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MARCH/APRIL 2017



## *Smokin' Hot* **BARBECUE**

**FIRE & REIGN**  
*On the Competition Circuit  
with The Shed*

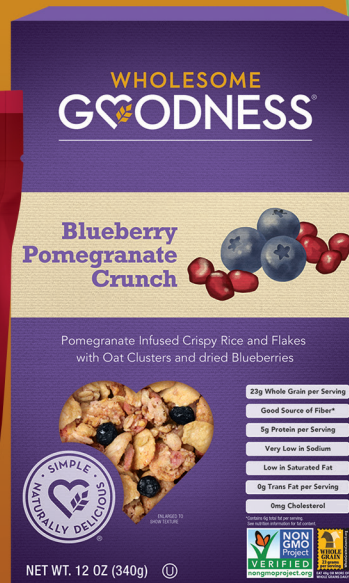
**The TEXAS  
CRUTCH**  
by PABLEAUX JOHNSON

**SAUCE & THE CITY**  
**BARBECUE SHRIMP**  
*Classic New Orleans Recipes*



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Donny Rouse

## An Old-Fashioned Butcher Shop

We're proud to continue the Gulf Coast tradition of family-owned butcher shops.

Our own Rouses history goes back to 1960. My grandfather, our founder, had a small butcher shop in the back of his first store. Every steak was cut by hand — our butchers still do it that way, today — and sausages and Cajun specialties were made by hand right in the store. Pa used pork butts from the butcher shop to make our sausage. It's still made with premium pork butts and my grandfather's blend of garlic, onions, cayenne pepper, salt and spices.

Butchering is an art form learned over years of practice and apprenticeship. Our butchers are the best and most experienced in the business. They're also some of the best outdoor cooks I know. Whether you're cooking or grilling, they'll help you make the right selection or share a recipe or cooking instructions.

Years ago we made a family commitment to only sell 100 percent American beef, pork and poultry. We've always sold only fresh ground meat. Some of our competitors sell ground beef that comes in pre-packaged, gas-flushed bags. Our butchers grind all of our beef fresh several times daily in store — there's no gas flush. We also sell grass-fed ground beef, chicken, turkey, pork and buffalo. All of our grinds are 100 percent USDA verified.

We tend to think pork and beef when we talk barbecue, but chicken is a staple. We introduced our own line of Rouses vegetarian-fed chicken a few years ago. Our butchers can butterfly a whole one for you so that it can be flattened and cooked skin side up, which will significantly reduce your cooking time.

Everyone has a favorite smoker, and we can spend a lifetime arguing the merits of the Big Green Egg versus the Traeger Pellet Grill versus a Weber Smokey Joe. Let's just make sure we do it over a big plate of barbecue.

*Donny Rouse*, CEO  
3<sup>rd</sup> Generation

## ➤ On the Cover

*Rouses whole beef brisket smoked by our friends at Central City Barbecue. Served with Rouses brand vidalia onion barbecue sauce.*

*photo by Romney Caruso*

• • •

## WHAT I'M COOKING

Pulled pork on my Big Green Egg. I use a Boston Butt pork roast and Nalty's Butt and & Breast Rub. Cook at 220 degrees for 16 hours. When pork is done, remove it from the Egg and wrap in aluminum foil. Let rest for one hour before slicing.

## RIGHT ON 'CUE

**Big Mike's BBQ, Houma, LA**

*See story page 24.*

**Blue Oak BBQ & Frey Smoked Meat Co., New Orleans, LA**

*These are two new spots by our market in Mid City.*

**Central City BBQ, New Orleans, LA**

*See story page 14.*

**Hannah Q Smoke House, Prairieville, LA**

*Smoked brisket, sweet glazed pork loin, ribs, chicken and a great selection of sauces.*

**Jay's Bar-B-Q, Baton Rouge, LA**

*This family-run restaurant has been dishing out barbecue for over 60 years.*

**Lil Daddy's Real Pit Bar-B-Que, Lafayette, LA**

*Dry rub ribs, tender brisket, falling-off-the-bone chicken, juicy sausage and my favorite: barbecue po-boys.*

**Moe's Original Bar B Que, multiple Alabama locations, New Orleans, LA**

*USA Today named this Alabama chain one of the Top 10 BBQ Joints in America.*

**The Shed Barbeque & Blues Joint, Ocean Springs, MS**

*See story page 18.*



# table of contents

MARCH | APRIL 2017



## BARBECUE

- 8 **Smokin' Hot**  
*by Pableaux Johnson*
- 11 **Slice of Life**  
*by Pableaux Johnson*
- 14 **Sauce & The City**  
*by Brad Gottsegen*
- 17 **Down to a Science**
- 18 **Fire & Reign**
- 24 **The Hogfather**
- 31 **Where There's Smoke**  
*by Wayne Curtis*

## BOOK EXCERPT

- 28 **The One True Barbecue**  
*by Rien Fertel*

## COOKING

- 22 **The Texas Crutch**  
*by Pableaux Johnson*



- 34 **Eula Mae's Avery Island Chili**  
*by Marcelle Bienvenu*
- 36 **Cornbread Fed**  
*by Crescent Dragonwagon*

## LENT

- 40 **Barbecue Shrimp**  
*by Tom Fitzmorris*
- 43 **Crawfish Season**  
*by Marcelle Bienvenu*
- 48 **Leruth's Legacy**  
*by Kit Wohl*

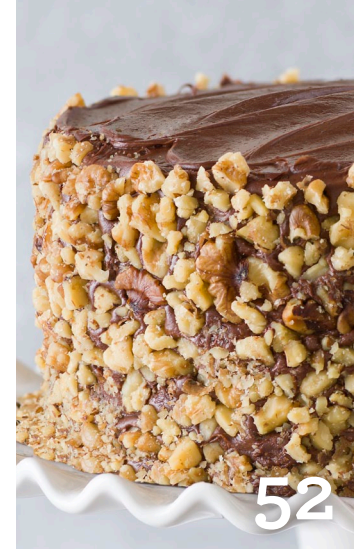
## HOLIDAYS

- 46 **Strut Your Stuffed**  
*by Kit Wohl*
- 52 **Emerald Smiles**  
*by Crescent Dragonwagon*
- 55 **Catahoula Pie Day**  
*by Marcelle Bienvenu*



- 37 **Crescent Dragonwagon's Cornbread**
- 42 **Tom Fitzmorris' Barbecue Shrimp**
- 42 **Barbecue Shrimp In the Oven**
- 43 **Crawfish Stew-Fay**
- 47 **Stuffed Artichokes**

## RECIPES



- 48 **Greg Reggio's Oyster & Artichoke Soup**
- 54 **Guinness Irish Stout Chocolate Cake**
- 55 **Custard Pie**

## IN EVERY ISSUE

- 1 Letter from the Family
- 2 In the Community

### > **A Bowl of Red**

"If you're born and raised in Texas, chili is a bowl of red — beef, no beans — but on the rest of the Gulf Coast, beans are optional, and a great way to stretch a pot when you're feeding a crowd. It's like cracking eggs into a boiling pot of crawfish stew. The addition of eggs means you can use less crawfish."

—Uncle Rob,  
Rouses Marketing & Advertising

- Get Uncle Rob's recipes for Bean Chili and Crawfish Stew at [www.rouses.com](http://www.rouses.com).
- Read about Eula Mae's Avery Island Chili on page 34.

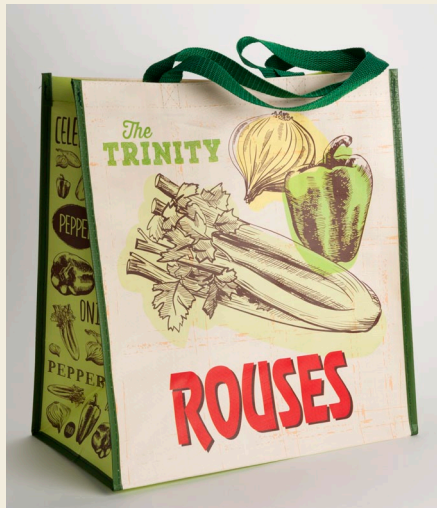




A top-down view of a large metal tray filled with various barbecue items. In the center is a large, dark, glazed brisket. To its left is a rack of ribs. In the foreground, there is a pile of pulled pork. Other items include a whole ear of corn, a small bowl of coleslaw, and several pieces of cornbread. The tray is set on a rustic wooden surface.

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### The Crawfish Guy

Stephen Kinzel, aka the Crawfish Guy, is a fixture at our Bertrand Drive store in Lafayette. This is his fifth crawfish season at Rouses. Look for him 11am to 6pm Fridays through Sundays.

photo courtesy The Daily Advertiser

### Eat, Drink & Be Berry!

Take a sweet trip to Ponchatoula, the Strawberry Capital of the World, for a free, friendly outdoor festival. Rouses is proud to sponsor the Ponchatoula Strawberry Festival April 7-9 in Memorial Park. Visit Rouses Ponchatoula at 145 Berryland Shopping Center before or after the fest. Open 7am to 10pm daily.

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D'Iberville, MS • March 4

**Independence Sicilian Heritage Festival**  
Independence, LA • March 10-12

**Amite Oyster Festival**  
Amite, LA • March 17-19

**Hogs for the Cause**  
New Orleans, LA • March 31-April 1

**Acadiana Po-Boy Festival**  
Lafayette, LA • April 1

**French Quarter Festival**  
New Orleans, LA • April 6-9

**Baton Rouge Blues Festival**  
Baton Rouge, LA • April 8-9

**Lockport Food Festival**  
Lockport, LA • April 21-April 23

**Interstate Mullet Toss**  
Gulf Shores, AL • April 28-30

**Festival International De Louisiane**  
Lafayette, LA • April 26-30

**New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival**  
New Orleans, LA • April 28-May 7

**The Thibodaux Firemen's Fair**  
Tibodaux, LA • May 4-7



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# Smokin' Hot

by Pableaux Johnson





It's late Friday morning — around 11am and what I'd usually consider the outer edges of the breakfast zone. But instead of considering a third cup of strong coffee, I'm staring at a mountain of smoked meat, formulating a plan of attack.

Should I start with a few bites of sliced brisket? The perfect pink smoke ring and thick, peppery bark look pretty seductive. Or maybe a forkful of pulled pork, still hot from the pit and rich with just the right amount of pig fat. Maybe a juicy rib? I haven't tried the beefy "burnt ends" of the brisket, which always disappear before I can get an order in. Then there's chicken, sausage and side dishes to contend with.

This, my friends, is what our ancestors called "a pretty high-class problem."

To the uninitiated, the aluminum food service tray that's weighing down the table at Central City Barbecue in New Orleans might look like a slow-smoked feast for a small, hungry army. But if you're a dedicated barbecue fan, you'll see a whole lot of America piled on top of brown butcher paper.

If you're even slightly geeky about barbecue, the innocently named "BBQ Sampler" is a delicious, lip-licking geography lesson.

The ribs and pulled pork (usually shoulder) are near-universal slow-smoked crowd-pleasers, but the well-crustured brisket slices hail from Texas, the "burnt ends" a specialty of Kansas City. The remoulade potato salad adds a tangy hometown salute among the side dishes.

We live in a time when barbecue is having its long, slow moment in the national culinary spotlight. When high-quality barbecue options seem to be multiplying by the day, and the description of "good enough for here" seems to be a *lot* less common.

A moment when the state of smoked meat is strong — and a moment that's been well worth the wait.

### Tradition, Time and Place

Not so long ago — say 10 years or so — getting a plate of *really good* barbecue along the Gulf Coast was pretty rare. In South Louisiana, a few Acadian traditions paid homage to the sacred hog — the celebratory *cochon du lait* pig roasts and cold weather — but those were different enough to be their own proverbial Cajun-flavored animal.

The many-splendored styles of Southern barbecue have traditionally reflected a distinct sense of place in terms of cuts, woods and sauces. Different meats, different techniques, different flavors — but one word: "barbecue."

Ask the simple question "What is barbecue?" and you get a range of different responses. In North Carolina, it's always pork — topped with peppery vinegar near the coast and tomato-based sauce when you cross to the Appalachian foothills. In Memphis, it can be dry-rubbed pork ribs or pulled shoulder. Fans of the Texas style favor brisket and hot links (peppery smoked sausages). Kansas City folks love ribs and burnt ends.

Even devotees of a trademark method — whole hog barbecue — can fall out over stylistic differences. (North Carolinians chop meat and skin into a fine consistency, while West Tennessee folks prefer to choose their sandwich meats from specific parts of the smoked pig.)



▲ Chicken and white sauce, Big Bob Gibson's Bar-B-Q, Decatur, AL  
Photo courtesy Alabama Tourism Department [www.ilovealabamafood.com](http://www.ilovealabamafood.com)

Many of these locally legendary barbecue pits were in tiny towns — off the beaten path, true to their regional style, and often family-owned for generations. Dedicated meatheads would make savory pilgrimage to the Hallowed Pits of the Masters, where you could get mind-blowing sandwiches for just a few bucks. In its natural habitat, traditional barbecue is part of the landscape.

### Better All the Time: A Modern Scene Develops

Slow-smoked, "real barbecue" is a food group that seems like it would travel pretty well. Its essential elements seem straightforward — everyday barnyard meats, woodsmoke and plenty of patience. All you need is an experienced pitmaster, a place to park your smoker, and the roadside experience should feel right at home just about anywhere — from Tacoma to Tallahassee, Venice Beach to the Virginia coast. Right?

Well, it turns out that, like so many things worth doing, the "simple food" is a lot more complicated than it seems from the outside. (Ask any pitmaster.) And running a barbecue restaurant beyond the culture's natural habitat makes it that much more challenging.

First off, there's the business end. Most classic joints (regardless of tradition) follow the "Till We Run Out" business model. They smoke all night, open the doors for lunch, and sell until they're out. And because they're local, pitmasters do their signature style.

Take a famous barbecue style outside its natural environs — say Memphis ribs to Metairie, for example — and you've got to adapt to local tastes and expectations. Any restaurant likely won't be a no-frills smoking shack, but a thoroughly realized "restaurant concept" that needs to accommodate die-hard rib aficionados, folks who want



“a lighter option,” picky toddlers and the occasional vegetarian.

A broader menu means customers expect more diverse condiment options, including a now common “six pack o’ sauces,” often presented in a cardboard beer carrier. A typical selection usually includes a tomato-based option (spicy, mild or sweet) and a nod to the pepper/vinegar Carolina tradition. One of the slots is increasingly filled by a squeeze bottle of North Alabama white sauce — a tangy mayo-based sauce frequently spiked with horseradish — popularized by Big Bob Gibson and a specialty of Tuscaloosa-based Moe’s Original Bar B Que. (Though originally associated with smoked chicken, Alabama white sauce is also making its way onto pork sandwiches, and if it’s on the table, just about anything you please.)

Some hardliners frown on the “all sauces” strategy, arguing that some sauces are meant for specific meats, and that the multi-style approach dilutes the importance of distinct barbecue cultures. Dubbed the “International House of Barbecue Syndrome,” the argument is that history and place become less important to the culture even as it spreads more widely.

The recent rise of barbecue competition culture also shines a modern spotlight on previously hidden regional styles and living legends of the slow-smoked craft. Stalwarts like Kansas City’s American Royal World Series of Barbecue and Memphis in May have carried the torch for years, while relative upstarts like the Big Apple BBQ Block Party stoke interests and appetites far from the pits of the rural Deep South. New Orleans’ own Hogs for the Cause brings together competition and charity as teams compete and raise funds for pediatric brain cancer.

The competition circuit also brings together a range of aspiring and experienced pitmasters who might not cook together otherwise. The FatBack Collective, an all-star team composed of a fascinating mix of white-linen chefs and whole-hog stalwarts, includes three New Orleans chefs from the Herbsaint/Cochon/Peche group (Donald Link, Stephen Stryjewski and Ryan Prewitt). And sometimes the competition circuit can help regional smoke folks build a national reputation for their brick-and-mortar businesses. The team behind The Shed Barbeque, a “barbecue and blues joint” in Ocean Springs, has been active on the competition circuit for at least a decade. In 2015, The Shed took home Memphis in May’s coveted Grand Champion trophy after multiple wins in whole hog, beef and poultry categories.

And of course, the wisdom of the oldest cooking techniques is spread through the most modern digital technology. Want to

learn how the modern gods of smoked meat build a pit, trim a brisket or pick a pig? All you need is a phone, an internet connection and a browser pointed to YouTube.

But there’s still no substitute for experience — the long, slow hours spent making magic with meat and woodsmoke. For those of us who would rather eat than smoke, it’s heartening to have so many options on the scene.

Outside Central City BBQ, I shuffle past the waiting line of diners (“We’re out of burnt ends, sorry y’all,” says the waitress) and see a pickup pulling a trailer load of split hickory wood back to the pits. It’s a welcome sign that barbecue’s long moment may just be starting.

---

**“The word ‘barbecue’ belongs to several different parts of speech. It is a noun meaning a social gathering, as in ‘We’re having a barbecue.’ It is a noun meaning a food that has been cooked by the barbecue method, as in ‘Let’s eat some barbecue.’ It is a verb meaning to cook in the barbecue method, as in ‘Let’s barbecue it.’ It is an adjective, as in ‘That’s barbecued pork shoulder.’ All of these usages point to the same thing. Meat, cooked slowly with the smoke of wood or charcoal.”**

—Lolis Eric Elie, *QUE&A: Barbecue, My Rouses Everyday, September/October 2013*

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# SLICE OF LIFE

by Pableaux Johnson

Barbecue fans can be funny. Gather a few true believers together from different parts of the country, and you'll get spirited conversations (read "borderline arguments") over a wide range of topics. Loyalists from across the South will argue the virtues of different cuts (St. Louis-style ribs versus baby-backs), smoking woods (hickory, oak, mesquite), cooking times (the longer the better? Depends ...), sauce recipes (sweet or spicy?) or any other nuance that makes *their* regional variation on the style *absolutely superior* to any other.

But ask about what bread goes with their 'cue, and there's a near-universal consensus: sliced white bread. Period.

It's the one area where BBQ partisans can find consistent common ground. With the exception of south Texas (where saltine crackers and tortilla culture come into play) and parts of the Appalachian South (where cornbread variations rule supreme), white bread is the undisputed King of Barbecue Baked Goods.

Soft, pliable and wonderfully absorbent, good old-fashioned white bread is the unanimous side starch for barbecue styles for sopping up spicy grease and pools of sauce. In the hand, a springy slice acts as the base of a sandwich or a utensil to grab meaty bits straight from the plate. Stylistic variations crop up — double-thick Texas toast and sesame-seeded burger buns are acceptable for sandwiches — but they're just slices adapted to special projects.

In a proper barbecue context, pillowy squares of sandwich bread are the only real option. There aren't choices for bread at a barbecue joint for the same reason nobody orders a shrimp po-boy on toasted pumpernickel or a double cheeseburger on a buttery croissant. Sure you *could* do it — I mean it's *possible* — but somehow, it's just *not right*.

In the middle of a meal, white bread can be a functional extension of a hungry diner's fingers and an adult's return to childhood — better than a fork, and a perfect excuse to eat with your hands. A "back to basics" way of connecting with your food, and the reason why God gave us opposable thumbs.

Just about every city has its own local bakery with its own beloved regional brand. Growing up in New Iberia, we bought loaves of Evangeline Maid but dug into the plastic Holsum bag at my grandparents' in Baton Rouge. New Orleans and the Gulf Coast was all about Bunny Bread, which confused me as a kid. (I mean, bread made out of rabbits?)

But the grocery store staple was on the picnic table whenever my



▲ Ribs and white bread, Dreamland Bar-B-Que, Tuscaloosa, AL  
Photo courtesy Alabama Tourism Department [www.ilovealabamafood.com](http://www.ilovealabamafood.com)

grandfather smoked brisket for Fourth of July. I started noticing that it was always the last thing to go on a multi-meat plate at church barbecues, or a smoke-stained backroads rib joints in Alabama, legendary pig joints in Chapel Hill or meat markets outside Austin. The soft "phhfffft" of slices on the plate was always a welcome sound that meant impending action — like a ref's whistle before kickoff.

We think about barbecue in the modern context — mostly home and restaurants these days — but for many barbecue styles, the slow-smoked specialty was inextricably linked to meat markets and small community grocery stores. In his book *Legends of Texas Barbecue*, author Robb Walsh describes the store-centric menu of early Texas 'cue (smoked meat or sausage, sliced onions, pickles, saltines or a loaf of white bread) as a practical workaround to racial segregation — and one of the few ways for black and Mexican cotton pickers to get a working meal in an era of segregated restaurants. When you couldn't sit in the dining room, you built a meal from the grocery aisles and meat market so you could get back to your job.

And decades later, soft slices of humble sandwich bread are a part of the American culinary songbook and an inextricable part of barbecue culture. A little softness to go with the spice. And a knowledge that sometimes, the simplest option makes the meal that much better.





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**Nutrition Information Per Serving:** 45 calories, 2.5g total fat, 0.5g saturated fat, 0mg cholesterol, 70mg sodium, 5g carbohydrate, 0g dietary fiber, 1g sugars, 0g protein



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*Photo and recipe courtesy of the American Lamb Board*





# SAUCE *and* the CITY

by Brad Gottsegen + photos by Denny Culbert

**B**arbecue is on fire in New Orleans. In the past year alone, several specialty barbecue restaurants have opened across the area, the latest of which is Central City BBQ, the brainchild of industry veterans, chefs Rob Bechtold and Aaron Burgau.

When I arrived for our interview, Chef Rob was quietly and methodically going about his duties of preparation and delivery while Chef Aaron pressed the flesh in the packed Friday lunch crowd, more than likely discussing hunting and fishing rather than the depth of the smoke ring on today's brisket. It's a partnership with well-defined roles that seem to be working beautifully, and if the reality that they're selling out most days by 1pm is any indication of how well the concept is doing, these guys are in for tremendous success going forward.

**Brad Gottsegen:** I've lived here my entire life, and although we're about as far south as possible, New Orleans has never been a place to get good barbecue. What do you think has

brought about this explosion of interest in cooking and eating barbecue here?

**Chef Rob:** Aside from the fact that Louisianians have always enjoyed eating with their hands, I think television had a lot to do with it. When the show BBQ Pitmasters began airing, people started understanding what good barbecue was all about. The Joint was the first place to offer artisan-style smoked meat in town, and that really got barbecue going in New Orleans. Then guys started doing small batch pop-ups around the city — I had one in Fat City called Smokin' Buddha — and I eventually opened my first brick-and-mortar shop, NOLA Smokehouse, in 2013. When the opportunity arose to join forces with Aaron, who has tremendous vision and marketing skills, it was a no-brainer.

**Brad Gottsegen:** Y'all took a big risk by building in a forgotten, run down, though well-located section of town, and it's obviously paying off in spades.

**Chef Aaron:** If it weren't for Paradigm Gardens (an urban farm I'm a partner in) opening up across the street, this place probably wouldn't exist. Once we saw how comfortable people were coming around here, and how wonderful the people that live in the neighborhood are, it began to make sense. We're also within walking distance from O.C. Haley Boulevard — which is really turning around thanks to community investment and a city-sponsored beautification project, the streetcar, the Mercedes-Benz Superdome, the Southern Food & Beverage Museum, and of course the Rouses Market downtown, all of which make the location even more appealing.

**Brad Gottsegen:** We all know about the different historically regional styles of barbecue across the South — peppered beef in Texas, mustard sauce in South Carolina, vinegary pulled pork in North Carolina — are y'all trying to define a style that's unique to New Orleans?



**Chef Rob:** We definitely are, mainly by using local ingredients and products whenever we can. Steen's Cane Syrup, strawberries from Pontchatoula, juice from Plaquemines Parish citrus — those flavors are incredible and so much better than what we can get out of products from Mexico and California. Once we get our feet underneath us a bit more, we're going to be offering seafood items on our menu, which will really help us put New Orleans on the map as a destination for barbecue.

**Brad Gottsegen:** Rob — what does one have to do to earn the title "Pitmaster"? Does it come with a pair of golden BBQ gloves?

**Chef Rob:** Time and sleepy eyes. It's 12-hour shifts or more, it's dedication — I was here at 9 o'clock last night and stayed here until 7am today. It's putting in the time to make sure it's done right.

**Brad Gottsegen:** Seriously, given how difficult this type of cooking is from a time intensity standpoint, what led you to this career?

**Chef Rob:** Stupidity. Honestly, it's the commitment I had to putting out a perfect piece of BBQ. From my experience in fine dining, my mentality is that the product is perfect when the details are met. Whether it be brisket or ribs, my burnt ends or pulled pork, I feel like I have the spirit of the legendary Chef Susan Spicer sitting on my shoulder making sure I'm doing it properly. She mentored Aaron and me when we were coming up through the ranks as line cooks, and I hear her voice all the time: "Are you doing those greens right? Did you put enough vinegar in? Are you tasting everything?"

**Brad Gottsegen:** Aaron — you're a nationally renowned owner and chef at Patois in New Orleans, a refined, bonafide foodie restaurant. But you've also owned a burger joint, and now own a barbecue joint. Where do you see the local restaurant scene headed?

**Chef Aaron:** I'm always watching to see the way the trends are going. With a couple of notable exceptions, "fine" fine dining is dead in New Orleans, and everything in the city is so casual now. In order to survive, you have to evolve to meet the changes in the local landscape. In a fine dining setting, you might see a customer once or twice a year, but if you're selling something delicious for \$10-12 a plate in a casual setting, where they can come dressed as they are, they may

come back to you once or twice a week. That's the diversity we're going for, and we want our food to be accessible to everyone.

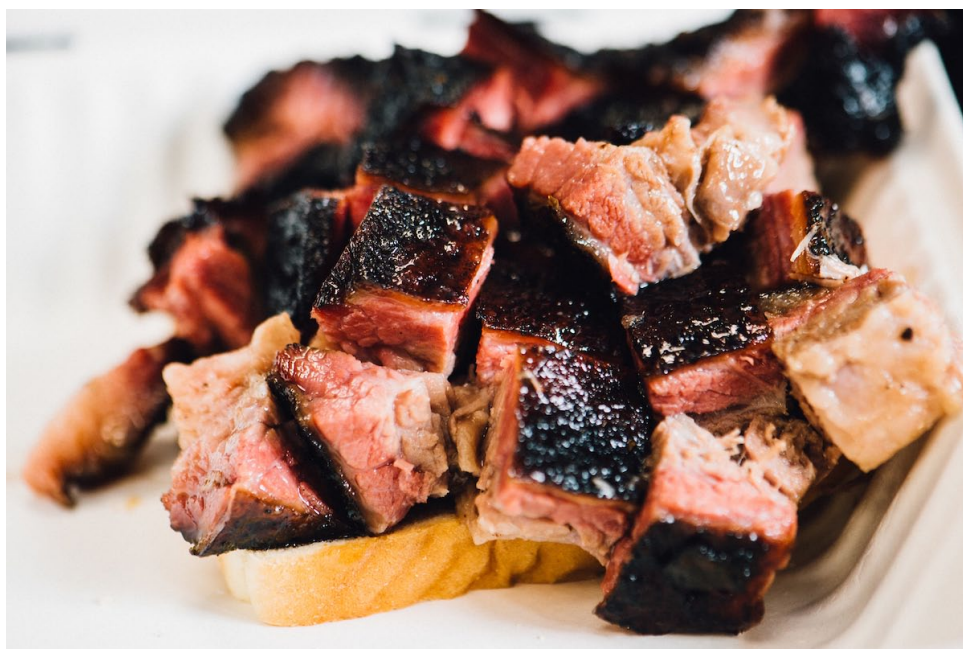
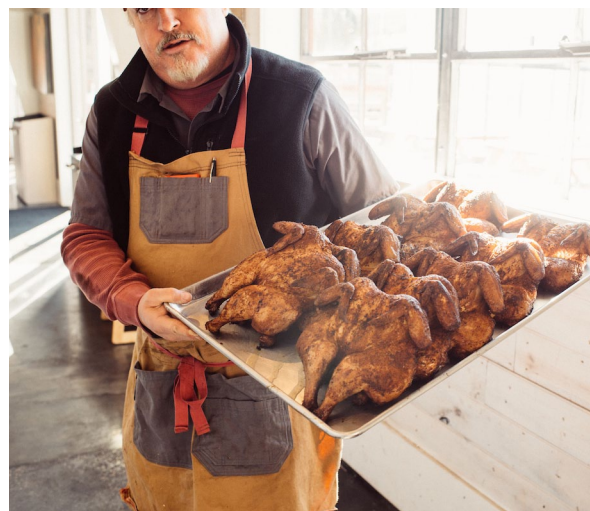
**Brad Gottsegen:** One thing that's interesting to me is that, compared to many other famous barbecue joints, such as Dreamland in Alabama, that literally only sells meat with sauce and a loaf of white bread, you guys are focused on designing a full meal, with lots of attention being paid to sides. Is that a reflection of the well roundedness and expectations of the New Orleans consumer, or more that y'all are just foodies?

**Chef Rob:** It comes from me wanting to cook what I like to eat, and that's why we bring it to the table. I really enjoy greens,

and the sweet corn spoonbread is something we've turned into one of our signature dishes. We also don't like to throw anything away — if we have any little brisket scraps we can't serve, we chop it up and add it to our brisket chili. It's part of our sustainability plan.

**Brad Gottsegen:** Arguably, the most popular item on your menu is burnt ends, a delicacy that's rarely seen outside of its hometown, Kansas City. Can you tell me about what they are and what goes into preparing them?

**Chef Rob:** They came to be by accident when I was cooking at Smokin' Buddha, when a customer asked me why I wasn't making them. I did some research, starting



▲ [PAGE 14] BBQ Sampler [TOP LEFT] Smoked Boudin [TOP RIGHT] Smoked Chicken [BOTTOM] Brisket Burnt Ends



**“[We’re] using local ingredients and products whenever we can. Steen’s Cane Syrup, strawberries from Pontchatoula, juice from Plaquemines Parish citrus — those flavors are incredible ...” Pitmaster Rob Bechtold**

offering them, and it quickly became something I’m now known for. It’s the rendered, barksy, fatty meat that comes from the nose, or point of the brisket. We season but don’t sauce our meat — we want you to be able to see the smoke ring and really enjoy the moist, intense flavor of the cut. When done right, it’s one of the best bites of food you can ever put in your mouth. We’re now doing 800-1000 lbs. per week of burnt ends alone, so it’s obviously taken off.

**Brad Gottsegen:** Is there anything special about the pits you’re cooking on? What types of wood are you using?

**Chef Rob:** We’re doing our indirect-heat cooking of pork butts and briskets on converted 1,000-gallon propane tanks, low and slow, for 15-18 hours at 250-300 degrees. Right now, we’re mainly using oak, but I like to throw in some hickory and definitely some cherry or other fruitwood when I can find it. We have custom direct heat pits for our ribs, chicken, sausage, and we smoke our wings before flash frying them for our daily happy hour.

**Brad Gottsegen:** The forgotten meat in the world of barbecue seems to be chicken, but y’all seem to feature it and do an especially nice job of keeping yours juicy, while at the same time smoky and flavorful. Does any special prep go into your yardbird?

**Chef Rob:** We use Springer Mountain Farms chickens from Georgia, which are organically and humanely raised on a vegetarian diet with no antibiotics, hormones or stimulants. All we do is add seasoning and let the quality of the product speak for itself. No injections or brining — we just apply a rub and leave them alone. Barbecue is meant to be a simple method of cooking — if you fool with it too much, you can easily mess it up.

**Brad Gottsegen:** A lot of barbecue purists are offended when a diner sauces their meat. Are y’all sauce snobs?

**Chef Rob:** I want to make people happy, and they can eat my barbecue any way they want to. We don’t sauce our product in the kitchen, but we have three sauces at every table, and we also make Alabama white sauce for those that like it as well. After Katrina, my wife and I wound up in Vermont, and we used to make applesauce from apples taken directly from the orchards up there. It eventually made its way into our sweet barbecue sauce and remains a main ingredient today, so its nostalgic for us in that it tells part of the story of our culinary journey from New Orleans up north and then back.

**Brad Gottsegen:** How much of your protein is sourced locally?

**Chef Aaron:** We’re getting a lot of our pork

from Chappapeela Farms from Husser, Louisiana, and the quality is just amazing. Beef in quantity is harder to come by locally, but because our burnt ends have become so popular and are now a regular menu item, we’ve found a supplier that is providing us just the “nose” of briskets, which is the part of the cut that burnt ends come from.

**Brad Gottsegen:** Historically, barbecue has been associated with sweet tea and beer, but you guys have built a substantial bar program with top-shelf bourbons and craft cocktails. How did that play into the planning of your overall concept?

**Chef Rob:** My whole thought was that if we were going to serve craft, artisan barbecue, we should also serve craft and artisan cocktails to go with it. There are a lot of bars in this city, and you have to do something to make yourself stand out. We’re using all fresh juices and taking no shortcuts, and as a result, we’re producing some really delicious, creative drinks.

**Brad Gottsegen:** What’s your vision for the future of this neighborhood?

**Chef Aaron:** We’re continuing to acquire parcels of land around the restaurant, so we can expand our offerings to outdoor spaces, including live music and large parties. We’re also nearly finished construction of our indoor reception space, so we can accommodate large groups for weddings, corporate events, etc. We want to have a positive impact and be a partner to the people that have been here a lot longer than we have, and given that over 50% of our employees come from close by, we want to do what we can to help this area become a great place to live as well as to eat.

**Interviewer Brad Gottsegen** is a member of Team Fleur de Que, which won the 2016 Hogs for the Cause “Top Fundraiser” Award for the fifth straight year by donating \$150,000 to families struggling against pediatric brain cancer. They also won “Best Booth” too.

**➤ Central City BBQ**

Central City BBQ (CCBBQ) is located at 1201 S. Rampart Street near the Downtown New Orleans Rouses Market. CCBBQ is open for lunch Wednesday thru Sunday.





## DR. HOWARD CONYERS HAS BBQ DOWN TO A *Science*

photo by Greg Miles

**H**oward Conyers, a resident of New Orleans' Central City neighborhood, has been lauded for his mastery of the old-fashioned, South Carolina-style, whole-hog pit barbecue he learned as a child from his father in the rural Pee Dee area of Manning, South Carolina.

Conyers cooked his first hog before he was a teenager on a pit designed by his dad, a trained welder. "Dad always made his own pits. The one I learned on was made from an old International brand refrigerator with a round top. It was laid on its back so the door was on the top. He cut two doors on the end and he put a rack inside."

After earning a Ph.D. in mechanical engineering and materials science from Duke University, Conyers began his career with NASA testing rocket engines at the Stennis Space Center. But his mind kept wandered back to the pits of his youth and the dying barbecue art his family cherished. "I realized I had left something back home that is unique and special, that is being lost. I saw that my father was not cooking hogs back home anymore, and the stories and history my people shared over the long hours tending the pits were not being transferred on to future generations anymore.

"South Carolina barbecue's rich culture is often not talked about because its complexity cannot be captured in a restaurant environment," Conyers said. "To really understand the vast culture, one must travel to rural areas and see barbecue in the home, church or community. Unfortunately, those opportunities don't exist for the general public. The misconception is that South Carolina barbecue is simply pulled pork served with a vinegar or mustard-based sauce. But it is much more; starting with the time-proven technique of pit cooking that differs by region. The preservation of classic regional barbecue becomes ever more important as competition barbecue becomes more mainstream and these traditions are lost, along with an area culture and history."

With passions for the preservation of South Carolina barbecue, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and community outreach, what is a rocket scientist to do?

Tie them together.

"I realized that STEM must be really accessible for kids to embrace it, and the Eureka! moment occurred when I realized that South Carolina barbecue is STEM in action. This is a straightforward way to introduce difficult STEM concepts through cooking or grilling — common activities in most people's lives. For example, pit design is a combination of Engineering and Technology. Cooking barbecue is the denaturing of proteins and the mechanisms of heat transfer through conduction and convection. This is science. Math comes in to play through determining cooking times — the amount of food to cook to feed however many people, and the determination of material amounts to build the pits."

Today, Conyers is regularly called upon to address groups nationwide,



and he uses the practice of cooking whole hogs to connect his passion for the preservation of his culinary heritage to his work as an engineer and scientist. As a Research Fellow with the National Food & Beverage Foundation and the Southern Food & Beverage Museum (SoFab), Conyers has curated several projects, including *South Carolina Barbecue — Culture, Misconceptions, and Preservation* and *From the Low Country to the Bayou*. He is also regularly called upon to address groups nationwide, and uses the practice of cooking whole hogs to connect his passion for the preservation of his culinary heritage to his work as an engineer and scientist. "I want this to be for everyone," he said, "not just the nerdy types like me. I want young people to be inspired to consider STEM-related fields of work."

—From the *Southern Food & Beverage Museum*

### ► Dr. Howard Conyers

As a Research Fellow with the National Food & Beverage Foundation and the Southern Food & Beverage Museum (SoFab), Conyers has curated several projects, including "South Carolina Barbecue — Culture, Misconceptions, and Preservation" and "From the Low Country to the Bayou." He also hosted the event "A Creole and Gullah Family Reunion," which further explored the influence of West Africa on American Southern cuisine. SoFab features the Rouses Culinary Innovation Center by Jenn-Air, which serves as a demonstration kitchen, laboratory, studio, meeting space and venue.





# Fire & Reign

interview by Tim Acosta, Rouses Marketing Director

Every year as springtime rolls around, the barbecue world turns its eyes to western West Tennessee for one of the country's biggest competitions — Memphis in May. Officially titled the “World Championship Barbecue Cooking Contest,” the event is part of a larger, month-long international festival that celebrates the legendary Beale Street music scene, the city's storied history and, of course, a good old-fashioned smoked meat smackdown.

On the third weekend in May, ambitious pit masters and barbecue teams head to Tom Lee Park for a massive celebration of meat, music and the chance to be this year's world

champion. Now in its 40th year, Memphis in May ranks as one of the barbecue circuit's crown jewels.

Brad Orrison, an owner at The Shed in Ocean Springs, Mississippi, knows Memphis in May well — as a fan, competitor and champion. His team from the ramshackle “Barbeque & Blues Joint” on the Mississippi Gulf Coast compete every year with plenty of success and “run the table” aspirations.

“We've won Whole Hog twice, and took the Grand Championship in 2015,” he notes. The Shed's team has also placed first

in every pork category. “We've also won beef and poultry categories. But we want to be the first team in the history of Memphis in May to win every category.”

The Super Bowl of Swine features nearly 250 teams from across America and several different countries. The competition takes place in a mile-long tent city at Tom Lee Park on the banks of the Mississippi River. Over the course of three days, more than 100,000 fans attend, smell the smoke, and watch the nation's barbecue legends practice their craft.

The competition features two rounds of judging: blind and on-site. The Shed's booth, *The Rolling Joint*, is a judge's favorite. It features a 1954 Jeep tricked out as a smoker, and the Robo Hog, a vertical pig cooker.

Of course, winning is nice — and can be pretty lucrative at the championship level — but for Orrison, the best part of any cooking contest is mixing and mingling with fellow competitors and other pork geeks: “Memphis in May is an epic party.” There's a lot of drinking, a lot of schmoozing, and a lot of oohing and aahing over Webers and Fatboys.



## 'QUE TIPS

Talk to any seasoned barbecue, and you'll pick up plenty of tips to up your personal pork-smoking game. Talk with Orrison — who calls himself the “Head ShedHed” and leader of his joint's loyal fan base — and you'll learn to never put cold meat in a smoker, stay away from green or damp woods and, most important, layer your rub to build complex, savory flavors.

“The salt goes on the meat first, because that's your base,” said Orrison. “Then you add the heat — cayenne pepper, chili powder and turmeric. Then you come back later in the cooking process with a mix of sweet and savory — usually brown sugar and celery seed. This way, when you bite into the meat you get sweet and savory, then spice.”

Orrison's best tip? Get a meat thermometer. As you learn your way around the complex world of mixing meat and fire, a thermometer will be your best friend. Whether you're cooking a 10-pound brisket or grilling chicken breasts, reading the numbers will get you closer to perfect meat than just “eyeballing it.”

The Shed's competition team of 15 regulars includes his sister Brooke Lewis (the Princess of Pork), other family members (Mama Shed, Poppa Shed and Daddy O), Hobson Cherry (senior pit master), and Mr. Jim (the restaurant's first customer and team's Official Beer Drinker). Over the years, The Shed's ragtag crew have racked up over 140 awards in just over a decade on the competitive circuit.

Back in Ocean Springs, the group works and plays together. Brad and sister Brooke built the original Shed location — a 300-foot structure made out of scrap metal, lumber and “collectible junk” Orrison had collected over the years — which lasted until a fire destroyed it in 2012. Four months later they'd rebuilt and reopened, bigger and better, in a new space with a treasure trove of junk from every corner of the Earth, much of it donated by loyal ShedHeds.

## GET FED AT THE SHED

Die-hard smoked meat fans from all over the Gulf Coast — these ShedHeds — hit the restaurant for slabs of ribs, chicken wangs, G-maw's Famous Beans, Daddy O's Creamy Cole Slaw and Momma Mia's Mac Salad. Whole hog barbecue — a restaurant



specialty — is always on the menu, and the *other* kind of H.O.G.s — the two-wheeled, gas-burning variety — are often in the parking lot. The Shed's location — just a short hop off Interstate 10 — makes it popular with the motorcycle folks.

“The restaurant is just off the beaten path, so we're an easy ride from anywhere,” says Orrison. “If you leave Baton Rouge on your Harley at 8 a.m., it's a 3-hour trip; you'll be there when we open.”

When it comes to meat (the most important part of a barbecue joint) it's pretty tough to go wrong. The brisket is smoked for 14 hours on pecan wood, which is native to the South. The coarse-ground sausage they use comes from Country Pleasin' in Florence, Mississippi. “We cook the sausage over medium heat in a hot smoker with coals made out of sharp wood like oak or cherry. When it hits a temperature of 165, we'll take it out, slice it flat like it's going on a po-boy, add sauce or seasoning, then put it back so it caramelizes down.”

Baby back ribs are cooked for five to six hours,

spare ribs for four hours. Both racks are done at 250 degrees (about 25 degrees hotter than normal home smoking temperatures). “That temperature works at the restaurant if we need to add chicken or sausage to the pit.”

You want to test the skill of a pit master? Taste the barbecue without the sauce first. But if you pass on the sauce at The Shed, you'll be missing out. Orrison's sauces have won 98 different national awards and range from Original Southern Sweet and Spicy Sweet to Spicy Mustard and Spicy Vinegar. (All are available on the shelves at Rouses, along with the marinades for beef, pork and poultry, a Cluckin' Awesome Poultry Rub and Rack Attack Rib Rub.)

Orrison has one more tip. “I'm not gonna lie — if you get pork loin or pork chop at Rouses, marinate it in our pork marinade, and grill it or reverse-sear it, it's gonna be great. Then if you go one step further and sandwich with Rouses garlic bread, and add some onions with butter and bacon crumbles, some sort of spicy mayonnaise, God forbid a hot pickle ... aw man, that's good. I want one right now.”



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# The TEXAS CRUTCH

by Pableaux Johnson



**W**hen it comes to traditional foods (and especially barbecue), I can't help but admire the purists. I tip my hat to folks who become enamored with the transcendent flavor of their favorite 'cue, then are driven to perfect it as part of their home repertoire. As students of the craft, they'll travel the country to sample the legendary pits.

Purists take their excitement for barbecue and funnel it into long smoke sessions and copious note-taking. They'll spend whole holiday weekends patiently tending their backyard cookers with patience and precision. They fixate on the finer points of the seemingly simple craft (rub recipes, meat trimming, pit physics) and spend countless hours tending their meats, controlling every variable in the process.

As a barbecue lover, I respect a purist's dedication, and it's a joy to gorge on the tasty fruits of their obsessive labor. As a cook, I like their ambition and determination. But as a practitioner of the barbecue arts, I'm more of a realist.

When I cook pork shoulders, I don't obsessively check my meat temperature or fiddle with airflow during a 9-hour smoking session. Instead, I lean pretty heavily on something called the "Texas Crutch." And my life is much better for it.

## The Basics: In Competition

The Texas Crutch is a smoking technique that involves wrapping a partially smoked cut of meat (usually a brisket, pork shoulder or other roast-like hunk) in thick aluminum foil to concentrate heat, accelerate cooking, and minimize evaporation. Add a little liquid to the mix (beer always works) and let it sit for a spell.

In basic kitchen terms, the basic crutch technique turns a dry-cooking method (smoking) into a wet-cooking method (essentially a braise). It's also a great way to turn an economical cut of pig (the notoriously tough pork shoulder) into fall-apart shreds of delicious piggy barbecue.

The "wrap and rest" technique developed on the national barbecue competition circuit, where control of internal temperature and meat moisture is critical.

Competition pitmasters track the doneness (and the final texture) of barbecue by tracking its internal temperature. For big cuts of meat (brisket, shoulders), there's a "plateau" in the process — where cooking seems to stop as the heat penetrates deep into the center of the meat.

Over time, slow heat gradually transforms the connective tissue and muscle of the traditionally tough meat into silky, flavorful collagen — the rich "X factor" of your favorite stews and gravies.



The Texas Crutch was developed as a way for competition teams to hasten past the plateau, giving the cooks more control over the cooking clock. But it was also considered kind of a cheat by the purists — there they go again — since it varied from the straight-up meat+smoke=barbecue equation.

### Embracing Hybrid Heat: One Man's Story

But in the real world (or at last my part of it) “crutching” works amazingly well for cooking my favorite big chunks o’ meat. And what’s more, it makes for some of the Best Breakfasts of All Time.

When it comes to slow-smoked meats, I’ve embraced the concept of barbecue being an indoor/outdoor sport. (Purists, you may want to skip this section, or risk bruising your delicate sensibilities.)

They gone? Great.

Let me tell you a story ...

It all started a few years ago, when I decided to spend a Sunday smoking a pork shoulder for supper. It being a spring weekend, I rose with my alarm, full of ambition and big plans — only to find that it was an hour later than I thought (daylight saving time strikes again).

For some reason, my brain had a hard time getting on track, and my plans for an early breakfast, run to Rouses Market and “light the fire by 8AM” slipped by one hour, then two, then three. I stumbled through my Sunday — disoriented in time and under-caffeinated — and finally struck a match in the early afternoon. I got my little Weber Bullet smoker stoked and loaded (a 6-pound pork shoulder and two chickens) at about 2pm. Some friends were coming over to eat at about 8am.

(So we’ll pause here to say that any experienced barbecue person will recognize that 4–5 hours is *plenty* of time to smoke mid-sized poultry, but nowhere *near* enough time to fully cook a decent-sized pork shoulder.)

The afternoon wore on, and I kept a watchful eye on my double-level cooker — checking the meat temperatures occasionally, adding more wood chunks when needed, resisting the urge to open the smoker’s dome every 20 minutes or so. At about 6:30pm, my neighbors likely heard me yell a series of aggressive encouragements to the nowhere-near-done pork shoulder ... Along the lines of “C’mon. C’MON. COME ON, PIG!”

(In other news: My block has a very high tolerance for “neighbor crazy.”)

After five hours on the smoke, the chickens looked beyond perfect. They’d been on the grate below the shoulder, so they were consistently slow-basted with spicy pork fat. They couldn’t have been more savory and beautiful.

The pork, on the other hand, seemed barely done. The exterior of the shoulder had a great color, with a burnished brown-to-burgundy crust from a spicy rub and outside-in smoke massage. But the thermometer reading let me know that the core of the roast wasn’t nearly ready. Try to serve this at dinnertime, and my more polite guests could well damage their dental work on thoroughly underdone “not nearly close to barbecue.”

Disappointed but glad to have some pig-flavored smoked poultry to serve, I replaced the smoker dome and went to my guests.

A few hours and bottles of wine later, my guests headed home and I grabbed a flashlight to check the shoulder. Not much progress temperature-wise, and the fire was just about dead and burning down to faint embers.

Disappointed and burnt out from the day, I remembered the Crutch and decided to give it a try. The smoker was out of the question — no way I was going to stoke another fire pretty close to midnight — but my kitchen oven seemed like a better bet.

The prep took about three minutes in total: wrap the shoulder in heavy-duty “tin foil,” add a second layer for insurance and add a little beer for the braising liquid. Place in glass baking dish, set oven on WARM (about 180–200 degrees), go to bed and hope for the best.

### Slower than Slow: the Final Product

The next morning, I woke up to the most magical smell. It was the faint aroma of pork and pepper, like I had fallen asleep in a heavenly smokehouse.

I opened up the foil packet, and the shoulder looked the same as the night before — beautiful color, decent smoke ring — but the texture was just ... perfect.

The solid chunk of shoulder — hard as a clenched fist the night before — had transformed into a tender pouch of pre-pulled pork, barely holding together. All the rubbery tendons were gone, along with most of the muscle fat, which melted down during the night.

From a non-purist’s perspective, it was darned near perfect — after a night in a low oven, the pork practically fell apart under its own weight. Tender, delicious and low-maintenance.

While it may not have the street cred of a pig lovingly tended by a dedicated round-the-clock purist, it’s a delicious compromise that works every time.

These days, I confidently start my shoulder after lunch, knowing that the overnight crutch will give me one of the best morning trifectas ever — perfect pulled pork omelette, strong coffee and a good night’s sleep.

**“As a barbecue lover, I respect a purist’s dedication, and it’s a joy to gorge on the tasty fruits of their obsessive labor. As a cook, I like their ambition and determination. But as a practitioner of the barbecue arts, I’m more of a realist.”**



# The Hog-Father

by Tim Acosta, Rouses Marketing Director



**B**ig Mike Lewis, pitmaster and owner of Big Mike's BBQ Smokehouse in Houma, believes in patience, family and the kind of good barbecue that's worth studying for a lifetime.

Lewis grew up in Florida and learned about barbecue eating at places like Big John's Alabama BBQ in Tampa, an open pit barbecue restaurant founded in 1968 by the late Rev. John A. "Big John" Stephens and still run by the Stephens family. "There's generations of barbecue knowledge there," Lewis says. He ate barbecue wherever he could find it and became a dedicated student of the old joints that dot Texas and the Gulf Coast. "I guess barbecue got in my blood."

After years in the Sunshine State, Lewis and his wife, Judith, moved to Houma in 2007 so they could be near his father, Harold Lewis, who had recently retired from running a mechanic shop. "Pop was 75 and I just wanted to spend time with him. Louisiana was calling my name."

The couple decided to open a restaurant and soon found a spot on the West Side of Houma — a former Tastee Donuts — and Big Mike's BBQ Smokehouse opened for business.

Like Big John's (their inspiration in Florida), Big Mike's was a family affair fueled by hard work and cooperation. Some parts of it never change — even after a long day of tending fires and serving folks, someone has to rise well before dawn to light the pits.

And for years, that job fell to Big Mike's dad.

"Dad would get up so I didn't have to. He knew I was already working 12 to 14 hours a day. That man always had my back."

The Lewis men worked side by side to build the restaurant. "Dad didn't take a salary the entire time he worked with me. In 2012 I retired him. I said, 'Dad, the train is moving; this is your stop. It's time for you to kick back and enjoy your life.' I sent him a retirement check every single week, but he never spent a single cent."

Things ran pretty smoothly until an electrical fire totaled the West Side restaurant. Lewis scrambled to find a new spot, eventually relocating to a Shell gas station right by the Rouses Market in the Village East Shopping Center. "A gas station wasn't our first choice for a barbecue restaurant, but it actually ended up being a good location for us," he says.

Lewis eventually moved from the old station to a new outpost on Barrow Street, and now he's planning a second location in Thibodaux.

He's also created his own line of barbecue sauces, rubs and fully cooked sausages, which he debuted at Rouses. "We made a barbecue rub, which is for brisket and pork, and a poultry rub, which we use for grilled chicken and smoked turkey. Our original sauce is a savory sauce, then we have a sweet heat version."

Every pitmaster dreams about having his own line of food, but what was it like for him to see his vision come true? "When I actually walked in and saw my products on Rouses shelves? Well, I can't begin to describe how great that felt. I'm at Rouses every day, and I still get excited when I see my stuff."





## 'Cue Me In

**Tim:** A lot of people are fearful of slow-smoking large cuts of meat like brisket. It's not as simple like throwing a couple of Rouses steaks on the grill.

**Mike:** We can do 10,000 to 15,000 pounds of brisket a month. We use the whole brisket, but can get a pre-trimmed brisket (Rouses sells both). Prep couldn't be easier. With good-tasting beef, you only need a rub, or even just salt and pepper, which is what they do in Texas. The point is you want beef to taste like *beef*— you wouldn't want to cover up that good flavor.

**Tim:** I cook brisket on my Big Green Egg with your rub. It's a two-day process for me, which involves cooking overnight, low and very slow.

**Mike:** At home I cook on a pit at 225 degrees. In the restaurant, I can dial it in lower — at 190 or 200 degrees — because I have more time. A whole brisket takes me about 16 hours, cooked indirectly over a wood fire. Sixteen hours is just enough time for that fat-crisped outer bark to build.

**Tim:** People get freaked out the first time they do a brisket and see that crust turning black.

**Mike:** They just don't know how pretty it is on the inside. That smoke ring (layer of dark pink) is just under the crust.

**Tim:** I've heard about cooking brisket "hot and fast" but I've never tried it.

**Mike:** If you want to fast-cook it, you do it at 250 degrees. But you have to introduce some moisture, so you put a little pan of water underneath it to lessen the heat's impact on the meat. You want the pan between the fire and the beef. Myron Mixon won Memphis in May's — first place in brisket and Grand Champion — and he fast-cooks his brisket in a "water smoker."

**Tim:** Now Mike, here's where I'm a champion: ribs. I won Rouses Big Green Egg Cookoff a couple of years ago. Lately I've been putting our beef short ribs on the smoker. (Short rib is like brisket on a bone.) I put some of your rub on those ribs, then smoke them at 250 degrees for about eight hours.

**Mike:** I have a better way, an easier way. You should actually smoke the short ribs *after* you've cooked them. Start with a small pan. Add the short ribs, season them with Big Mike's Rub, throw in some chopped onions, a few bay leaves.

Put a couple of the bay leaves in the bottom of the pan and a few on top. You don't need any liquid. Wrap the pan in foil and cook in your kitchen oven for 4-5 hours at 225 degrees. Transfer the ribs out of the pan and into the smoker and cook them for another hour and a half. The bake makes it easy, and the ribs get a lot of flavor without spending all day on the smoker. And you talk about bay leaves making a huge difference ...

**Tim:** Do they get a sauce?

**Mike:** You want a mustard sauce for beef short ribs. Go 2:1:1 with the ratio — two parts Big Mike's BBQ sauce, one part mustard, one part honey. Serve it on the side or add it last minute. Be careful with the sauce. You *never* want to put sauce or honey on meat when you cook it until the very end, say the last 15 minutes or so. A sweet, thick sauce will burn and get bitter if you put it on too soon. Once the sauce is on, watch it close for burning.

**Tim:** Finally, let's talk turkey. You smoke them year round at your place.

**Mike:** A good smoked turkey is different from your usual Thanksgiving turkey, which can be dry. You might need gravy on that Thanksgiving turkey, but smoked turkey can be a whole other bird. At Big Mike's, we brine our turkeys overnight to get the best flavor out of them, then rub them with fresh herbs, spices and a salt. Then we put the rub on before we smoke them. I promise you, you're gonna ask for seconds of my turkey.



▲ [PAGE 24] photo by Joe Racoma [TOP RIGHT] Big Mike — photo by Joe Racoma [BOTTOM] Big Mike's BBQ Brisket — photo by Randy Hawthorne



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## The One True Barbecue

*Fire, Smoke, and the Pitmasters Who Cook the Whole Hog*  
(Book Excerpt)

**T**hough I was born and raised in the South, I grew up entirely barbecueless. My birthplace of Lafayette, Louisiana, the hub city of Cajun culture, occasionally harbored a franchise chain out of Texas or Tennessee, but none endured for very long or, for that matter, served up any meat that any self-respecting Texan or Tennessean would deem to be quality barbecue. Louisianans, especially those in Cajun country, are a people raised on the hog but not barbecue. A few links of boudin, a pork, rice, and spice-filled sausage, best eaten still warm while sitting on the hood of your car or truck, is my favorite snack. We consume plenty of cured pork products, like tasso, andouille, and smoked sausage. Although it's a disappearing custom, Cajun families still gather for a harvest-season pig slaughter and curing called a *boucherie* that, accompanied by music, dancing, and too much alcohol, extends over a weekend. Elsewhere in Cajun country, men roast suckling pigs, called *cochon de lait*, or "pig in milk" in French, a rite of spring in a handful of small towns.

Growing up in the suburbs, I hazily remember seeing a barbecue pit in the backyard of my family home, not that it saw much use. Neither of my two dads, my birth father nor my stepfather, fired up the Weber for a Sunday rack of ribs, much less to charrill a hamburger. Not that my two brothers and I were raised on a meat-

free diet. Because my mother managed a steakhouse, we were a beef family, spoiled with the riches of steak. I worked as a busboy at her restaurant throughout my teenage years, and, on a whim, I can still conjure up the scent of seared steaks sizzling in pools of molten butter, as if the essence of beef had seeped into my skin.

Throughout my college years, while living in New Orleans, on several occasions en route to concerts or to visit friends, I detoured through hellish Atlanta traffic for Styrofoam takeout trays of charred and fatty bones from Fat Matt's Rib Shack. Later, and further afield, I road-tripped to the Hill Country surrounding Austin with the sole intent of tasting a half dozen or so sausages and beef briskets, each more fat capped and smoke ringed than the next, to round out a gluttonous vacation that was very nearly pleasurable enough to make me consider moving to Texas. Eventually, I moved up to New York for a graduate degree and dined at Blue Smoke, a posh Murray Hill-area restaurant that covered the breadth of the nation's barbecue cultures, complete with a complementary wine list.

For me, barbecue, in all its forms, existed as a vague notion. Real barbecue truly remained a mystery, lingering, like smoke, at an intangible distance. But in the summer of 2008 I traveled throughout Memphis recording oral histories — capturing the narrative histories and the personal stories

behind the food — as a freelancer for the Southern Foodways Alliance, a University of Mississippi-based organization devoted to, as their mission states, "documenting, studying, and celebrating the diverse food cultures of the changing American South."

I saw this documentary project as an opportunity to connect with my southern roots.

So there, in Memphis, I consumed as much barbecue as I could find: twice, three times, and, at least once, five times in a single day. I gnawed on the famous dry-rubbed ribs at Charlie Vergos' Rendezvous, the downtown grande dame of barbecue restaurants. I snacked on barbecue nachos alongside college students at the crowd-pleasing Central BBQ. I ate all the only-in-Memphis specialties: barbecue rib tips, barbecue bologna sandwiches, barbecue Cornish game hens, and barbecue spaghetti. By the time I left Memphis I liked barbecue — certainly didn't love it — and had eaten enough of the stuff to think that I understood it. To riff on T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," I had known smoked sausages, briskets, porks; I could measure out my life with plastic sporks. The art of barbecued meats seemed simple enough, I thought: meat meet heat.

But it was on a trip beyond the city to Siler's Old Time BBQ in Henderson, Chester County, Tennessee, that I realized that,



**“Louisianans, especially those in Cajun country, are a people raised on the hog but not barbecue. A few links of boudin, a pork, rice, and spice-filled sausage, best eaten still warm while sitting on the hood of your car or truck, is my favorite snack.”**

concerning barbecue, I didn't know a damn thing. I arrived at the barbecue house just in time to catch the yellow, rust-worn Chevy pickup back into a gravel-lined gap between the kitchen and the pit house. A single pale-pink trotter stuck out of the truck's bed, pointing accusatorially at the driver and the concealed-carry weapon permit sticker on the back window. Ronnie Hampton dipped out of the cab and ambled toward me. He wore a camouflage baseball cap sunk low over half-open eyes and crooked nose, his tongue steadily rolled a toothpick, and he seemed to exist in a perpetual state of drowsy awareness that only old dogs can channel. He ignored my presence, my wide-eyed ogling of his truck's cargo, and unlatched the tailgate to reveal three hogs stacked and shrink-wrapped in glossy black contractor-sized garbage bags. They looked so much like body bags — three Mafia-dispatched corpses ready for disposal in New Jersey's Pine Barrens — that I had to remind myself that this was just barbecue.

This is just barbecue.

Except it was not the sort of barbecue I recognized to be barbecue: a rack of ribs smoking on the Weber grill; licking sugary sauce from sticky fingers; baseball, backyards, and the Fourth of July.

This was an animal. Still bleeding, though just barely.

I leaned in closer. Amidst a pile of spent Gatorade and beer bottles, a spare tire, and a length of weed-whacker twine, each body bag — imperfectly wrapped, or perhaps too small to hold the carcass — spilled out its contents of flesh and fat and blood. The hogs had been split along the spine, their internal organs and heads removed. The flabby neck meat, remaining attached to the right-side shoulder, hung flapping like a massive, fatty tongue against the truck's bed. Raw meat met rust. Sanguinary fluids merged with a decade's buildup of grease, tar, and mud.

There's a reason geneticists and other biotechnologists believe that surgeons will soon be harvesting organs from genetically modified pigs for human transplantation: inside and out we are very much the same. These poor pigs looked remarkably human.

### ➤ About the Book

Rien Fertel is a Louisiana-born and -based writer and professional historian and contributor to *My Rouses Everyday*. His new book profiles whole-hog barbecue pitmasters who have been passing down their culinary art form through generations, guarding the secrets of the trade and facing bitter family rivalries all in the name of good barbecue. It is available online and at local bookstores.

Alive and breathing just a couple of hours ago, the hogs still radiated heat, adding unwanted degrees to an already steamy July morning. The flies had arrived before I did, buzzing back and forth between the skin — patchily jaundiced and cantaloupe mottled — and the exposed flesh. Feasting.

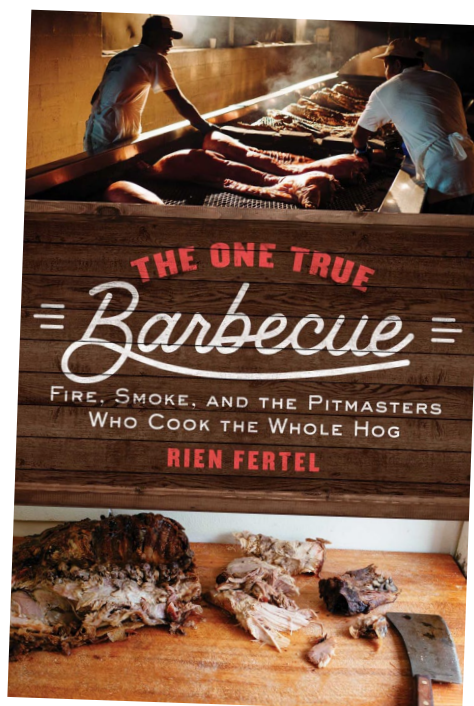
Chris Siler came bursting out of the kitchen's back doors with a knife in hand. The new owner of Siler's Old Time BBQ, here in Henderson, Chester County, Tennessee, was as lumbering as Hampton was whip thin. Under a black chef's apron he wore a red T-shirt and a pair of bright blue Wrangler overalls with oversized pockets.

Dragging the first hog to the tailgate's lip, Siler tore open the plastic wrapping. With the pig on its back, he used his left hand to pry open the cavity. Wiping the sweat from his face, he then gently ran the blade, sinking no deeper than an inch, along where the animal's backbone — now split in two — once united and divided the animal. As he reached the hog's midsection, streams of blood began issuing from some unseen wellspring, pooling in one side of the curved rib cage. This pig had been alive earlier this morning. Sweat dripped from the tip of Siler's nose and forehead, commingling with the blood.

He grabbed a trotter, and concentrating on his knife work — biting his tongue between teeth and lips — he rotated the blade around the midpoint of the hog's four feet, marking superficial circular incisions into the skin. Ronnie Hampton reentered the scene, his black-gloved right hand holding a reciprocating saw. He had Siler's five-year-old son in tow.

This was the exact moment young Gabriel came to see. As his father held down the hog's bottom half, Hampton began grinding away at the front-left trotter. The saw spat out bone, blood, and sinew. Gabriel skipped around the truck, screaming, laughing, delighting in the joy of another pig getting made ready for the pit. He stopped to tell me — taking the lollipop from his mouth — that he could not wait until he was big and strong enough to lift a hog.

The saw and the meat, combined with the promise of smoke and fire, did more than excite a version of southern exoticism within me; these rituals unlocked a deeply held memory. I was instantly and quite uncomfortably put in mind of my mother, who, in one of my earliest recollections, I can see slashing through a short loin with an electric





band saw. Her thriving steakhouse — this was before the days of pre-packaged, Cryovaced steaks — cut the following day's quota of New York strips, filets, and rib eyes. When any given employee became a no-show, my mom took up his position, even if that meant being the butcher. It was brutal, violent work, not maternal in the least. The next fifteen minutes went by in the blur and whine of the saw blade. By the time Gabriel had stopped reveling in the rendering of pig flesh, twelve disembodied trotters stood macabrely piled in the truck's bed. I was sickened. I was thrilled. I was hungry.

I walked inside to order a barbecue sandwich.

The dining room of Siler's was a jumble of southern stereotypes, minus the rusted tin sign advertisements, worn farm equipment, and other vintage bric-a-brac that define the Cracker Barrel aesthetic. There were stacks of Wonder bread buns piled high along the painted cinder-block walls, a plastic plant in each corner, and squeeze bottles full of barbecue sauce on every table. On the walls, inspirational Christian curios mingled with pig iconography and family photographs. The Ten Commandments hung over the cash register. Most of the clientele had long passed the minimum AARP age, but that would be appropriate as Siler's Old Time BBQ was Henderson, Tennessee's last authentic barbecue joint and one of the last surviving wood-cooked whole-hog pit houses in the entire South.

I paid for my barbecue sandwich and took a seat at the table, brushing a sesame seed from the red-gingham-clothed table.

My sandwich appeared as a grease-slicked, wax-papered parcel speared with a toothpick. I unwrapped the barbecue bundle to find a rather sad-looking plain white hamburger bun leaking what appeared to be ketchup. Disappointed by what aesthetically amounted to fast food rubbish, I rotated the wax paper clockwise to get a look at the sandwich's backside. There, teasingly poking through the two halves of bread, was a single, sly tendril of meat. Tossing the top bun aside, I uncovered a baseball-sized mound of mixed white and dark pork: thick, ropey strands of alabaster flesh curling serpentine around chunks of smoke-stained shoulder, some pieces of which still contained black-charred bits of skin. It was all smothered in a heavily pepper flecked coleslaw containing little else but chopped cabbage and ketchup. Using my hands, I started forking the meat into my mouth. Each bite seemed to reveal a different part of the pig. I could discern, with tongue and teeth, the textural differences between the soft, unctuous belly meat and the firm, almost jerky-dry shoulder. The slaw added softly alternating rushes of sweet and heat to each smoke-tinged taste.



In Memphis I had eaten barbecue more times than I'd like to count, but this was the first time I truly tasted barbecue. Every bite transported me to a South I partially recognized but had never really known: a porky place, a swine-swilled space, a region where barbecue was “ever so much more than just the meat,” as the southern historian and journalist John Egerton once penned. I was tasting history, culture, ritual, and race. I was eating the South and all its exceptionalities, commonalities, and horrors — a whole litany of the good, the bad, and the ugly. Everything I loathed and everything I loved about the region I called home.

This was not just barbecue, this was place cooked with wood and fire.

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**“For anyone interested in the origins, history, methods and spectacle of whole-hog barbecue, this book is essential reading ... Fertel leaves readers hungry not only for barbecue but also for the barbecue country he so engagingly maps.”** *(The Wall Street Journal)*

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# WHERE THERE'S *Smoke*

by Wayne Curtis

**T**he smell of ribs on a grill or pulled pork coming off a smoker seems to trigger an innate thirst for a cold beer. It's quite possible we were born with the genes for this predisposition.

But sometimes instinct is overruled by another thought: I'd like something with a bit more behind it to stand up to the smokiness from the fire. Bourbon drinks are a popular option. But the pro move? Match smoke with smoke: try a mezcal or mezcal-based cocktail.

Granted, searching for mezcal in South Louisiana can be like searching for a dark brown gumbo in Guadalajara — you get the feeling it's just not the right place. That's not much of a surprise, as Mexican influence hasn't been as pervasive here as in, say, neighboring Texas. (Austin has four *mezcalerias*, small, traditional bars where you can sample artisanal mezcals.)

But in other ways, the absence of mezcal is inexplicable, since Southern Louisiana loves big, bold flavors, and that's what mezcal delivers. After all, mezcal evolved south of the border as an accompaniment to foods that also draw on layered, complex tastes with a fondness for spicy smoke, including dishes with chipotle peppers.

Mezcal is made from the agave plant, which grows in abundance throughout much of Mexico. You're probably already familiar with one popular type of mezcal. It's called tequila. This a more highly regulated subset of mezcal — to be called tequila, it must be made with blue agave, adhere to certain labeling and production requirements, and be made only in specified regions of the country, which naturally includes the village of Tequila, home to several major producers. (By international trade agreement, tequila and mezcal may *only* be made and bottled in Mexico; similar products made in the United States are labeled "agave spirits.")

Mezcal isn't required to color inside the lines like tequila, although traditions do guide the flavor profile. It typically has a distinctive smoky streak — making it a sort

of Mexican cousin to Scotch — which stems from cooking the agave heart in a stone pit over oak or mesquite, a technique that has persisted for generations. It's more often than not made by small-scale producers in what amount to glorified backyards — sometimes just one- or two-person operations, with the bulk of production in the hills around Oaxaca, in southern Mexico.

Among the first Americans to promote mezcal north of the border was an artist named Ron Cooper, who started importing under the Del Maguey label in 1995. He tracked down "single village" mezcals, allowing consumers to sample different tastes from different towns, the result of varied traditions. Today, Del Maguey has made some fairly broad inroads on backbars and liquor store shelves — look for the dark green bottles and colorful, bold labels.

Other mezcals are starting to crop up at bars across the region — although you may have to dig a bit deeper to find them. Casa Borrega in New Orleans is a good first stop — it features about a dozen mezcals that complement its long list of tequilas, all

served in a sort of Oaxacan roadhouse eatery created by artist and founder Hugo Montero, a Mexico native who's been in New Orleans for three decades. Not all mezcals in stock appear on their printed list; ask the bartender if they've got anything new on the shelf.

The bar also serves up some outstanding mezcal cocktails, including a mezcal-meets-beer hybrid called Condessa, named after a popular neighborhood. ("It's basically the Bywater of Mexico City," said Orestes Montero, one of two of Hugo's grown sons who work at Casa Borrega.) It's refreshing without being timid, and pairs remarkably well with all variants of barbecue.

Mezcal is also emerging as a favorite among craft bartenders, who find the smokiness can add a nice complexity to a cocktail. Alexandra Anderson of Cane & Table in the French Quarter came up with "The Luck I've Had," a bright, tasty drink that tames the mezcal with dry vermouth, creme de cacao and armagnac. And at Cure on Freret Street in New Orleans, bartenders are also finding ways to showcase mezcal, including in a riff on the old-fashioned, and a wonderful Manhattan variation (no name as yet) from bartender Matt Lofink.

Mezcal sometimes gets tarred as being the country cousin to tequila, more raffish and unrefined. As if that's a bad thing. But where do you have better adventures? On a no-exit highway, or on an unpaved track that heads toward smokers cooking up ribs?







# Leek & Onion Soup

4 tablespoons Extra Virgin Olive Oil  
4 large Melissa's Baby Dutch Onions, coarsely chopped  
4 medium Leeks, thoroughly washed - the white and 3 inches of green cut into 1/2 inch rounds  
6 cups Chicken or Vegetable Stock  
2 1/2 tablespoons Balsamic Vinaigrette  
1 1/4 cups White Wine  
Salt and Freshly Ground Black Pepper  
Parmesan Cheese  
Fresh Thyme

Heat the olive oil over medium heat in a soup pot. Add the onions and leeks and sauté uncovered until very soft, about 30 minutes. Add stock and continue to simmer until the flavors blend, about 30 minutes. (NOTE: This can be prepared one day in advance to this point.) Just prior to serving, heat over medium-high heat.

Add the balsamic vinegar, red wine, salt and pepper. Shave a few paper-thin shavings of the Parmesan on top of the soup. Garnish with fresh thyme leaves and serve immediately. Makes 4 servings.







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**Beef Fajitas**

- 8 oz John Soules Foods Beef Fajitas, thawed
- 1 Sliced Pepper (green, red, yellow or combination)
- 1 Sliced Onion
- 1 Shredded Cheese
- 1 cup Topping (salsa, guacamole, sour cream or combination)
- 4-6 Tortillas (flour or corn)
- 1 tbsp Olive Oil

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium high heat. Add the John Soules Foods Beef Fajitas and cook until 160°F. Add peppers and onions and cook for an additional 2 minutes. Remove from heat.

Take the remaining ingredients and place on serving platter. Place cooked meat, peppers and onions on serving platter. Fill tortillas with desired ingredients. Serve.

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# *Eula Mae's Chili*





by Marcelle Bienvenu

When the late Paul McIlhenny (then the president and CEO of McIlhenny Company, which makes world-famous Tabasco hot sauce on Avery Island) asked me to work with Eula Mae Dore on a cookbook, I was thrilled. I, like many others who frequented Avery Island, knew about Eula Mae who, with her husband, managed the Commissary where island residents could find everything from kerosene to detergent, canned goods, produce, basic groceries *and* a good sandwich.

It was fall of 1998 and my mother had just passed away, so the call from Paul and the opportunity to work with Eula Mae were quite welcome. Eula Mae had “retired” from the Commissary but continued to cook for McIlhenny family events. Her beloved husband, Walter “MoNeg” Dore, had died a few years earlier, and she was anxious to keep busy.

While Paul, Eula Mae and I chatted at the McIlhenny office, I realized that she was reluctant to take on such a project, but I assured her she had nothing to fear. I had experienced much of her recipe repertoire, having attended parties, weddings, brunches and other events on the island, and knew of her cooking talents. After a little coaxing, Eula Mae agreed to spend two to three days a month cooking in the kitchen at the McIlhenny Company complex. She was familiar with the setup since she often cooked there for visiting dignitaries, businesspeople and family members.

I remember Paul telling us that if we needed any kind of pots and pans, utensils and gadgets to test the recipes, to go ahead and purchase them. I couldn't wait to go shopping, but Eula Mae graciously refused saying that “she didn't cook in pots she didn't know.” (Side note: When the book was finally launched a few years later at an event in New York City, I had to ship Eula Mae's pots up there since she refused to cook in anything else.)

Over a period of almost three years, we tested well over 100 recipes and oh, was it a great adventure. When Eula Mae offered to make this chili one day in the test kitchen, she explained that she had never given out her recipe.

She whispered, “You will be the first person to see what I do to make this chili so good! I have never revealed this recipe to anyone, except my daughter, in 50 years. Adding the

chili powder mixed with some flour is the secret to making the chili just right! You'll see what I mean when you try it.”

First of all, the chili must simmer for several hours. It can't be rushed. Put it on early in the morning and let it cook long and slow. Eula Mae usually used about 40 pounds of ground beef for the crowds that numbered over 200, so the process took her all day.

## Eula Mae's Avery Island Chili

*From Eula Mae's Cajun Kitchen,  
Harvard Common Press*

Makes about 1½ quarts chili

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 2 pounds ground beef
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon Tabasco brand pepper sauce
- ½ teaspoon Accent
- 3 cups chopped yellow onions
- 2 cups chopped celery
- 1 cup chopped green bell peppers
- 4 garlic cloves, chopped
- 1 (6-ounce) can tomato paste
- 2 tablespoons chili powder
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup water

### HOW TO PREP

Heat the oil in a large, heavy pot over medium heat. Add the beef, salt, pepper, Tabasco and Accent, and cook, stirring, until all the pink disappears. Add the onions, celery, bell peppers, and garlic. Cook, stirring, until the onions are soft and lightly golden, about 10 minutes.

Add the tomato paste and 1 tablespoon of the chili powder and mix well. Cook covered, stirring occasionally, and simmer over a very low fire for at least 2 hours and as long as 3 hours.

Combine the remaining tablespoon of chili powder with the flour in a small bowl and blend well, then add the water and stir to mix. Add to the pot of chili and cook, stirring, for about 1 minute.

Turn off the fire and let sit for about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, before serving.

### ➤ Marcelle Bienvenu

*Food writer and cookbook author Marcelle Bienvenu is an instructor at the John Folse Culinary Institute at Nicholls State University in Thibodaux, La.*

• • •

There was another chili recipe Eula Mae shared with me.

When Mr. Walter's Marine buddies would come to the island, he often hosted casual parties dressed in faded khakis and tennis shoes. He was the ultimate host, always making his guests comfortable and, of course, well fed. He loved to serve his pals this chili because he thought it was just the thing to serve while they reminisced about the old days.

“Sometimes my husband made this chili for Mr. Walter. I always found it strange that he liked it served with rice, but I never questioned it. We are in rice country, and if it made Mr. Walter happy, that was fine with me!”

• • •

## Walter McIlhenny's Chili

Makes about 6 servings

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 3 pounds lean beef chuck, cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 cup chopped yellow onions
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 tablespoons chili powder
- 2 teaspoons cumin
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 2 teaspoons Tabasco brand pepper sauce
- 3 cups water
- 1 (4-ounce) can chopped green chilies, drained

Hot cooked rice

Chopped onions for garnish

Shredded cheddar cheese for garnish

Sour cream for garnish

### HOW TO PREP

Heat the oil in a large, heavy pot or Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add the beef and cook, stirring often, until browned well. Transfer the beef to a platter and set aside.

Add the onions and garlic to the pot and cook, stirring often, until they are soft and golden, about 5 minutes. Add the chili powder, cumin, salt and Tabasco. Cook for 1 minute. Add the water and the chilies. Bring to a boil. Return the beef to the pot and reduce the heat to medium-low. Simmer until the beef is very tender, about 1½ hours.

Serve hot over rice and garnish with onions, cheese and sour cream.





# CORN BREAD FED

by Crescent Dragonwagon

**I**n a country, and world, that seems to grow ever more contentious and us-versus-them, is there no common ground? No place in which we can all rest? Yes. Cornbread. Everybody loves cornbread. I know. I spent six years writing a book about cornbread. When I answered the question, “What are you working on?” the response was instant. “Cornbread? I love cornbread!” It was not only the words that were near-universal, it was the tone: delighted surprise, as if reminded of a pure pleasure rarely thought of, almost forgotten,

yet greeted as an old, dear friend.

So, yes. Cornbread is a meeting place.

That’s why all of us should have a good cornbread recipe. It’s so very simple to make. Given this, and given the near-universal happiness it gives, why would you deny yourself that rarest of pleasures, delighting others?

Because cornbread is also a place of dissent.

Not everybody loves the same kind of cornbread. Sugar, or not? Bacon fat, or butter? Yellow cornmeal, or white? Universal

agreement on what makes cornbread love-worthy does not exist. Disagreement about cornbread, like so much, is just as common as love for it.

Most professed cornbread lovers have a cornbread that is to them the one and only good, real, true, authentic version, against which all others are sham. “If God had meant cornbread to have sugar in it, He’d have called it cake,” cookbook author/culinary memoirist Ronni Lundy said tartly. She’s been saying so for decades (since the 1980s, when she first wrote about the subject for *Esquire*). The author of the recently published *Victuals: An Appalachian Journey, with Recipes*, Lundy is the latest in a long line of those throwing down the cornbread gauntlet, a lineage that includes Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Frederick Douglass and Mark Twain.

Like many other my-way-is-best beliefs, cornbread loyalties often lie in our childhoods, the region where we spent them, and our race. Mostly, the cornbread we grew up with is the one to which we give allegiance and love.

Our rationales follow. Lundy recently told the *Charlotte Observer*, “... we don’t put sugar or flour in our cornbread in the mountain South ... those were things we’d have to buy ... be beholden to someone for. Your daily bread was things you could grow yourself ... the bread of my ... forebears resonates for me culturally as an act of independence ... an individual’s ability to feed him or herself.”

One cannot help but admire this line of thinking and self-sufficiency; yet Lundy’s skillet-baked cornbread contains baking soda, presumably purchased. The truly self-reliant cornbreads came earlier. Most of today’s eaters would not recognize them as cornbread: these breadstuffs were unleavened cakes of cornmeal, water, and salt — no milk, buttermilk, eggs. (These were often called hoecakes or ashcakes, because they were baked on the side of a hoe over the fire, or in the ashes themselves).

When such cakes were made from the finely ground cornmeal possible only when the corn to be ground had been alkalinized (as Native Americans did, using ground clamshells, ash, or chamisa bush, among many other pH-altering agents), they were ... tortillas. (Since the Native Americans were here first, and corn is the Americas’



**“The North thinks it knows how to make corn bread, but this is a gross superstition. Perhaps no bread in the world is quite as good as Southern cornbread, and perhaps no bread in the world is quite as bad as the Northern imitation of it.” —Mark Twain**

native grain, I think that truly, if we're talking real cornbread, it's the tortilla ... but these are fightin' words to many.)

Lundy's version is the standard-bearer of the white South. Here are some oversimplified generalizations describing the three main American skeins of cornbread:

1. Southern cornbreads as made by whites traditionally contain all cornmeal (usually white), no flour, no sugar. They use buttermilk, are usually leavened by baking soda, and baked in a hot skillet, with bacon fat, though butter is sometimes used.

2. Yankee cornbreads use equal or greater amounts of white flour than cornmeal, and that cornmeal is yellow. They are often quite sweet, and usually made with sweet (“regular”) milk, not buttermilk. Their go-to fat is butter, their leavening baking powder, and they're generally baked in a room temperature pan.

3. The traditional cornbread of black Americans reflects the great migration of people of color from South to North, combining the best elements of each. These cornbreads mix yellow cornmeal and flour, but never more flour than cornmeal. They are a little sweet but not too much, and are baked in a hot skillet. Their fat may be butter, bacon fat, vegetable oil, or a combination of all three. They also combine both baking powder and soda, and use buttermilk.

In the face of such loyalties, with so many authentic, beloved recipes and related family stories, what was I, the author of a book whose single subject was cornbread, to do? Especially when I took delight in almost every recipe, including those which contradicted each other?

What I did was title my book *The Cornbread Gospels*. “Gospels” with an s; plural, not singular. If there are many mansions in my father's house, why should there not be many cornbreads in my mother's kitchen?

Each cornbread has its own flavor and texture, its own story and ethnicity, its own ideal go-withs. Cornbreads like Lundy's

— pure, satisfying, but on the dry side — could not be better when accompanying a nice soupy bowl of beans, or even crumbled into the beans. It's also perfect used in that old Southern delicacy, incomprehensible to those who have not eaten it, but addictive to those who have, crumbled into buttermilk and eaten with a spoon (on the culinary continuum of cereal and milk, or yogurt and granola — grain and dairy, consumed together).

Flour-containing cornbreads would turn to mush if used thus. But when you want a tenderer, more moist, less austere cornbread, one that will serve as a beloved go-with to almost any meal and is delicious served on its own, I bow to the African-American style cornbreads.

The recipe that follows is a variation of the one that began my cornbread journey. It was made by a black woman named Viola, a Georgia native, our neighbor. I was in my teens, living in Brooklyn, New York, and Viola's cornbread astounded me. It was part of a goodbye dinner she made for us, a few nights before my then-husband and I moved to the South. There, eventually, in the tiny Ozark mountain town of Eureka Springs, Arkansas, I owned and ran a country inn and restaurant called Dairy Hollow House for many years.

My version of the recipe Viola gave me, the first I'd ever had that was baked in a buttery hot skillet (which adds the incomparable crispness on the bottom and sides), was, as I used to say, “the sun around which the other planets on the menu revolved.”

It is not overstating it to say that that move — from Brooklyn to the South — and this cornbread both changed my life.

For the better.

### ➤ *Crescent Dragonwagon*

*Crescent Dragonwagon — yes, that's her real name — is a James Beard award-winning culinary writer and cookbook author. She has also written 28 children's books. This is her first contribution to our magazine.*

## Cornbread

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

Vegetable oil cooking spray  
 1 cup unbleached white flour  
 1 cup stone-ground yellow cornmeal  
 1 tablespoon baking powder  
 ¼ teaspoon salt  
 ¼ teaspoon baking soda  
 1¼ cups buttermilk  
 2 tablespoons sugar  
 1 egg  
 ¼ cup mild vegetable oil  
 2 tablespoons butter, or mild vegetable oil

### HOW TO PREP

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Spray a 10-inch cast-iron skillet with oil and set aside.

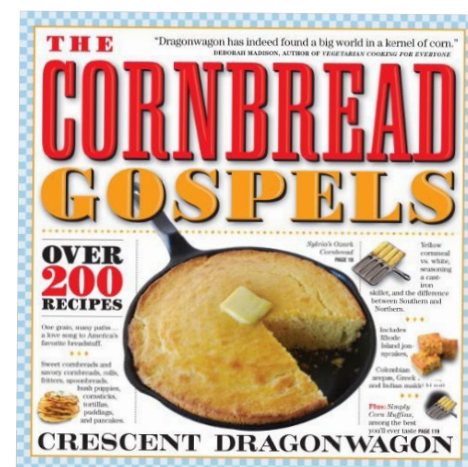
Sift together the flour, cornmeal, baking powder, salt and baking soda into a medium bowl.

In a smaller bowl, whisk together the buttermilk, sugar, egg and oil.

Put the prepared skillet over medium heat, add the butter, and heat until the butter melts and is just starting to sizzle. Tilt the pan to coat the sides and bottom.

Pour the wet ingredients into the dry and combine them quickly, using as few strokes as possible. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan and bake the cornbread until it is golden brown, about 20 minutes.

Let cool for a few moments, and slice into wedges to serve.







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# Barbecue Shrimp

by Tom Fitzmorris + photo by Romney Caruso

If you took a poll among New Orleanians as to what their favorite dish is, there'd be a variety of answers, but barbecue shrimp would come up — a lot. That's no surprise — the dish is on many restaurant menus, and with good reason. But few would expect it to outpoll gumbo, crawfish bisque, or charbroiled oysters and other iconic New Orleans dishes.

A fair amount of history lies behind the popularity of barbecue shrimp. Its ancestor appeared during the most fecund years of evolution for Creole and Cajun cookery,

from the last decades of the 1800s through the first years of the 1900s. The strongest force in those years was Italian, as large numbers of sailors, opera singers and cooks landed in New Orleans from Italy.

Barbecue shrimp is a variation of the classic Italian dishes *gamberi fra diavolo* (shrimp in the style of the devil's brother) and shrimp scampi.

Both of those dishes are similar to barbecue shrimp, but the real dish and its misleading name were unknown until the 1950s. It was a long evolution.

More on that in a moment. But we must now say what barbecue shrimp is — and what it is not. Barbecue shrimp isn't smoked or grilled. Nor is it served with anything even close to American barbecue sauce.

Instead, what you get are big — but not *too* big — shrimp, usually served with the shells, heads, tails and claws still intact. They are cooked in a sauce that is mostly butter and black pepper.

Beyond those main elements, the recipes for barbecue shrimp are quite varied. Among common ingredients in the sauce are garlic,





Worcestershire sauce, Louisiana hot sauce, lemon juice, white wine, beer and paprika.

If you ask me, the ingredients mentioned above add little to the flavor. Shrimp, butter and pepper are just about everything here. It's one of those dishes where, the simpler the recipe, the better the results.

The essence of barbecue shrimp comes more from the technique of cooking it than the ingredients. The versions I think are the best — as well as my own recipe — include only four major moves around the rangetop. Here they are:

*Pascal's Manale's Original Version:* This recipe is a secret, never published as far as I know. However, on a few occasions I watched older cooks who had cooked at Manale's (or were part of the family). I saw that they had a big pot full of the sauce, made with margarine, pepper and — most important — the juices that came from all the orders of barbecue shrimp cooked so far that day. It wasn't a deep-fry, but more like a light boil in the margarine/shrimp-juice/pepper matrix. The shrimp were lowered into this pot and cooked until done. Now and then the cook would top off the margarine and pepper. Note that this method would be hard to recreate at home, which probably adds to the secrecy as well as the flavor.

*Mr. B's Version:* Steam the shrimp in a covered pan with a small amount of watery liquid, moving them around until the shrimp are uniformly pink, but just barely. Shrimp cooked too long lose flavor, and overcooking can cause the meat to stick to the shells. (At last, what causes that problem is here defined.) Then you add the butter and pepper, and agitate the pan until the butter emulsifies into the liquid. This major breakthrough came from Chef Gerard Maras, whose idea this was in the 1980s.

*The Big-Batch Version:* Any more than two pounds of shrimp won't cook well in the above approach. To cook a lot of shrimp, I use a baking pan about two inches deep, with all the ingredients uniformly distributed. Then I cook the shrimp in the oven at about 350 degrees Fahrenheit. This is the easiest way to make barbecue shrimp, but it is also the method most likely to cause overcooking.

*Emeril's Revolutionary Version:* Almost all of Emeril Lagasse's restaurants serve this style of barbecue shrimp, and they are major house specialties. They are already peeled and beheaded, yet the flavor is still there. What the Bam! man does is make an intense shrimp stock from the shells and heads, reducing this down till he has a sort of shrimp demi-glace. Butter and pepper are added to this flavorful stuff, and there it is. Not having to peel the shrimp is a big plus for a lot of people.

If you make barbecue shrimp that veers away from any of the four approaches above, it may be good, but it won't be a certified classic.

## The History of Barbecue Shrimp

The most often asked question at Pascal's Manale Restaurant is, "What's a manale?" The restaurant was opened in 1913 by Frank Manale. When he died, he left the restaurant to his nephew Pascal Radosta, who was responsible for making Manale's (that's what we locals call the place) into the popular restaurant it became. For 40 years, Manale's had a big Italian menu, but there was no barbecue shrimp on it. Hard to imagine, that!

The dish's invention came around 1954, when one of Manale's regular customers buttonholed Pascal Radosta to tell him about an exciting dish he had just experienced in a restaurant in Chicago. It was nice big shrimp sloshed around in butter and herbs, he said — but he couldn't remember the dish's name. The man asked Pascal whether they could make the dish for hm. Pascal said they'd give it a shot. He went into the kitchen and explained the request to his brother and chef, Jake Radosta. Jake checked a few of his cookbooks and made a dish somewhere between scampi and fra diavolo. The customer said that what Jake had made was different from the Chicago dish, but he liked it even more.

"What is that man eating?" said some of the other customers. Next thing, the place was filled with people wanting the new shrimp dish. It quickly became the entree ordered by half of the diners on any given day. It got its name of barbecue shrimp a few days later. It was the best anybody could think of, thereby kicking off 50 years of confusion and good eating at Manale's.

*Just remember this:* In your travels around America, when you see something like "New Orleans-Style Barbecue Shrimp" on a menu, it is critically important that you ask, "Is there any barbecue sauce in this? Like the kind you'd put on ribs or brisket?" If the answer is yes, move on to the next entree, or perhaps to another restaurant. There are few worse dishes than what I just saved you from.

### ➤ Did you know?

*Rouses sells more than three million pounds of head-on wild Louisiana shrimp every year.*



## Barbecue Shrimp Serves 6 to 12

*This recipe is largely based on the new recipe created by Chef Gerard Maras in the early 1980s at Mr. B's. The butter emulsifies into the other liquid and gives not only a bigger flavor, but a nicer-looking dish. The amount of butter and pepper seems fantastic. Be bold. This is not a dish you will eat often — although you will want to.*

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 3 pounds fresh Gulf shrimp with heads on, 16-20 count to the pound
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 4 tablespoons black pepper (or more!)
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 3 sticks butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons paprika
- 1 loaf French bread

### HOW TO PREP

Rinse the shrimp and shake the excess water from them. Put them in a large skillet (or two) over medium heat, and pour the lemon juice, wine, Worcestershire, and garlic over it. Bring the liquids in the pan to a light boil and cook, turning the shrimp over with a spoon every two minutes or so, until all the brown-gray color in the shrimp is gone. Don't overcook! At the first moment when you think the shrimp might be done, they will be: lower the heat to the minimum.

Cover the shrimp with a thin but complete layer of black pepper. You must be bold with this. When you think you have enough pepper in there, you still need a little more. Add the paprika and salt.

Cut the butter into tablespoon-size pieces and distribute over the shrimp. With a big spoon, turn the shrimp over. Agitate the pan as the butter melts over the shrimp and emulsifies into the liquid at the bottom of the pan. When no more solid butter is visible. Remove the pan from the burner.

Serve the shrimp with lots of the sauce in bowls. Serve with hot French bread for dipping. Also plenty of napkins and perhaps bibs.

### ➤ **Pascal's Manale**

*Manale's Restaurant, now known as Pascal's Manale, opened in 1913 in a former corner grocery store at Napoleon Avenue and Dryades in New Orleans, LA. Pascal's Manale is best known for Barbecue Shrimp but also serves Louisiana-Italian dishes.*

## Barbecue Shrimp in the Oven Serves 8 to 12

*There's a limit (about three pounds) to how many shrimp can be done at one time in the emulsifying method above. For bigger quantities, I bake them in the oven instead. They come out nearly as good. The only loss is that the sauce loses its semi-creamy look. But that's more an appearance issue than one involving flavor.*

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 bay leaves
- 4-6 pounds fresh Gulf shrimp with heads on, 16-20 count to the pound
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ¼ cup dry white wine or beer
- 2 pounds salted butter
- 2 tablespoons paprika
- 2-4 tablespoons ground black pepper
- 2-3 loaves of toasted, hot New Orleans French bread

### HOW TO PREP

Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Use the garlic cloves to wipe the inside of a baking pan big enough to hold all the shrimp, or use two smaller pans. Squeeze the garlic, pressing it into the pan to get as much garlic oil as you can in there. Discard the garlic itself, but leave the little bits that came loose. Place two bay leaves at the bottom of the pan.

Wash and pat dry the shrimp, then lay them on their sides, crowded together and slightly overlapping, in the baking pan. Douse the shrimp with the lemon juice.

Cut the butter into cubes and distribute the cubes atop the shrimp. Sprinkle the shrimp with enough paprika and black pepper to cover them with a palpable black layer. Don't miss any spots! (And you don't have to use the whole can of pepper, either.)

Bake the shrimp in an oven preheated to 350 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 minutes. Move the shrimp from the outside of the pan to the center (some still may not have turned pink) so they all get exposed to the heat. Return the shrimp to the oven if necessary, but not for much longer. Check every couple of minutes, and when all the shrimp are pink, take them out. If you're wondering whether they're fully cooked, then they are. Your Creole-Italian instincts know how to cook barbecue shrimp.

Serve the shrimp in soup plates with lots of the sauce and toasted French bread — also with plenty of napkins and perhaps even bibs.



▲ Pascal's Manale's Barbecue Shrimp, New Orleans, LA — photo by Cheryl Gerber



# CRAWFISH Season

by Marcelle Bienvenu

Up until the late 1950s, crawfish was considered a “poor man’s food.” Local fishermen brought the crawfish from the swampy waters primarily for consumption by their own families. If there was more than enough for even the largest of Acadian families, the fishermen peddled the crawfish to friends and neighbors for mere pennies a pound.

The primary method of preparation at the time (in the early 1900s) was boiling the freshwater crustaceans to consume during the season of Lent when seafood predominantly was consumed by South Louisiana Catholics.

According to J. Richard “Dickie” Breaux in his book *How to Simply Cook Cajun*, “the first establishment to serve crawfish commercially was the Hebert Hotel in Breaux Bridge in the 1920s.” Guests flocked to the hotel where Mrs. Charles Hebert, the proprietress, and her two daughters prepared meals for them. Breaux explains that the sisters gave Mrs. Aline Guidry Champagne of Breaux Bridge the recipe for what has now become the most famous crawfish dish we know as étouffée, which means to smother. She cooked the dish for herself, but soon word spread about this delicious method of cooking crawfish and she began serving it to her customers.

The story goes that Aline’s father Henry Guidry had a dining facility in Henderson, La. known as Guidry’s Place at Henderson Landing in St. Martin Parish. The restaurant had many private dining rooms that seated about 12 people per room.

Breaux claims that the small dining rooms allowed the locals to eat boiled crawfish in private since they were not accustomed to eating them in front of strangers. (This was during the oil boom when there were visitors to South Louisiana who found it odd that people ate “mudbugs.”)

But once the community of Breaux Bridge proclaimed it was the Crawfish Capital of the World in 1959, the mudbugs became so popular that the LSU AgCenter developed crawfish agriculture (pond crawfish) to supply the demand. The “season” for catching crawfish in the wild usually was from January to June, but raising crawfish in ponds provided another source when the supply in the Atchafalaya Basin was not available.

Much like gumbo recipes, crawfish étouffée has various methods of preparation, which each cook proclaims “the best you’ll ever taste.” My mother, whom I trusted in all things culinary, proclaimed every time she put a pot on the stove for making étouffée, “If you make a roux, then you have a stew.” So no roux in her pot. She made what became known in the family as stew-fay because she added a slurry (a combination of flour and water) that helped to thicken the mixture.

But hey, that’s *her* recipe, and there is no doubt that the locals engage in many discussions about this subject, just as they will argue whether jambalaya should be brown or red (made so by the addition of tomatoes). And that’s a subject for another day.

## ➤ Suggested Reading

*Louisiana Crawfish, A Succulent History of the Cajun Crustacean* by Sam Irwin



## Crawfish Stew-Fay

Makes 4 to 6 servings

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- ¼ pound (1 stick) unsalted butter
- 2 cups chopped yellow onions
- 1 cup chopped green bell peppers
- ½ cup chopped celery
- 2 pounds peeled crawfish tails
- 1 heaping tablespoon all-purpose flour dissolved in ½ cup water
- Salt and cayenne
- 2 tablespoon chopped green onions
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley leaves
- Cooked long-grain rice

### HOW TO PREP

Heat the butter over medium heat in a large, heavy pot. Add the onions, bell peppers, and celery, and cook, stirring, until soft and lightly golden, 10 to 12 minutes. Add the crawfish and cook, stirring occasionally, until they begin to throw off a little liquid, about 5 minutes.

Add the water/flour mixture, reduce the heat to medium-low and cook, stirring occasionally, until the mixture thickens, 3 to 4 minutes. Season with salt and cayenne. Remove from the heat. Add the green onions and parsley. Serve in bowls over rice.

Of course, étouffée is not the only dish to make with crawfish. Home cooks and cutting edge chefs continue to put their own spin on traditional recipes and create new ones.





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## FIRE-ROASTED ARTICHOKE WITH TOMATO BALSAMIC CHUTNEY

### Ingredients:

- |   |                               |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 4 large Ocean Mist Farms Artichokes, cooked | ½ cup brown sugar             |
| 5 large tomatoes, diced                     | ½ cup golden balsamic vinegar |
| ½ medium yellow onion, chopped              | ½ teaspoon cumin              |
| ½ bunch green onions, chopped               | Salt and pepper, to taste     |
| 1 Tbsp. olive oil                           |                               |

### Directions:

Cut cooked artichokes in half, then place directly on grill. Turn frequently until outside petals are evenly charred.

Chutney: Cut tomatoes in half, squeeze to remove seeds. Roughly chop tomatoes into large dice and add to pot with remaining ingredients (excluding Artichokes). Simmer on medium-low for 30 minutes. Serve chutney at room temperature over grilled Artichokes.

Recipes and more at  
[AllAboutArtichokes.com](http://AllAboutArtichokes.com)







*Strut Your  
Stuffed*



by Kit Wohl + photo by Romney Caruso

**A**rtichokes may look a little daunting to the uninitiated, but all those spiky leaves hide a bit of tender goodness at the base and embrace a delicious heart. Frozen or canned artichoke hearts make a great shortcut, already cleaned and ready for use in salads and other recipes. Don't let their fierce appearance frightens you! Just sit next to me at dinner, and I'll instruct you in the ways of the artichoke.

If fresh is the way to go in your house, just slice off the stem close to the globe so the artichoke stands upright. Cooking them can be as simple as steaming them in a couple of inches of water for 45 minutes or so until a leaf easily pulls away, ready to be dipped into melted butter spiked with lemon. Add a little lemon or vinegar to the boiling water to help keep the artichoke green. After the leaves have all been nibbled, the heart awaits discovery at the base. Scrape off the fuzzy layer and enjoy. It brings a whole new meaning to the process of eating with your hands.

Using scissors, finicky cooks can clip away the top third of the spikes and slip a thin slice of lemon between the leaves for extra finesse and "oomph." If you're getting really fancy, artichoke plates are *de rigueur*, with a center divot to hold the artichoke upright, a shallow bowl for lemon butter sauce and an area for discarding the leaves. Appropriate sauces for artichokes include Hollandaise, mayonnaise or a nice garlicky aioli.

Iconic chef Warren Leruth set everyone scrambling to duplicate his now famous, classic artichoke and oyster soup. Cooks jealously guarded their own versions of the recipe, which finally made its way into many cookbooks and onto the Internet, where several excellent recipes are readily available to anyone who knows how to Google. It was far too good to keep as a secret for very long.

Savvy crawfish boilers often include in their pots some miniature artichokes — so tender that they can almost be consumed leaves and all. When steamed, cut in half and sautéed, these minis can make a special appearance on salads or as charming garnishes.

Romans, Greeks and adventurous, vegetable-loving populations from other Mediterranean countries have been cultivating artichokes for centuries. California is the primary producer in the United States; however, these scrumptious globes can be successfully grown in most Southern states below zone 7 on the USDA Plant Hardiness Zone Map. The Gulf South is no exception.

The Gulf Coast's Sicilian tradition places stuffed artichokes at the top of our local favorites list. Place one in the center of the table and watch everyone fight over it, all the while just smacking and smiling. You'll discover that one is just not enough unless there are only two people. Even then I like to have my own!

A word of caution: This recipe contains a good bit of garlic. If you've managed to consume more than your fair share, make certain that anyone you're planning on spending time with for the next few hours has done the same.

**Our local love affair with artichokes began in the late 19th, early 20th century when thousands of Southern Italian and Sicilian immigrants settled along the Gulf Coast.**

### ➤ **St. Joseph's Day**

*In the Middle Ages, Sicily was suffering from a severe drought, and the faithful prayed fervently to St. Joseph, the patron saint of the family, to end their suffering. When the rains finally came, a bumper crop of fava beans grew, saving the people from starvation. In thanks, Sicilians promised to honor and remember this great favor with altars adorned with food and erected each year in St. Joseph's honor. Because St. Joseph's Day (March 19th) always occurs during Lent, only meatless dishes are prepared. Much of the food includes "sawdust," or breadcrumbs, to honor St. Joseph the carpenter. The "lucky beans" are also a mainstay on the St. Joseph's Altar.*

*For a complete list of Rouses St. Joseph's Altars, visit [www.rouses.com](http://www.rouses.com).*

## Stuffed Artichokes

Serves 6 with hearty appetites or 12 friendly nibblers

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 6 large artichokes
- 6 lemons
- 10 cups Italian seasoned bread crumbs
- 1½ cups Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- 1 cup scallions, chopped
- ½ cup parsley, chopped
- 12 garlic cloves, finely minced
- 2 tablespoons salt
- 1 tablespoon freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tablespoon cayenne pepper
- 2½ to 3 cups olive oil
- 6 lemon slices
- 1 dash lemon juice or white vinegar

### HOW TO PREP

Using scissors, trim off the pointed ends of each artichoke and rub a lemon on the cut ends to prevent browning. Slice off the stem ends of each artichoke so they stand up straight in the pan.

Combine all the ingredients, except the artichokes and lemon slices in a large bowl. Add 2 cups of the olive oil and mix well until it has the texture of stuffing.

Spread the leaves of each artichoke open, without breaking them, and tuck as much stuffing as possible down into each leaf, tapping the artichoke gently to let any loose stuffing fall off.

Stand the artichokes in a casserole that is stovetop safe or a metal roasting pan just large enough to hold them in a single layer. Add water to a depth of 1½ inches and pour a generous amount of olive oil over each artichoke, letting it seep in. (If you prefer, you can add a dash of lemon juice or white vinegar to the water to help the artichokes retain their fresh green hue.) Juice a fresh lemon over each artichoke, and top with a slice of lemon.

Bring the water to a boil, then reduce the heat to low and steam the artichokes, covered, checking occasionally to see if it's necessary to add more water, for 45 minutes to an hour (possibly more), or until the leaves pull away easily and the pith — the tender, edible flesh at the base of each leaf — is soft. Serve hot or warm.

**Optional:** Add 1 cup fried chopped bacon or pancetta to stuffing mixture. The stuffed artichokes can be prepared in advance and reheated before serving. Leftover stuffing keeps for 2 weeks in the refrigerator and longer in the freezer. The stuffing is so delicious, it can be cooked and used to enhance almost any meal.





## LERUTH'S LEGACY

by Kit Wohl + photo courtesy G.E. Arnold,  
NOLA/The Times-Picayune archive

**B**lunt and persnickety, Chef Warren Leruth was not only creative but also a fearlessly innovative chef. He started out as a food chemist, so he was trained to be particular about his procedures and recipes.

In food circles, he was the Renaissance man who did things his way. Rather than expand with his restaurant's popularity, he removed tables. Generous with his time and talent, he developed dishes for other restaurateurs, and many of those recipes remain as standards of their kind.

New Orleans as a city for fine dining beyond Creole cuisine came to national attention in 1965, when Leruth renovated a Victorian shotgun cottage across the Mississippi River in Old Gretna. He stirred our culinary world forever. Who had ever heard of fried parsley as a garnish?

When the late and legendary chef introduced oyster and artichoke soup to the world at his eponymous restaurant, the dish became an instant classic. Families across the country quickly conjured up their personal versions of the "secret" recipe. As most secrets evolve, it wasn't one for very long. Now it is available in many variations of goodness in cookbooks and on the Internet. Sadly, Leruth never produced a cookbook, leaving only two small booklets and a handful of recipes reproduced in a few publications.

Chef Greg Reggio began his cooking career as an apprentice at LeRuth's. He recalls with fondness his days on the restaurant's kitchen line and credits his time there alongside Leruth for providing the inspiration and training he needed to succeed.

Greg is now one of the Taste Buds, a trio of chefs who have developed innovative recipes at such groundbreaking restaurants as Semolina, Zea Rotisserie & Grill and Mizado. Chefs Gary Darling and Hans Limburg are his partners.

Working with Gary Darling, who was then executive chef in Al Copeland's test kitchen, Leruth was also responsible for Popeyes biscuits and the restaurant chain's famous red beans and rice and dirty rice recipes. When you use a non-separating salad dressing or eat at Outback Steakhouse or Burger King, you could be enjoying something that Leruth created.

With his food chemistry background, Leruth was excruciatingly specific about each ingredient. He had strong opinions about tasting procedure and insisted that a flavor fully reveals itself on the third bite. He was the master of what he called "The Comeback Taste."

## Greg Reggio's Artichoke & Oyster Soup

Serves 10 to 12

*"The inspiration for this version of oyster and artichoke soup comes from my first professional cooking job at LeRuth's and my mother's oyster stew that highlighted fresh flavors and buttery finish," said Reggio. We think Leruth would be proud of this takeoff on his creation.*

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1/2 sticks unsalted butter, divided
- All-purpose flour, as needed
- 1 quart shucked raw oysters, with juices
- 1 cup diced (1/4-inch) yellow onion
- 1/2 cup diced (1/4-inch) celery
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped parsley
- 1 tablespoon Paul Prudhomme's Blackened Redfish Magic, or another low-salt Cajun spice blend
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme
- 2 cups heavy cream
- Shrimp stock, as needed, up to 1 cup
- Kosher or sea salt, to taste
- 1/2 cup sliced (1/4-inch) green onion
- 2 cups artichoke hearts

### HOW TO PREP

Begin to prepare this recipe by making a blond roux. Melt 1 stick of butter in a heavy, 6- to 8-quart pot over medium heat. Whisk in enough flour to bring the texture of the mixture to that of wet sand. Cook the roux until the color becomes a light tan and the aroma is somewhat nutty. Do not brown the roux. Remove the roux from the pot and set aside.

Place the oysters and their juices in a saucepan. Cook just until the oysters are plump and their edges fan out. Be careful to not overcook them. Remove the poached oysters from the liquid and spread them out on a sheet pan to cool. Reserve the liquid. Once the oysters are cool enough to handle, cut them into 1/2- to 3/4-inch pieces.

In another pan, blanch the artichoke hearts in boiling water until tender. Allow them to cool and cut them into 1/2-inch pieces.

Melt the remaining butter in the skillet. Add the onion, celery, garlic and parsley. Cook over medium heat until the onion is translucent and the celery is tender. Do not brown the vegetables.

Add the heavy cream, bring to a boil and simmer for 5 minutes. Whisk in enough of the roux to bring the thickness to that of cake batter. Add in all of the reserved oyster liquid and enough shrimp stock to thin the soup to a medium thick consistency, using up to 1 cup of shrimp stock to your preference. Cook for 5 minutes at a simmer. Adjust salt if necessary.

Just before serving, add the oysters, artichoke hearts and green onions.





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# EMERALD *Smiles*

by Crescent Dragonwagon

**T**he Irish actress Fionnula Flanagan was telling us about a dinner she had hosted at which my father had been present, four days before his unexpected death. “Well, you know how he was,” she said. “I served a chocolate cake, and he loved it. ‘Well, then, Maurice,’ I said, ‘Why don’t you just take the rest of it with you?’ ‘Oh, Fionnula, no! I couldn’t! Really?’ The

whole thing?’ ‘Of course the whole thing,’ I said. You’d think I’d given him diamonds.” My husband and I exchanged looks. Across the surreality of it all, at least one minor mystery was solved: that empty wooden cake box, the name of its high-end bakery painted in gold leaf atop it — what, we’d wondered, was it doing sitting near the front door of my father’s Los Angeles apartment? Larger mysteries remained, as they always

do with an unexpected death. We had tried to unravel them, though we’d not yet fully comprehended the basics: My 77-year-old father’s heart had abruptly stopped beating. His sudden death upended normality. Ned and I flew in from the middle of the country, arranging his memorial and clearing out his apartment. The week we did that we somehow ended up (I have no memory of how) as houseguests of kind Fionnula, whom we’d never met before this turn of events.





photo by Romney Caruso

Besides being my much-loved father, Maurice Zolotow was a show-business biographer. We knew him precisely as Fionnula described him: the life of the party as always, at what turned out to be the last party of his life. So large were his enthusiasms, so deep his engagement, so limitless both his own stories and his interest in other people's stories, so bracing his laugh, so eccentric his theories (at least some of them), that he gave off a kind of

**“Working on an article about St. Patrick’s Day and wanting to think outside the corned-beef-and-cabbage, green-food coloring box, thinking also of Maurice and his love of both the Irish and chocolate, I began contemplating a chocolate cake, in which the bitterness that is part of chocolate’s unique seduction, was heightened by the use of Guinness in the batter.”**

crackle. His exuberance was, perhaps, just this side of crazy, but whether you were his friend, colleague, subject or daughter, you could not help but be charmed and intoxicated.

I could, and someday probably will, write a full-length memoir about Maurice (who, among other things, was Marilyn Monroe’s first biographer). But for the purposes of this story and recipe (my Guinness Extra Stout Chocolate Layer Cake), you need only know the following about my father: 1. That he adored the Irish, especially Irish writers and especially James Joyce. 2. That, on no factual basis whatsoever, he considered the Irish one of the 10 lost tribes of Israel.

3. That he loved eating and, until it got the better of him and he finally quit, drinking. 4. That after he quit drinking, he developed a ferocious sweet tooth and grew voraciously fond of chocolate. And, for the purposes of this story, you need only know the following about me:

1. That I write in five different genres, one of them being culinary, and that I sometimes invent or develop recipes. 2. That, from the early ’80s through the late ’90s, I co-owned and ran a country inn, which for six years included a restaurant, in an Ozark mountain village. Overlay these two sets of facts, and you can well imagine that my father loved coming to visit us in Arkansas, staying at the inn and eating at its restaurant. His favorite dessert was a densely chocolate-y bread pudding, served dolloped with softly whipped, barely sweetened cream and a squiggle of raspberry sauce.

The night I first brought it out to him from the kitchen, he removed his glasses so he could examine it closely. Then he plunged his spoon into it and placed it into his mouth. His eyes closed in bliss as

he rolled its velvety custard on his tongue. He swallowed. He opened his eyes, said, “Wow,” and took a second bite. After that, glasses still off, he gazed up at me from the banquette, his pale blue eyes large. “Cres,” he said sincerely, “On a scale of one to 10, I give this a 10,000.”

When Ned and I got back from Los Angeles, we returned to our then lives as innkeepers/restaurateurs. I renamed the dessert “Chocolate Bread Pudding Maurice.” The squiggle of raspberry became an “MZ,” piped on quickly, valentine red on the white plate, the scoop of bread pudding, whipped cream, a few fresh berries, a sprig of mint, across from the “MZ.” As the waiters would peel in and out of the kitchen, they’d call out their dessert orders. “I need a Maurice!” “Three Maurices!” Sometimes, hearing his name in this new-old context made me cry, sometimes smile.

During this same period, I listened to 28 cassette tapes of various Alcoholics Anonymous talks my father had given. He spoke about how drinking was associated, in his early years, with the mythology of writing; about Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner and, inevitably, Joyce. “On my first trip to Dublin, I couldn’t wait to have a Guinness. That was what James Joyce drank,” he said in one talk. The night he arrived, he’d left his hotel, gone to the nearest pub, and eagerly ordered one. “It was bitter,” he said, his voice on the tape with the same old crackle, though he himself had vanished from this world. “And at room temperature. I said to the bartender, ‘It’s bitter!’ and he said, ‘Sure, and it’s supposed to be.’” Maurice spoke about how he thought at first he’d been too good for AA. “At one meeting I mentioned James Joyce. Someone came up to me after the meeting and said, ‘Yeah, Jimmy Joyce, I know him, lives in the Valley,



works a good program!’ Can you imagine? I was a terrible snob ... Yet through this same program I met someone who introduced me to Fionnula Flanagan, the actress who played Joyce’s wife in his work *Women!* So that shows you what I knew.”

Time flew by, as in the old black-and-white movie convention of calendar pages blowing away. My father died (20 years sober) in 1991. In 1998, we closed the inn and restaurant. In 2000, Ned, my husband, also died unexpectedly. I continued to live and love, cook and eat, with an ever-growing sense of appreciating the moment you had and the people you were with. I do so to this day.

In 2009, while working on an article about St. Patrick’s Day and wanting to think outside the corned-beef-and-cabbage, green-food-coloring box, and thinking also of Maurice and his love of both the Irish and chocolate, I began contemplating a chocolate cake, in which the bitterness that is part of chocolate’s unique seduction was heightened by the use of Guinness in the batter. After several tries and the addition of currants (a fruit much loved and used in Irish baking), I came up with this one, easily one of the best desserts — dense yet delicate, moist and melting — I have ever developed or made, and over which everyone I’ve ever served it to has swooned. Oh, how I wish I could serve it to Maurice! (For him, I would have boiled the Guinness first, to evaporate the alcohol.) But I can do so only in dreams, in my imagination — though knowing, through the bread pudding and that cake box, how much he would have appreciated it. “Fionnula,” I told her back in 1991, “We found the box from that cake you sent him home with. There wasn’t a crumb left.”

## ➤ Guinness Extra Stout

*Guinness Extra Stout is based on a beer first brewed in 1821. It is the precursor of every Guinness innovation you’ve ever enjoyed.*

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**Smithwick’s Superior:** *One of the most famous examples of Irish red ale.*

**Killian’s:** *This deep, ruby red beer is full-bodied with an aroma and flavor of toasted caramel.*

## Guinness Extra Stout Chocolate Layer Cake

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

#### Drizzling Syrup:

- 1/3 cup Guinness Extra Stout (measured after foam has subsided)
- 1/3 cup dark brown sugar
- 3 tablespoons unsweetened, non-Dutch cocoa powder
- 1 teaspoon vanilla

#### Cake:

- 2/3 cup Guinness Extra Stout (measured after foam has subsided)
- 2/3 cup dried currants
- 1/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons, unsweetened, non-Dutch cocoa powder
- 2 ounces semisweet chocolate, cut into small pieces
- 3/4 cup buttermilk
- 1 3/4 cups plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 cups plus 2 tablespoons all-purpose unbleached white flour
- Cooking spray
- 2/3 cup butter, softened
- 4 eggs
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 cup currant jelly, warmed

#### Bittersweet Icing:

- 1 1/2 cups heavy cream
- 6 ounces bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 4 1/2 tablespoons powdered sugar
- 4 1/2 tablespoons cocoa
- 1 1/2 teaspoons vanilla
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1 cup chopped walnuts, toasted

### HOW TO PREP

To prepare syrup, combine all syrup ingredients in a small, heavy saucepan, whisking until smooth. Heat over medium heat until sugar dissolves and syrup is smooth.

To prepare cake, pour stout over currants; cover and soak until plump.

Drain currants, reserving stout. Add stout to a small saucepan. Whisk in 1/3 cup cocoa and bring to a simmer. Remove from heat; add semisweet chocolate, stirring until chocolate melts. Cool slightly. Stir in buttermilk. Preheat oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit.

Combine 2 tablespoons cocoa, 2 tablespoons sugar and 2 tablespoons flour. Coat two 8- or 9-inch square or round cake pans with cooking spray; dust with cocoa mixture.

Beat butter with a mixer at medium speed until smooth. Gradually beat in 1 3/4 cups sugar until well blended. Beat in eggs one at a time. Beat in vanilla.

Combine 2 cups flour with baking soda, baking powder and salt. Add flour mixture to butter mixture alternately with chocolate mixture, stirring until blended. (Batter may look curdled.) Stir in currants.

Divide batter between pans. Bake 25 to 30 minutes, until a wooden toothpick inserted in the center comes out clean. Cool in pans on a wire rack 10 minutes; invert onto rack.

Poke tops of cake layers with a skewer or toothpick. Spoon Drizzling Syrup over tops. Place one layer on a platter. Spread warmed jelly over layer on the platter. Chill 30 minutes.

To make the icing, bring cream to a boil. Place chocolate in a heatproof bowl, pour boiling cream over it, and whisk until chocolate melts and is thoroughly combined. Cover tightly and chill. Chill beaters from a handheld mixer at the same time. Up to 3 hours before serving the cake, whip chocolate mixture with a handheld mixer. When soft peaks form, sift in confectioners’ sugar and cocoa, and add vanilla and salt. Continue whipping until combined.

Spread about a quarter of the Bittersweet Icing over the jelly. Place second cake layer on top.

Ice top and sides of the cake with the remaining icing. Press nuts into sides of cake.







# PIE DAY

by Marcelle Bienvenu + photo by Romney Caruso

**M**y first introduction to sweet dough pies, known locally as *tarte-a-la-bouillie* (which literally translated means a tart or pie filled with custard), was in the 1960s on Good Friday in Catahoula, a small village nestled along the levee that contains the Atchafalaya Basin in St. Martin Parish. For ever so long, it was customary for Papa and Mama and all the children to spend the Easter weekend at our camp on Catahoula Lake.

On Good Friday, all of us would attend the afternoon services at the small church, then return to the campgrounds for boiled crawfish. By the time we were sucking the last of the heads and peeling the tails, a small entourage of ladies headed by Tootie Martin Guirard (later, Emma Lou Bourque took over after Ms. Tootie passed away) arrived bearing sweet dough pies for us to enjoy.

I remember the ladies telling us that Good Friday in Catahoula was long known as “pie day,” and it was the custom for the ladies of the village to labor for several days making the sweet treats to consume on Good Friday after they recited the rosary at 10:00am in the morning. You see, the Catholic Church deems that on this holy day, everyone must fast and have only one meal. Not wanting to break the religious rule, the innovative inhabitants made sure their one meal was a long and good one.

What our family enjoyed later in the day were any of the pies that were not eaten by the good ladies, and we eagerly waited for them each year since that was the only time they were available. But, thankfully, in later years the ladies began making hundreds of the pies to be sold at their annual spring fair to raise money for their community.

One fine spring day I joined the ladies in the school cafeteria to watch firsthand just how they made these simple but delicious pastries. The group of ladies, each wrapped in aprons, chatted and worked in a steady rhythm as I wandered from table to table. Miss Emma Lou, their leader, scurried here and there, counting pies, checking on the consistency of the dough, and doling out the custard. When it was time to take my leave, Miss Emma Lou pulled me to the side and gave me the recipe for these coveted pies.

## Catahoula Sweet Dough Pies

Makes 4 pies

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- ¾ cup solid vegetable shortening
- 1 cup sugar
- ½ cup milk
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 4 teaspoons baking powder

### HOW TO PREP

Cream the shortening and the sugar together. In a small mixing bowl, combine the milk, eggs and vanilla and mix well. Add to the shortening and sugar and blend. Combine the flour and the baking powder. In a large mixing bowl, add a little of liquid mix together with the dry ingredients. Continue alternating the mixture until all is used and the dough comes away from the side of the bowl.

Divide the dough into four equal parts. (It's best to wrap the dough in plastic wrap at this point and chill for at least one hour.)

Roll out the dough on a floured surface to about ¼-inch thick. Carefully lift the dough and place it in each of four 9-inch pie pans, crimp the edges and add the filling. Bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes or until the crust is golden brown. (The ladies usually do not put tops on the large pies, but extra dough can be used to make a lattice on each pie.)

## Custard Filling

Makes enough filling for 1 pie

### WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- 1 (12-ounce) can evaporated milk
- 12 ounces water in which ½ cup cornstarch has been dissolved
- 1 cup sugar (or more, according to desired sweetness)
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### HOW TO PREP

Combine all of the ingredients in a saucepan. Slowly bring to a boil and stir until the mixture thickens. Cool and pour into unbaked pie shells. To make a coconut filling, add 1 cup shredded coconut to the custard when cooling.

### ➤ Ready-Made at Rouses

*Rouses tarte-a-la-bouillie custard pies are perfect for Pie Day and Easter. The recipe has been passed down from generation to generation.*





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