle that I didn't starve out of business."

Hicks still gets his due as the father of Benton's business, even if he found his successor's methods unsound. "A famous person one said — I forgot who it was, but I never forgot the quote —if he could see farther, it's because he stood on the shoulders of giants," Benton says. "Well, if I could have any success, it's because of that man who started it in his back yard gave me the springboard for this business."

OLD HOG

For years, Benton's slow-cure techniques drew further naysaying, particularly from those who eyed the bottom line.

"I was selling my stuff to what people stopped on the highway and a few local hillbillies," he says. "Greasy-spoon restaurants in Gatlinburg and Pigeon Forge. There, it's not exactly fine dining. Whatever they can buy the cheapest and serve to the tourists is kind of what they're after. I was trying to compete, selling 15-month-old hams for the same price they were buying 80 or 90-day-old hams for, and I was starving to death."

Benton's business had a slim chance of survival in that climate. "But, by the same token," he says, gesturing to his worn boots and jeans, "you can tell by looking at me I've got cornbread tastes. I don't exactly shop on Fifth Avenue and L. L. Bean supplies most everything I wear. I didn't have a fabulous lifestyle, so I didn't require a lot."

But change was coming — it just took nearly 30 years to get there. By Benton's account, the slow ascent to profitability started when Blackberry Farm's Fleer introduced Benton's country ham to the guardians of tradition at the Southern Foodways Alliance.

Benton brought 40 pounds of his aged ham to Oxford, Mississippi, despite the protests of his employees, who weren't into the stuff. "I was taking some slices of my 18 to 20-month aged stuff down there, and they said, 'What are you doing? You're not taking those old hams

down there.'" His response? "That's what I think ham ought to be, and if they don't like it, they don't have to eat it."

But the ham, meltingly rich with fat and thinly sliced like prosciutto, was a hit. When Benton returned to the smokehouse on Monday, he announced that production on those old hams would increase by 500 percent, effective immediately.

"They looked at me and said, 'You're going to put us out of business.' I said, 'Well, fellas, I think I've seen the promised land and I think there's a market with chefs for what we do."

That "hillbilly food" could inspire devotion in chefs in fancy Yankee restaurants is a rare but beautiful bit of irony, and one that's not lost for a second on Benton.

"I swear to you, I owe a debt of gratitude to every chef who uses my products because I think I make something that's (just) decent," Benton says. "It's what they do with it that turns it into something incredible. I think the chefs have figured out that the good old boys can make something just as good as our European cousins can."

"But you know, a fellow ought to know what he's doing after 39 years."

From Left to Right: chef John Fleer, Mackensy Lunsford, chef William Dissen and Allan Benton

PORK VINDALOO

chai pani
indian street food

RECIPE COURTESY OF CHEF MEHERWAN IRANI OF CHAI PANI

This is a traditional Goan recipe (south India). Goa was colonized by the Portuguese in the 1600s and they brought with them new ingredients to south India – Pork, Chillies, Vinegar, Garlic. The original Vindaloo was a way to preserve pork – lots of garlic, oil, vinegar and chillies. The Indians acquired a taste for the pork "pickle" and turned it into more of a curry. The "Vin" stands for vinegar and the "aloo" is Alho (garlic) – so Vin d'alho. The Aloo part is frequently mistaken for potato (since that's the Indian word for it) so it's now common for Vindaloo to be made with potatoes.

ACTIVE TIME: 45 min.
TOTAL TIME: 1 hr. 45 min.

For the Marinade:

2 lb lean pork shoulder or loin cut into bite size chunks
1 Tsp Garam Masala (buy in store or make at home
- equal parts Black Peppercorn, Cloves, Cinnamon Sticks, Green Cardamom toasted and ground in a coffee grinder)
2 Tsp Red Chilli powder
1 Tsp Turmeric
1 Tsp Salt
2 Tbsp Ginger Garlic paste
(equal parts fresh Garlic & peeled Ginger pureed in a blender or food processor. Add a touch of oil in the blender so it purees smoothly)

For Cooking:

1 Cup Vegetable Oil (Canola is fine but if you can find coconut oil, that adds an extra dimension of flavor)
1 Tbsp Cumin seeds
Whole Red Chillies
1 Tbsp Ginger Garlic Paste
2 Cups diced White Onion
2 Tsp salt
1 small can crushed Tomatoes
1 Cup Rice Wine Vinegar (if only plain vinegar available, use a tablespoon of Sugar to sweeten the dish)

1. Cube the pork into bite size chunks. Mix the marinade ingredients together into a paste and rub well over the meat. Let it sit refrigerated for at least 1 hour.
2. Heat the oil in a large sauce pan or wok. When the oil is hot (about 350°F) add the pork and stir fry till its browned. (Don't crowd the pot with the meat or it'll drop the oil temp and won't sear. If the pot is not big enough, sear the meat in small batches. Brown the pork, not cooking it all the way through).
3. With a slotted spoon, remove the pork and set aside.
4. Drop the whole chillies and cumin seeds into the hot oil and brown for 30-45 seconds. Immediately add the ginger garlic paste and brown it lightly. (Don't wait to long or the cumin could burn.)
5. Add the diced onions and salt and fry till they're well browned. If you like it hot, at this point, add an extra tsp or two of red chilli powder to taste. Add the vinegar to deglaze. Let the vinegar cook off for a minute or two and then add the can of crushed tomatoes.
6. Saute till the tomatoes are glossy and the oil starts to separate.
7. Add the pork (and any collected juices) back to the pot and cook on medium till pork is cooked through. Salt to taste. Garnish with fresh cilantro. Serve with rice or potatoes.

More than Jiggering

WRITTEN BY CYNTHIA TURNER
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CINDY KUNST

IT'S INFECTIOUS, THIS INDUSTRY.

I fell deeply in love nearly three years ago, and the romance hasn't subsided a bit.

I was bartending for a decade before the true breadth of the cocktail world became apparent to me — there was a certain awareness that manifested when I stepped into such a vast scene. That the history had enough depth that it was possible to never cease learning, along with the personalities and the sense of community, is what offered the ultimate appeal.

The city was New Orleans, a parent city of our beloved cocktail. Home to one of the countries oldest bars, legendary Privateers and Voodoo priestesses, the French Quarter's illustrious — and notorious — reputation is well-deserved. There, history runs deep, passion thick, with a style unparalleled by any other city in the world. With settlers like Antoine Peychaud and his infamous Royal Street Pharmacy, where the iconic bitters were created, New Orleans was primed with liquid inspiration.

I was in a cocktail wonderland and, despite my experience behind a bar, was still wet behind the ears in a way. No longer was I just pouring drinks I knew to be "classics," I was pouring beverages I knew to be from a certain era. Vieux Carrés, Ramos gin fizzes and Sazeracs were the order of the day.

I learned quickly that simply knowing the recipe was not enough — literally breathing the history of the Big Easy cocktail scene was necessary to even tread water in that town. For the first time, my patrons were more educated than I was, and in that moment, I became hooked.

My teacher in this new world was brilliant, with the palate of a saucier, a master's technique, and an awe-inspiring global knowledge with a respect for tradition. He had unique ways of introducing me to today's hottest players. We would have frequent Lafranconi moments, where "we weren't just drinking, we were learning."

He would allude to the folks he respected and those who we, as an industry, should follow for their brilliance. As months passed, I felt part of something bigger than me, than bartending as I'd previously known it.

Tales of the Cocktail, an epic gathering of bar personalities and enthusiasts from across the globe, further drove the idea of community home. I met and shared stories with industry

CYNTHIA TURNER Blind Pig's very own craft mixologist creating some prohibition era cocktails for the "Women on Top" dinner February 2011.

giants who served as mentors to all the little guys with flawless and humble grace. They had the ability to inspire without even trying. Even in their position at the top, their own quest to learn never ceased.

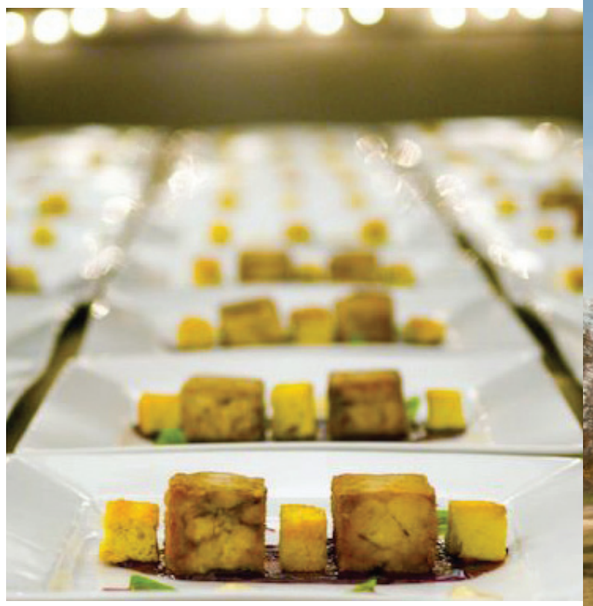
In that first year, the stage was set; I thought I had stumbled upon the cocktail industry's secret door. Before those moments, bartending was a way to get me through college. Now, it's a way of life.

This is the only fever I've ever been happy to catch.

COCKTAIL À LA LOUISIANE

1.75 oz. Rye .75oz. sweet vermouth
.5oz. Bénédictine
1 bar spoon Herbsaint Legandre
1 dash Angostura
1 dash Peychaud's
Stir ingredients, strain into a chilled coupe and garnish with brandied cherries.

You can try some of Cynthia's Craft Cocktails at **Table Restaurant**
48 College Street, Asheville, NC 28801 (828) 254-8980



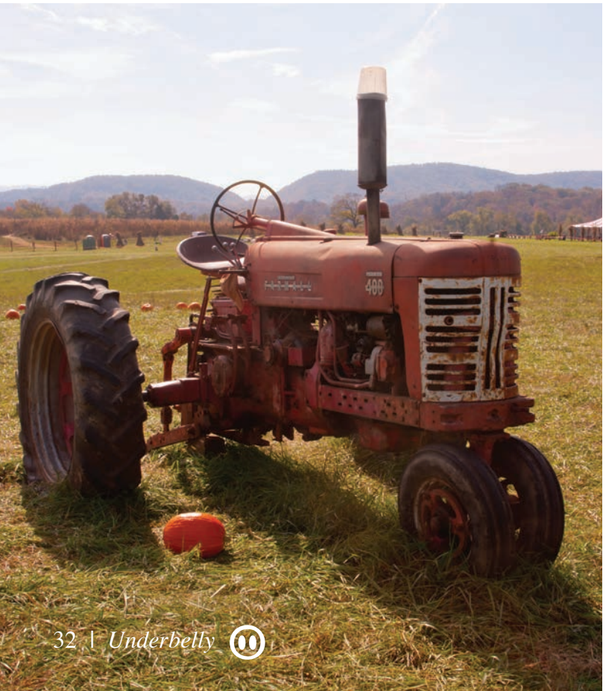
CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT TO RIGHT 1. Passing Bulls Penis on a Ritz Cracker at "An Offal Experience" Dinner, November 2011. 2. Staff wearing face paint for "Dia De Los Muertos" dinner, October 2012. 3. "Escoffier Dinner for the King" at Homewood, March 2012. 4. City Bakery's Blind Pig Loafs, specially made for the "Yellow Submarine" dinner, hosted at City Bakery, October 2012. 5. Pitmaster Ed Mitchell creating his famous East Carolina barbecue for "Q" dinner, May 2012.

Where the Cows Still Come Home

WRITTEN BY MIKE MOORE
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CINDY KUNST

"There is a milk made over in the valley, skin as smooth as silk, you outta see her jiggle her jugs and churn her buttermilk." - Southern Buttermilk Hymn

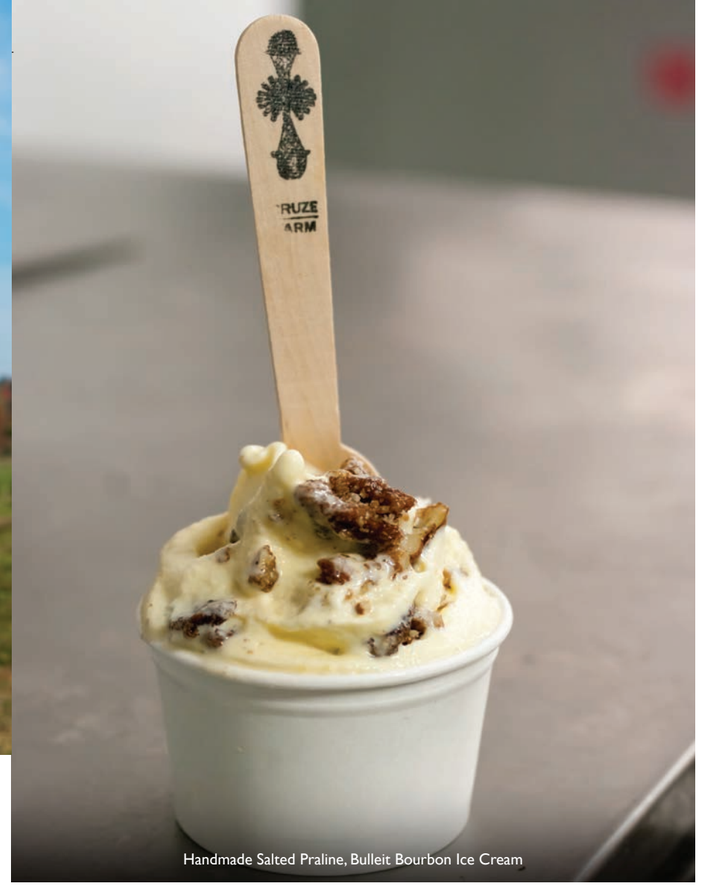
Nestled deep in the heart of East Knox County, beyond the historic Tuckahoe trading post, are the soft, green hills of Strawberry Plains, Tennessee. It's a part of the world that hasn't changed much since the days of earlier Appalachia. There's a feeling one gets driving down the old country lanes; things just seem right here. The countryside is inhabited by simple folk who greet you with a wave and a smile. Cruze Dairy Farm sits high upon a branch of the French Broad River along old Kodak Road and has been a generational farming operation for centuries, creating dairy products like no other.



Mr. Earl Cruze, 69, has been waking at 4 a.m. to milk cows his entire life, but it's never seemed like work. Earl purchased the property where Cruze Dairy sits some 10 years ago. He's since adopted a conservancy trust with the state and federal government that protects the land from further development. Earl moved the operation here with a focus on preserving a product that's long been dear to the people of the American South. "If you really want to know the truth about buttermilk, it could actually put Viagra out of business," he says with a smile.

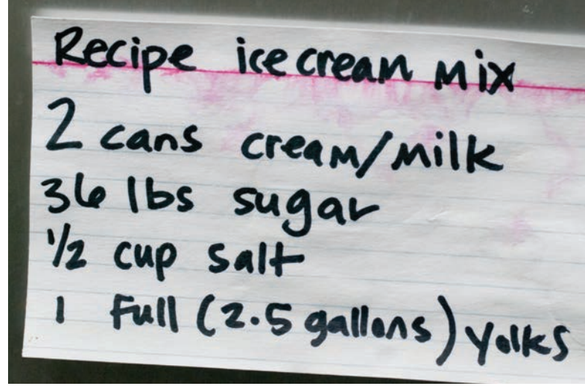
Aged by wisdom and time, Earl is a generational family farmer. With a big smile, broad back and strong hands, Earl is kind with family and strangers alike and walks the earth with the well-being of others always in mind. Earl has made buttermilk for nearly 70 years. He's a strong believer in making sure his product is made with care. "You make buttermilk the same way you raise a family," he says. "You care about it one hundred percent."

Earl's daughter, Colleen Cruze, has been around buttermilk her entire life. As a young girl, her family would take her to the farm stand at the Market Square Farmers Market in Knoxville, where she would take trays loaded with cups of Cruze ice cream into the crowds (eating half the ice cream herself with her



Handmade Salted Praline, Bulleit Bourbon Ice Cream

Feeding time for Jersey Calfs



fingers while chatting with everyone). Her mother quickly pulled her from her duties and made rules about her fingers all over the food, but it was already apparent that Colleen loved dairy as much as she loved people, and she was especially enamored with people from a different culture.

Colleen attended the University of Tennessee, earning a degree in Agricultural Science and continues to work with her father on the farm in all facets of the dairy operation and serves as the ambassador of their brand. Her love for other cultures inspired her to travel to Japan after hurricanes and tsunamis devastated the coast. Struck by the need to help, she developed an idea to bring Japanese farm workers to her side of the world in rural Tennessee, immersing them in the American culture of the dairy business through the Japanese Agricultural Program. "I have developed such strong and lasting friendships with these folks," Colleen says. "It's such a great learning process for both of our cultures."

It's an inspirational sight to see Colleen and several other strong Japanese women, wearing their 1950's milk-maid uniforms, carry heavy crates of buttermilk and butter from the trucks to the farm stands after they've produced it. It's a slice of Americana — and it's also brilliant branding and marketing.

Today, Cruze Dairy Farm produces more than 4,000 gallons of dairy products a week. Colleen has taken the ice cream branch of the business to a whole new level, with new flavors of ice cream and other hand-made goods. At a recent visit to the farm, we tasted the hand-chipped chocolate destined for the ice cream. The salty-sweet pralines were handmade with top shelf Bulleit bourbon and incorporated into some of the best ice cream we've ever tasted.

What you taste in that sweet-sour, golden-hued buttermilk with its thick, creamy cap or that nutty and rich pistachio ice cream is the taste of the Cruze family craft of dairy farming, the right breed of cattle and the right geography — perfection.

The sweeping hills among Strawberry Plains and the Riverdale Community of East Knox County are perfectly lush and green, fed by clean water from creeks and rivers and plentiful rainfall. Colleen says that often the grass is so sweet that in the lush spring or summer that her customers comment on the flavor of the buttermilk changing with the seasons. The Cruze's healthy Jersey cows enjoy a life similar to that of Waygu. The Jersey, one of the oldest dairy breeds, has been purebred for nearly six centuries. They originated on the Island of Jersey, a small British island in the English Channel off the coast of France, and have been prized throughout the history of the breed for their milk and butterfat production.

Lore in many cultures is that buttermilk imparts good health to those who drink it. Those who scoff at the thought of it have become accustomed to a mass-produced and ultra pasteurized product, which can be sour and astringent, with little to no salt or sweetness. Commercial buttermilk is generally made from low-quality skimmed milk with flecks of by product butter to give it the same appearance. It's often thickened with carrageenan or guar gum to mimic the consistency of real buttermilk. True buttermilk should be creamy, frothy and both sweet and sour. It has a thickness and body to it that's reminiscent of yogurt. Buttermilk contains healthy lactobacilli — the same family of bacteria you'll find in yogurt, sour cream and crème fraîche.

Try the real deal, and you'll be hooked. It's like Earl says: "If you've tried buttermilk and you didn't like it, you might oughta try it again."

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