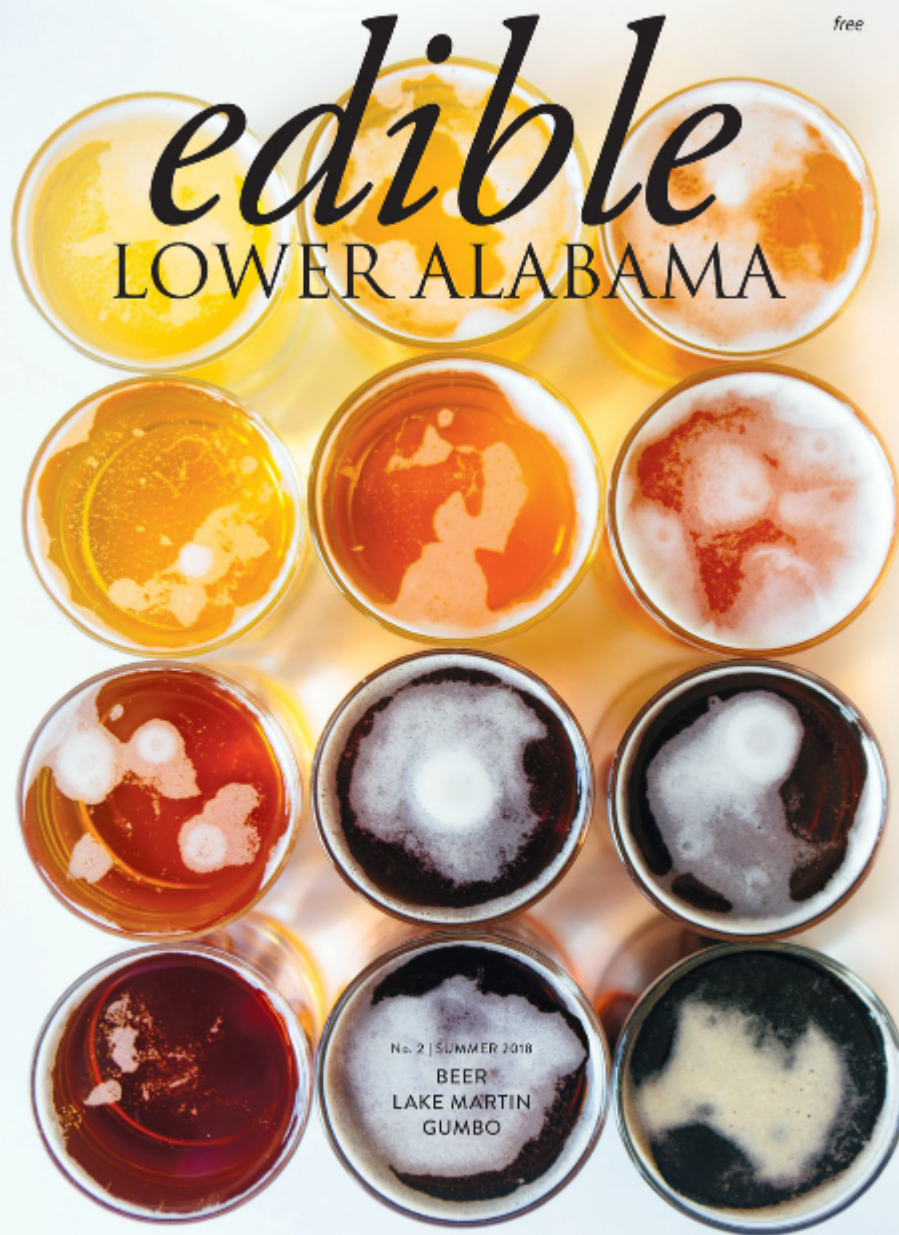




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SOUTHERN NATIONAL

Renowned Atlanta chef Duane Nutter relocates to Mobile.

WORDS AND PHOTOS AMANDA GIBSON

Grab a seat at Southern National's U-shaped bar, deck in walnut and zinc, and you're likely to have a lively conversation with your neighbor. Something is happening in downtown Mobile.

Southern National is the latest, and highest-profile, addition to the city's restaurant scene. The project comes from Chef Duane Nutter (of Atlanta Hartsfield Jackson Airport's One Flew South fame), and Mobile-born restaurateur Reggie Wainwright. They relocated to Atlanta City because, as Nutter puts it, "Mobile is emerging."

The restaurant's style is "Southernism"—Southern food seamlessly blended with international flavor—hence its moniker. "It's all about where I've been and where I want to go," Nutter says.

A veteran of the Four Seasons and Ritz Carlton kitchens, Nutter

knew early on he was destined for a career in food, despite almost pursuing stand-up comedy.

"I was always curious about the kitchen, even as a child," he says. "Mostly because it revolved around lots of relatives getting together to have a good time. Of course, it's different when cooking for 200 strangers on the line. But it's that romantic vision that gets you in the door in the first place and by then, you're hooked."

He experienced his first kitchen burn at the tender age of five, when he got too close to the steam emanating from a pot of boiling cubic. He was nine or 10 when his mother gave him his first Teflon pan.

"I didn't do homework anymore—just fried eggs," he says. "I ate 12 fried egg and bologna sandwiches before my mom came home one

TIDBITS



Chef Duane Nutter (far right) relocated to Mobile from Atlanta to open Southern National. The kitchen uses locally sourced ingredients from local farmers and downtown's Market in the Park.



afternoon. Just one after the other."

At Southern National his dishes have become a little more mature, but are still just as playful. He curbs salmon in Carbond honey-suckle vodka, fries up extra Kang Pao-style and roses his tater tots in garlic and rosemary.

His jalapeño johnnycakes, topped with red-eye gravy and Bennet's country ham (or "American prosciutto," as the chef calls it) are tender and fluffy, and sophisticated touches like freeze-dried corn render the classic dish entirely unique and memorable. (Try the recipe for yourself, page 19.)

Mobile diners aren't the only ones taking notice of Nutter's innova-

tion in the kitchen. Earlier this year, Southern National was named a James Beard Award semifinalist for the country's best new restaurant—a first for the city. It is not, however, his first nomination. In 2014, under Nutter's helm, One Flew South received a nomination—the only airport restaurant in the country to earn that distinction.

Nutter says he was stunned when he learned of this year's nomination. But those who have tasted his fried-egg and bologna sandwiches know better than to be surprised. ☘

Southern National, 360 Dauphin St., Mobile, 251-308-2387; southernnational.com

"I WAS ALWAYS CURIOUS ABOUT THE KITCHEN, EVEN AS A CHILD. MOSTLY BECAUSE IT REVOLVED AROUND LOTS OF RELATIVES GETTING TOGETHER TO HAVE A GOOD TIME."



Photo by Matt Campbell

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JALAPEÑO JOHNNYCAKES WITH RED-EYE GRAVY

Serves 12

- 4 eggs
- 1½ cups buttermilk
- ½ cup water
- ½ cup cooking oil (vegetable, canola or melted bacon fat)
- 2 cups self-rising flour
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. black pepper
- 2 Tbsp. sugar (optional)
- 3 cups seeded and diced jalapeños
- 3 cups corned green chiles (optional)

A mix of butter and oil for frying (such as duck fat and canola oil)

Combine first four wet ingredients. Combine dry ingredients in another bowl. Add dry ingredients to wet ingredients. Mix well to form batter. The batter will be thick. Fold in diced jalapeños and green chiles. Fry cakes in batches on a griddle over medium heat until lightly browned on each side. Garnish with sliced grape tomatoes, green onions, shaved slices of Benton's aged country ham, grilled shrimp and red-eye gravy. Store leftover gravy in the refrigerator.

"SoNat" Red-Eye Gravy

- 1 medium onion, diced
- 1 bay leaves
- 1 pint coffee beans
- 2 qt. chicken stock

- 1 gal. veal stock
- 6 slices Benton's bacon, chopped
- 10 slices garlic, smashed
- 1 bunch thyme

Cooking oil (vegetable, canola or melted bacon fat)

Cook bacon in a little bit of oil, rendering off the fat. When the bacon is cooked down, add garlic, onion and bay leaves. When the bacon and vegetables are golden brown, drain the oil. Add the coffee beans, chicken stock, veal stock and thyme. Simmer for about 30 minutes, until gravy consistency. Strain out solids. If gravy is too thick, add a little more chicken stock. Season with salt and pepper.



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