

food

Down-home good

Long Island restaurants serve up Southern comfort



NEWSDAY PHOTO / JIM PEPPER



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Juanita Cooke of The Cooke's In, above, and, right, Lillian and Leisa Dent of LL Dent.

BY JOAN REMINICK
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Have you noticed, lately, that filet mignon with porcini risotto is being upstaged by pulled pork with spoon bread?

Or that Chilean sea bass with Thai curry emulsion has taken a back seat to fried catfish? Long Islanders have been hankering for homey Southern comforts — and finding them at a growing number of dining spots in Nassau and Suffolk. Witness the rash of 2006

Southern-style restaurant openings: In Carle Place, the mother-daughter team of Lillian and Leisa Dent launched LL Dent, specializing in dishes like Southern fried chicken, candied yams and banana pudding. In Huntington Station, Adam Goldgel, who used to cook at the high-style

Panama Hatties, has moved a few miles west to open Hog House Barbecue, where his brisket is smoked low and slow and served with house-made pickles. Over in Commack, restaurateur Art Bloom has transformed the stylish Blue Oyster Grille into the down-home Jackson's, where one can get a rack of barbecued ribs with mac and cheese. And in Baldwin, chef Kariton Harris just reopened Cornbread & Caviar (a restaurant he closed three years ago at another address) with "hot manna" fried chicken and Georgia peach chutney on the menu. Out in the Hamptons, come summer, the soon-to-be Mumbo Gumbo in Sag Harbor will offer up chef Noah Jaques' Bayou-style gumbos and dry-rubbed smoked St. Louis ribs in surroundings meant to evoke a Delta fish shack.

What gives, y'all?

Rich in culture and history

Nothing all that new, says John T. Edge, director of the Southern Foodways Alliance and author of "Southern Belly" and "A Gracious Plenty: Recipes and Recollections From the American South."

"The interest in Southern food is cyclical," said Edge. "Think about the spike in interest in all things Southern that paralleled Jimmy Carter's presidential candidacy. Before

that, in the late '60s, there was the soul food craze. Then, there was the Paul Prudhomme and blackened redfish craze. What's happening today is, as Americans embrace the idea and the ideal of regional cookery, they look south for something genuine, vernacular and honest. For many people, the South is this last bulwark against strip mall America."

The food of the South is rich in culture and history, says Harris of Cornbread & Caviar. "Some people grew up on it and they like to revisit that taste. And, then, it's introduced to others, who find it home-ish."

Juanita Cooke, a woman way ahead of the curve, has been serving heaping platters of home-ish Southern food for the past 10 years at her Huntington Station restaurant, The Cooke's In. She goes back decades to trace the cuisine's popularity in the Northeast.

"The Southern black influence has a lot to do with it," Cooke said, citing the fact that many transplanted African-Americans found work up North as domestics, preparing dishes of the South in the homes where they were working. Integration and the civil rights movement had some bearing, too, she said, introducing Northern activists to foods served in the homes and churches of the South. Cooke attributes the Cajun craze to the rise in travel to the region, along with "the Mardi Gras

Where to get ribs, pulled pork, fried chicken and more

Got a yen for a rack of smoky ribs or a plate of crunchy, juicy fried chicken? You might find just what you crave at one of these restaurants:

NASSAU COUNTY
The Bayou, 2823 Jerusalem Ave., North Bellmore, 516-785-9263 — Cajun, Creole, Southern
Big Boy's Grill, 498 Uniondale Ave., Uniondale, 516-292-1025 — Barbecue and New Orleans-style cooking
Big Daddy's, 1 Park Lane, Massapequa Park, 516-799-8877 — Southern, Cajun, Creole and barbecue
Cornbread & Caviar, 1299 Grand Ave., Baldwin, 516-377-7779 —

Southern and eclectic
Jadé, 143 N. Franklin St., Hempstead, 516-483-2271 — Southern
LL Dent, 221 Old Country Rd., Carle Place, 516-742-0940 — Southern
R.S. Jones, 153 Merrick Ave., Merrick, 516-378-7177 — Southern, Southwestern and barbecue
SUFFOLK COUNTY
Adam's Rib, 753 W. Montauk Hwy., West Babylon, 631-587-4623 — Southern and barbecue
Belle's Cafe, Gabreski Airport, Main Terminal, County Road 31, Westhampton Beach, 631-288-3927 — Southern, Caribbean, Creole and Cajun
Blackbird's (formerly Sweet Magnolia's), 553 Old Montauk Hwy., Sayville, 631-563-4144 — Southern

B. Smith's, Long Wharf Promenade, Sag Harbor, 631-725-5858 — Eclectic with a Southern twist
The Cooke's In, 767 New York Ave., Huntington Station, 631-424-2181 — Southern and Caribbean
El Dorado Barbecue, 1986 Middle Country Rd., Centereach, 631-588-7227 and 4837 Rte. 347, 631-473-8525 — Southern barbecue
Farmer Bar-Cutchoque Barbecue Co., 4805 Depot Lane, Cutchogue, 631-734-5410 — Southern barbecue
Hog House Barbecue, 200 W. Jericho Tpke., Huntington, 631-271-4200 — Barbecue, Southern, eclectic
Jackson's, 6005 Jericho Tpke., Commack, 631-462-0822 — Casual

American with Southern classics
Magnolia, 29 Main St., Sag Harbor, 631-725-0101 — Eclectic with Southern bent
Smokin' Al's Famous BBQ Joint, 19 W. Main St., Bay Shore, 631-206-3000 — Southern barbecue
Tennessee Jack's BBQ, 148 Carleton Ave., East Islip, 631-581-9657 — Southern barbecue
Turtle Crossing, 221 Pantigo Rd., East Hampton, 631-324-7166 — Barbecue, Southern, Southwestern and Tex-Mex
Yazoo City, 143 N. Wellwood Ave., Lindenhurst, 631-226-1100 — Regional American with strong Southern leanings

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