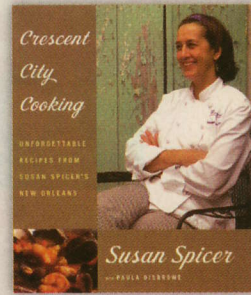
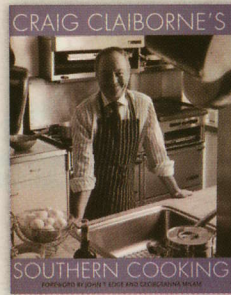
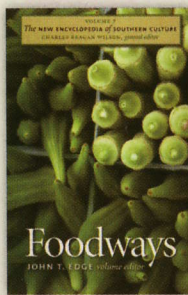
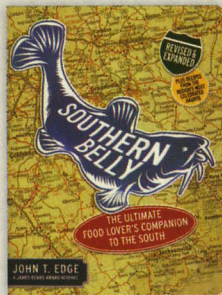


# A Southern Review

*Recent books suggest different notions of Southern cooking.*



Is Southern food simply what we eat in the South? Or is it the way we used to eat? In the lively *Southern Belly* (Algonquin), first published in 2000 and revised this year, John T. Edge tries to define Southern food by collecting the stories of the people who put the pork, grits, barbecue and fried chicken on our plates. Edge is a culinary preservationist, so his idea of Southern food is deeply rooted in decades long past.

I've lived in five of the cities featured in *Southern Belly*, and I can't say that Edge captures the places I know. The restaurants where I normally ate were more modern and more diverse than those in this book. (To be fair, I lived in college towns and bigger cities.) He does, however, paint dead-on portraits of the curious little culinary corners that get older each year but barely change.

When he comes to New Orleans, what Edge describes sounds like home. What New Orleanian goes a week without Leidenheimer bread? And people pack into Casamento's for the retro vibe as much as for the best oysters in town. New Orleans, for better and for worse, is stuck in the past.

*Foodways*, volume seven of the *New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture* (University of North Carolina), rounds up a team of writers and scholars—with Edge again leading the charge as editor—to define Southern food. The tone sometimes wobbles as academics can be dry and writers often try too hard to entertain. The info, which ranges from Appalachian home cooking to the commercial empire of Coca-Cola, is solid. Familiar names such as former *Times-Picayune* food critic Gene Bourg and Susan Tucker of the Newcomb Institute deftly handle our quirky corner of Southern cuisine. *Foodways* is a book for anyone whose interest in Southern food is really an obsession. It's also a source of obscure and curious facts. For example, you can amaze your friends with the true story of Duncan Hines (hint: he wasn't a baker).

Reading the late Craig Claiborne's *Southern Cooking* (University of Georgia), originally published in 1987 and reissued this year, is as good as a semester's worth of advanced classes on Southern food. Claiborne, a Mississippi native who revolutionized food writing as the editor for the *New York Times'* dining section, writes with a deep knowledge of classical French cooking and a lifetime of study. In a few nimble sentences, he explains the difference between French and New Orleans rémoulade sauces or traces the name of the benne wafer, a Charleston specialty, back to West Africa. Claiborne is learned, but never pedantic. He sprinkles the lessons with anecdotes from his Southern childhood. And his tastes are broad. Claiborne declares, for example, that blackened redfish and Buffalo wings are the two greatest additions to modern American cuisine. *Southern Cooking* is the work of a master teacher and a rare cookbook that's worth reading cover to cover.

Is Susan Spicer of Bayona a Southern chef? I doubt that she'll ever earn an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, but after cooking in our city for 28 years, she is certainly a New Orleans chef. Spicer doesn't shout like some of her generation, but she's had a broad impact on the way we eat. More than once, a chef has told me that a meal at Bayona convinced him to move to New Orleans or to come back home.

Spicer has finally collected her recipes into *Crescent City Cooking* (Knopf). It's a personal, idiosyncratic book that matches the style of a chef as comfortable with tasso as Asian chile paste. At times, the beginners tips scattered throughout seem misdirected in a work aimed at more experienced home cooks. Unlike many cookbooks by professional chefs, however, *Crescent City Cooking* is filled with enticing recipes that won't require a week of vacation to pull off. And yes,

both the sweetbreads with sherry mustard butter and the goat cheese crouton with mushrooms and Madeira cream sauce—two Bayona staples—are included in *Crescent City Cooking*.

## More Books

Visit OffBeat.com for reviews of 86 *Recipes: New Orleans* edited by Lorin Gaudin, *Joe Simmer's Healthy Slow Cooking* and Dominique Macquet's *Tropical Latitudes*, as well as new books on cocktail culture: *Mixing New Orleans* by Phillip Collier, and *In the Land of Cocktails* by Ti Adelaide Martin and Lally Brennan.

## Other News

Alberta has closed, but Vizard's on the Avenue will take over its Magazine Street space. Chef Kevin Vizard hopes to have his restaurant reopened Uptown by New Year's Eve....Slade Rushing and Alison Vines-Rushing, who ran the shuttered Longbranch, have a new home in the CBD at MiLa....RioMar has opened a new tapas bar next door to the restaurant....Ask author Wayne Curtis (*And a Bottle of Rum*) everything that you've ever wanted to know about rum at a seminar on December 8. The \$150 course includes a spirit-paired lunch at Café Adelaide and a tour of Celebration Distillery. Visit [www.talesofthecocktail.com](http://www.talesofthecocktail.com) for more information.... Through the end of February, the Rib Room has a special menu from Argentina....Every Saturday through Christmas, Savy Gourmet offers free classes at 10 a.m....

Café Adelaide: 300 Poydras St., 595-3305  
MiLa: 817 Common St., 412-2580  
Rib Room: 621 St. Louis St., 529-7046  
RioMar: 800 S. Peters St., 525-3474  
Savy Gourmet: 4519 Magazine St., 895-2665  
Vizard's on the Avenue: 2203 St. Charles Ave., 529-9912