SC CHEF AMBASSADORS
PASSION ON A PLATE

MAKE THEIR MARK WITH SIGNATURE DISHES

By Libby Wiersema • Photos by Perry Baker, Michael Hrizuk & Chris M. Rogers

South Carolina, your flavors are showing, thanks in no small part to our dedicated Chef Ambassadors. Each year, four gifted chefs are chosen to represent their regions—charged with relating the story of South Carolina’s food heritage through various activities and, of course, their dishes. Our Chef Ambassadors reveal their signature dishes that define South Carolina cuisine.

2018

Kiki Cyrus’ CHICKEN AND WAFFLES • Kiki’s Chicken and Waffles, Columbia

Cyrus’ pairing of Belgian waffles the size of plates with a quartet of crusty, fresh-from-the-fryer, jumbo chicken wings is all the flap among the local foodie crowd. Hot sauce and warm syrup on the side set it off.

“Coming to our restaurant as a first-time guest and trying the chicken and waffles is a MUST.”

Sarah McClure’s CREOLE SHRIMP & GRITS • Southside Smokehouse & Grille, Landrum

This chef has a curious confession: She’s never liked shrimp and grits. The fact she loves this version is a testament to her culinary savvy. The fact that diners can’t get enough of it is pure gravy.

“My version includes more vegetables than many, as well as cubed andouille sausage. We use Adluh grits with lots of cream and parmesan, and my sauce incorporates seasonings that have a Lowcountry flair, along with white wine and heavy cream.”

Heidi Vukor’s TRIPLE CHOCOLATE MOUSSE CAKE • Croissants Bistro & Bakery, Heidi’s Corner and Hook & Barrel, Myrtle Beach

This cake is constructed of light-as-air whipped cream spiked with chocolate ganache over chocolate mousse that covers a gooey, fudgy layer. The praline crust pulls each element together for a decadent dessert.

“Trying to stay with the South Carolina theme, the bottom of the cake is made with South Carolina pecans.”

Michelle Weaver’s CRAB CAKE • Charleston Grill, Charleston

Her dish is a prime example of melding the best of the world with the best of the South. Beautiful jumbo lump blue crab is served with a lime and heirloom tomato vinaigrette, local shrimp and fresh dill.

“The crab cake itself is all crab, no cake.”
William Cribb’s CAROLINA Q TACO • Willy Taco, Greenville & Spartanburg and Cribbs Kitchen, Spartanburg

Chef Cribb uses his kitchen wizardry to juxtapose South Carolina and Southwestern flavors for a match made in taco heaven. It’s no wonder this pocket sandwich has a cult-like following.

“The way the slow roasted mojo pulled pork pairs with the slaw, sweet and spicy house-made piddle and chipotle barbecue sauce is a perfect taco umami.”

Amy Forte’s PIMENTO CHEESE • The Flipside Cafe, Fort Mill & The Flipside Restaurant, Rock Hill

Sharp white cheddar gives this “Southern pâté” a surprising twist that makes it a worthy appetizer or crowning touch for other Flipside dishes. “It is fantastic as an appetizer served with crispy pretzels. But it also goes great on our Chuck Burger with lettuce and bacon and onion jam.”

Adam Kirby’s HERB-ENCRUSTED GROUPER • Bistro 217 & Rustic Table, Pawleys Island

South Carolina scamp grouper grouper gets an herby makeover that highlights its sweet flavor profile, and is paired with paprika-roasted Yukon gold potatoes, wilted spinach and is finished with a caper brown-butter sauce.

“I’ve had this dish on all my menus. It is our best-seller—simple, light, fresh, local. The sauce makes the dish.”

Sean Mendes’ CATFISH CHARLESTON • Blues Cajun Kitchen, Roadside Seafood & Gillie’s Soul Food, Charleston

Widely known for his soulful seafood masterpieces, Mendes seasons and backens a succulent catfish fillet, tops it with a rich sauce studded with South Carolina shrimp, crab and crawfish, then serves it on a bed of dirty rice.

“To me, this dish embodies everything about coastal South Carolina, with a Cajun twist.”
Ramone Dickerson’s SONG OF THE SOUTH STUFFED CHICKEN WINGS • 2 Fat 2 Fly, Columbia

Carolina-raised chicken wings are stuffed with white rice and sautéed collards from W.P. RAWL’s local family farm. They are then dredged in Adluh breading and fried to crispy perfection.

“Song of the South is the heartbeat of all things Southern and tastes like 4:45 on a Sunday afternoon.”

Forrest Parker’s LOWCOUNTRY PIRLOU • Drawing Room, Charleston

As gumbo and jambalaya are to New Orleans, rice pilou is to Charleston. Each forkful is studded with fresh shrimp, crab, grouper and lobster.

“It speaks of Carolina Gold rice culture, diaspora and, with the addition of saffron, nods to the lost century of Spanish influence. Because we feature Certified South Carolina products, it also means it’s delicious!”

Orchid Paulmeier’s CHICKEN AND RIB PLATTER • One Hot Mama’s American Grille, Hilton Head Island

Sticky ribs caramelized with her original Perfect 10 sauce are served alongside chicken that is slow smoked, coated in SC-produced Adluh breading, then fried until crusty. Dirty rice, fresh collards and warm honey-jalapeno cornbread accompany for full Southern effect.

“This is my go-to dinner with the perfect balance of salty, sweet, spicy and tangy.”

Teryl Youngblood’s TROUT WITH SPRING VEGETABLES • Formerly of Passerelle Bistro, Greenville

Though Chef Youngblood has taken a kitchen sabbatical, she teaches occasional cooking classes and finds pleasure in creating beautiful meals for her family including a lovely fish dish you can replicate at home. Go to DiscoverSouthCarolina.com/online-guide for the recipe.
Cooper Thomas’ PECAN-ENCRUSTED CAROLINA SHRIMP • Victors, Florence

Local pecans are toasted and ground then added to bread crumbs, creating a coating for succulent shrimp from our coastal waters. Served lightly fried with a side of house-made Creole honey mustard, the dish teeters between spicy and sweet.

“This dish focuses on two predominant South Carolina ingredients. We are able to purchase both pecans and shrimp right here in the state.”

Chef Heidi Tull’s TOMATO PIE • Grits & Groceries, Belton

Flaky crust is the vehicle for a delicious cargo of sauteed onion, layers of sliced home-grown tomatoes and a generous topping of mayo mixed with hoop cheese and spices. Baked up bubbly and brown, this pie delivers a true taste of South Carolina summers.

“For me, it is the dish that brings back memories of my childhood in Sumter.”

Brandon Velie’s MANCHESTER FARMS QUAIL • Juniper, Ridge Spring

Local farms supply the savory nuts and bolts of this award-winning dish. Tender, farm-raised quail is paired with Adluh grits and flash-fried Watsonia Farms collards. A drizzle of his Midlands BBQ sauce gives the overall result a regional touch.

“This dish has a real flavor of not just South Carolina, but very specifically the Midlands region. It really is South Carolina on a plate!”

Brian Waters’ SHRIMP & GRITS • Saltus River Grill, Beaufort

Building on the South Carolina shrimp and stone-ground grits basics, the star power on the otherwise humble dish comes from rich additions like cream cheese, chicken stock, chanterelle mushrooms and pork belly.

“This dish has been a labor of love for me, and while I get many requests for the recipe (which I honor), it is an incredibly time- and labor-intensive process. That, too, is a good reason to come here and try it.”