



Forget the city of old—or even the city of five years ago. **SID EVANS** considers how a new wave of restaurateurs, designers, and hoteliers have put the jewel of the Lowcountry on the global stage.
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SQUIRE FOX

DO THE



Clockwise from top left: A mural outside Lewis Barbecue, which serves Texas-style brisket on North Nassau Street; the façade of a traditional home in the Historic District; the patio at Lewis Barbecue; Fritz Porter, a home-goods, art, and



CHARLESTON



Shepard Fairey's *Power & Glory* mural, on King Street; garlic egg noodles with pulled pork from Pink Bellies at Workshop food hall, on King
antiques store on East Bay Street; the Dewberry Charleston hotel, set in a renovated Midcentury building; rack of lamb at Stella's, a Mediterranean restaurant.

W

When I was considering a move to Charleston to edit a new magazine called *Garden & Gun* in the summer of 2007, my wife and I went to McCrady's restaurant, just off East Bay Street, which was helmed by a young chef named Sean Brock. Having been spoiled by New York restaurants, we weren't expecting much, but it was hard not to be charmed by the entrance on a tiny cobblestoned alley, the long walnut bar, and the brick arch that framed the entrance inside. We couldn't get a babysitter, so we stashed our sleeping six-month-old daughter under the table in her car seat, praying that she wouldn't wake up and spoil a rare date night. Then the courses started coming—house-made charcuterie, *sous vide* scallops seared *a la plancha*, and something called country ham cotton candy. Here we were in a building that dated back to 1778, where George Washington once dined, and this mad-scientist chef was serving some of the most innovative, delicious dishes we'd ever had. For a couple debating a new life in an old city, that meal was a promise of exciting things to come. Our daughter slept peacefully through dinner, and by the end of the night (and after plenty of wine) we had decided to make the move.

Looking back, I realize that Brock was a messenger from the future—a devoted student of the region's culinary history as well as a brash, tattooed innovator. Within a few years he would be named Best Chef in the Southeast by the James Beard Foundation, and soon his tribute to Southern ingredients, Husk, which opened in 2010, would pave the way for an explosion of new restaurants and bars that would transform the city. Charleston is an international food destination now, like Paris or San Sebastián, Spain. You can't walk half a block without stumbling on some inventive new oyster bar, café,

or barbecue joint, not to mention a Mediterranean standout like Stella's, where the calamari and *keftedes* draw a devoted lunch crowd, or a charming French bistro like Chez Nous. Eating is a sport there, a topic of conversation from the streets south of Broad to the suburbs of Mount Pleasant.

But something bigger than food is reshaping Charleston. There is more traffic, for one thing, but there is also an energy coursing through the city that reminds me of Nashville and San Francisco. Charleston is home to more than 250 tech companies now. Hip design shops are opening, like Fritz Porter Design Collective, where





A view of Broad Street and St. Michael's Church, built in the mid 18th century.

SOMETHING BIGGER THAN FOOD IS RESHAPING CHARLESTON. THERE'S AN ENERGY COURSE THROUGH THE CITY THAT REMINDS ME OF NASHVILLE AND SAN FRANCISCO.

you can browse antiques selected by the South's best tastemakers. New events are crowding the calendar, like High Water Festival, "a celebration of music, food, and libations" from local artists Shovels & Rope. And the cocktail culture is keeping the city lubricated, from the tiki-themed South Seas Oasis, where you can sip mai tais in a space lined with bamboo and hula skirts, to the intimate, old-school Proof, celebrated for its crisp gin and tonic. On a Friday night, Upper King feels a little bit like a block party in Brooklyn, as people spill out of the bars, clubs, and restaurants. What not so long ago was a sleepy →



ASK AN INSIDER

CARRIE MOREY, CHARLESTON'S CULINARY QUEEN

Ten years ago, women like Morey—the boss-lady behind **Callie's Hot Little Biscuit** (calliesbiscuits.com), a restaurant where people line up for the Southern breakfast staple—were a rarity in Charleston. Now that's all changing, as more female chefs and entrepreneurs bring their talents to the table. Here, Morey shares her favorite eateries with women at the helm.

"Literally my favorite thing to do on Fridays, after a long week of work, is to linger over lunch at Jill Mathias's restaurant, **Chez Nous** (cheznousbistro.org; *entrées* \$12–\$40), off Cannon Street. It's like a mini-vacation via transportive French food. And I just love how Jill is unapologetic about having only a few things on the menu. She's breaking all the rules in all the right ways. **Verde** (eatatverde.com; *salads* \$8–\$10), a delicious salad spot on King Street, is where I eat at least three times a week. Jennifer Ferrebee, the owner, is a seriously smart cookie. She just celebrated the birth of her first baby. And for something sweet, I—like everyone here—line up for Lauren Mitterer's Sticky Bun Sundays at **WildFlour Pastry** (wildflourpastrycharleston.com). When she opened in 2009 in Cannonborough, the area was a little off the grid. But Lauren had the vision, and then everybody came."



Clockwise from top left: A guest at Stella's, which serves modern Greek cuisine downtown; Goat Sheep Cow, North, a new wine bar and cheese shop in Half Mile North; the piazza at 86 Cannon, the Poinsette House, a five-room inn; a charcuterie plate at Goat Sheep Cow, North.



little town in the Lowcountry is becoming a city that never sleeps.

There is no better reflection of this changing city than the Dewberry Charleston hotel in a 1964 federal office building. I used to drop my kids off for preschool at the Presbyterian church across the street, and I barely noticed the monolithic Midcentury Modern structure that loomed over Marion Square. For years, cranky residents wanted it replaced with something more traditional. But in the eyes of former Georgia Tech quarterback and real estate magnate John Dewberry, it was a thing of beauty. “Most people wanted me to tear it down,” he told me over coffee one morning in the lobby, which began welcoming guests two years ago. “But while a lot of people couldn’t see it, a few of us could.” Dewberry softened the building’s façade with

35-year-old crepe myrtles, espaliered red maples, a walled garden, and gorgeous outdoor lighting that accentuates its vertical lines. More than any other hotel in town, the Dewberry is unapologetically modern, with Midcentury furniture that Dewberry and his wife, Jaimie, have curated from auctions all over Europe. The brass bar in the lobby (which they call “The Living Room”) is the heartbeat of the hotel, always staffed by bartenders in white jackets who make a mean Old-Fashioned. If there’s a better-looking bar anywhere in the South, I haven’t seen it.

About a mile up the peninsula, the five-room 86 Cannon, the Poinsette House captures another side of the new Charleston. Modeled after other intimate properties in town, like Zero George and the Wentworth Mansion, the year-old hotel is set in a house →

EVANS’S GUIDE TO CHARLESTON

The editor in chief of *Southern Living* and former Holy City resident shares his top picks on what to experience now.

STAY

The Dewberry Charleston

A hotel with Midcentury design elements off Marion Square. thedewberrycharleston.com; doubles from \$350.

86 Cannon, the Poinsette House

Don’t miss the nightly wine and cheese at this inn on Cannon Street. 86cannon.com; doubles from \$349.

Wentworth Mansion This downtown inn is classic Charleston, with its Tiffany windows and evening sherry service. wentworthmansion.com; doubles from \$400.

Zero George A cluster of 1804 homes and carriage houses make up this hotel in Ansonborough. zerogeorge.com; doubles from \$449.

EAT

Butcher & Bee

Middle Eastern small plates reign at this creative restaurant in Half

Mile North. butcherandbee.com; entrées \$19–\$28.

Goat Sheep Cow, North

The artisanal cheese shop’s new outpost in Half Mile North doubles as a wine bar. goatsheepcow.com.

Husk Chef Sean Brock’s love letter to Southern cooking (shrimp and grits, wood-fired quail) focuses on local grains and meats. huskrestaurant.com; entrées \$30–\$34.

Leon’s Oyster Shop A former auto-body shop is now a destination for fresh oysters and fried chicken. leonsoyster.com; entrées \$13–\$39.

Lewis Barbecue Try the “sancho loco” sandwich with pulled pork, chopped beef, and house-made sausage at this spot helmed by the pit master behind La Barbecue in Austin, Texas. lewisbarbecue.com; entrées \$10–\$20.

McCrary’s Brock experiments with various flavors (*uni*, meet cucumber) at this tasting-menu-only dining room with 22 seats. mccradyrestaurant.com; tasting menus from \$115.

Rodney Scott’s BBQ Scott got his start at his family’s grocery in Hemingway, South Carolina; his excellent barbecue has now reached cult

status. rodneyscottssbbq.com; entrées \$9–\$18.

Stella’s This branch of the Richmond, Virginia, favorite began serving Greek fare last year. stellascharleston.com; entrées \$15–\$29.

Workshop An “exploratory food court” of rotating food and beverage areas. The venue also hosts culinary classes. workshopcharleston.com.

Xiao Bao Biscuit This casual restaurant dishes up “Asian soul food” plates like *okonomiyaki* and Vietnamese crêpes. xiaobaobiscuit.com; entrées \$12–\$18.

DRINK

Edmund’s Oast Supplement the house beers (brewed a few blocks away at its sister taproom) with snacks like fried tripe. edmundsoast.com.

Proof Known for its menu of nearly 40 refined cocktails. charlestonproof.com.

South Seas Oasis A lively bar for tiki cocktails and pupu platters. southseasoasis.com.

DO

Fritz Porter A design collective featuring curated antiques and contemporary art. fritzporter.com.

SHOPPING TIP

THESE ONLY-IN-CHARLESTON SOUVENIRS ARE WORTH THE SPLURGE

For the ultimate keepsake that celebrates heritage and craftsmanship, look to these skilled artisans.

Charleston has been exporting its culture via the products of metalsmiths and basket weavers for hundreds of years. Two of the artisans taking those traditions into the 21st century are Marianna “Mini” Hay and Corey Alston. Hay is the youngest designer at **Croghan’s Jewel Box** (croghansjewelbox.com), a King Street institution (her great-grandfather opened the shop in 1907). Looking to make her own mark, the 27-year-old took an unusual symbol—the palmetto bug, a.k.a. the humble cockroach—and turned it into her signature totem, placing it on chunky cuffs and delicate pendants. Her Goldbug collection has grown to 40 core designs, from a \$25 napkin ring to a \$530 bib necklace. In Charleston’s City Market, fifth-generation basket weaver Corey Alston is also injecting a dose of fresh thinking into his family business, **Gullah Sweetgrass Baskets** (thecharlestoncitymarket.com). From traditional S-handle baskets and trays to one-of-a-kind caddies, the pieces, which range from \$35 to \$350, stand out for their meticulous construction—no surprise since Alston began weaving as a teenager. He also launched a Build Your Sweetgrass Basket app that lets customers design their own model and have Alston bring it to life.





A hearty spread at Lewis Barbecue, whose proprietor employs Texas barbecue techniques.



AT LEWIS BARBECUE, YOU CAN SIT UNDER THE SHADE OF A LIVE OAK AND ENJOY SOME OF THE BEST BRISKET IN THE COUNTRY, TEXAS-STYLE.

dating from 1862. You can hear the wood floors creak under your feet on the piazza (pee-ah-za, as they say here), but everything about the experience is luxurious, from the décor to the sheets to the sleek Linus bikes that wait for you outside. Five years ago, the neighborhood was known for its sagging porches and rowdy college students who came for the cheap housing. Tourists had no reason to venture there, but now this tiny hotel is a destination for travelers

from all over the world. When I asked the proprietors, Marion and Lori Hawkins, what these international visitors want to do, Lori answered without hesitation, “Eat.”

It’s a five-to-10-minute walk to some of the best restaurants in town, from Xiao Bao Biscuit, which serves inspired Asian dishes in a converted gas station, to Leon’s Oyster Shop, where the fried chicken rivals any in the South. Or you can go for barbecue. Southerners have long nurtured a debate over whether Carolina-style pork or Texas-style brisket is the true king. Charleston has decided you can have it both ways. On Upper King Street, one year ago, Rodney Scott opened Rodney Scott’s BBQ, a brick temple to the low, slow, whole-hog style that put South Carolina barbecue on the map. Less than half a mile away, at Lewis Barbecue, you can sit in a gravel courtyard under the shade of a live oak and enjoy some of the best brisket in the country, Texas-style. Like all real Texas barbecue, it’s smoked for 18 hours and served on butcher paper with a couple of slices of white bread. You simply couldn’t find brisket of this quality anywhere



IF YOU'RE GOING TO SEE ONLY ONE PLANTATION, LET THIS BE IT

When it comes to visiting the Lowcountry's historic estates, many visitors find themselves overwhelmed by the options, which include the popular Middleton Place, Drayton Hall, and Magnolia Plantation. But **McLeod Plantation Historic Site** (ccprc.com) is different for its unflinching perspective on both slavery and the struggle for land rights before, during, and after the Civil War. Spread over 37 acres on James Island, McLeod opened to the public in 2015. Through tours and lectures, guides paint a stark, vivid picture of life for the slaves who harvested Sea Island cotton for McLeod's middle-class farmers. They also trace McLeod's wartime and postbellum evolution, from a campsite for both Confederate and Union troops to the headquarters of the Freedmen's Bureau following emancipation. The tours last 45 minutes, but you'll want another hour on your own to explore the grounds, which include the 1851 main house, slave quarters, and a riverside pavilion.

Left: Visitors can tour the main house and slave quarters at McLeod Plantation, on James Island.

outside of the Lone Star State until the young, bearded pit master John Lewis decided to pack up his smokers and move here from Austin.

What makes Lewis's even more interesting is that it sits in the emerging development of Half Mile North (a half-mile north of the Arthur Ravenel Jr. Bridge), with its contemporary architecture, car-charging stations, and cluster of tech companies. This is where another revolution has begun, driven by a wave of start-ups, like the e-commerce firm Blue Acorn, that have helped earn Charleston the moniker Silicon Harbor. At Butcher & Bee, Web developers and digital entrepreneurs →

talk tech over *shakshuka* and brown-rice bowls. Edmund's Oast has become an evening hangout, with sophisticated dishes like chicken-liver parfait and exceptional craft beers.

Still farther up the peninsula, at the Pacific Box & Crate office complex, there are no porches in sight—just chic industrial buildings with soaring windows. Inside couldn't be more modern, with Ping-Pong tables, a yoga studio, and dogs lounging among the workstations. Stephen Zoukis, the real estate mogul behind the complex, recognized that Charleston needed a home for these new businesses—as well as another culinary center. “For a lot of these young people, having an alternative to downtown is important,” he told me one morning at Bad Wolf Coffee, the campus caffeine hub. And so Zoukis launched Workshop, a food court showcasing all kinds of global cuisine.

I only lived in Charleston for about four years, but every time I go back, I feel the city's magnetic pull. It's not the quiet Lowcountry town I first fell in love with, but underneath all these new places, the character and charm of the city are still there. Ten years after that memorable dinner at McCrady's, Sean Brock is busier than ever, now overseeing eight restaurants in five cities, including new iterations of Husk in Greenville, South Carolina, and Savannah, Georgia. But McCrady's is where the chef is at his most creative. “That's my sanctuary,” he told me recently.

A year and a half ago, he reimaged the restaurant as a 22-seat tasting-menu-only space, curating everything from the music to the silverware. McCrady's now serves 15 wildly inventive courses, such as a single Virginia oyster perched on a bed of smooth rocks with a cloud of steam rising from the bowl. I don't know what this portends for the next 10 years in Charleston, but I do take comfort in the fact that Brock is reinventing himself and his signature restaurant every day, just waiting for the next couple to come in and taste something out of this world.

Sid Evans is the editor in chief of Southern Living and Coastal Living.



Oysters pile up on a table at a traditional roast.

YOU'RE INVITED TO A LOWCOUNTRY OYSTER ROAST. NOW WHAT?

This convivial outdoor ritual is a social-calendar mainstay from September through April, and locals are famous for inviting visitors and new friends to join in. It's always best to brush up on a few basics before you go.

Dress Code

Proper oyster-roast attire generally begins with the two B's: boots—something in the Billy Reid, L.L. Bean, or Blundstone vein—and a Barbour jacket. If you don't have one of the waxed-cotton classics, the Southern equivalent from outfitter **Tom Beckbe** (tombeckbe.com) will do.

Table Etiquette

The Lowcountry uses a wood-fire technique, in which the bivalves are smothered beneath wet burlap while being steam-roasted over a flame. Groups rotate away from the table after each fresh batch is laid out so everyone gets a turn.

The BYO Rule

Bringing your own oyster knife and glove is welcomed. The heirloom-quality Edisto knives at **Williams Knife Co.** (williamsknife.com) are a local go-to; otherwise, the **East Bay True Value Hardware** (18 Society St.) keeps kits with a knife, glove, and cloth in stock throughout the season.

ASK AN INSIDER

SHEP ROSE, REALITY STAR TURNED ISLE OF PALMS RESIDENT

With their windswept Atlantic beaches and family-friendly vibes, the barrier islands outside Charleston offer a different kind of escape. One of the most popular: Isle of Palms, home to the 1,600-acre **Wild Dunes Resort** (destinationhotels.com/wild-dunes; doubles from \$199) and two golf courses. Many of the area's most recognizable residents have homes there, including Shep Rose, who stars in the Bravo series *Southern Charm* and a new spin-off series, *Relationship*. Here are his weekend go-tos, before and after a long day of surfing.



“I get my coffee at the **Refuge** (therefugeiop.com), a little nautical-themed spot just over the IOP connector. That's where you'll find me most mornings. The seafood-focused **Long Island Café**

(longislandcafesc.com; entrées \$16–\$33) is a gem. It's been here since the 1980s and is as unpretentious as they come. My dad loves it, too. He's obsessed with the local flounder. I'm a grouper guy. And the Italian restaurant **Coda del Pesce** (codadelpesce.com; entrées \$24–\$32) is definitely the diamond of the restaurant scene here. The chef, Ken Vedrinski, does amazing things with fresh seafood and house-made pasta.”

The Dewberry Charleston hotel now offers private mixology classes.



HEAD OF THE CLASS

Get schooled in the ways of Charleston's fabled craftspeople in one of these informative classes and workshops.

Intricate ironwork can be found throughout the city, in churches, homes, and gardens. Get hands-on instruction in the trade from blacksmith **James Irving**, who leads a Playing with Fire course on the basics at the Wild Dunes Resort and at his forge on James Island; students

may come away with a bottle opener, oyster shucker, or fire poker. destinationhotels.com/wild-dunes; from \$90 for a two-hour class.

Ryan Casey is a rising star in the craft-cocktail world, having earned his stripes at Charleston hot spots like FIG. Now he presides over the brass bar inside the Dewberry Charleston, where he hosts private mixology lessons for locals and guests. dewberrycharleston.com; from \$100 per hour.

Henrietta Snype's basket-making lessons are

a deep dive into weaving technique, covering topics such as identifying native grass types and why the woven pieces can command high prices. preservation.society.org; from \$85 for a two-hour class.

Floral arranging is an art in Charleston, one of the country's top wedding destinations. Learn the ins and outs—from tabletop designs of wild local blooms to wreath making—from the experts at **Charleston Flower Workshop**. charlestonflowerworkshop.com; from \$150 for a two-hour class.



SHOPPING TIP

CANNON STREET, YOUR OFF-THE-BEATEN-PATH RETAIL CORRIDOR

King Street is Charleston's Madison Avenue. But some of the city's most interesting stores can actually be found on nearby Cannon.

1/Beads on Cannon

The ultimate specialty shop, this two-story emporium carries any kind of gem, stone, bead, and bauble imaginable, plus everything necessary to string, weave, or wire-wrap them. beadsoncannon.com.

2/Indigo & Cotton

Since 2011, owner Brett Carron has been outfitting Charlestonian men with his smartly edited selection of both Southern (Raleigh Denim, Makr) and non-Southern (Post Imperial, Mollusk) brands in this welcoming, airy space. indigoandcotton.com.

3/Mac & Murphy

This intimate shop raises the bar for indie stationery stores. Owner Liz Macpherson has stocked an eclectic array of things you never knew you needed: colorful greeting cards, framed prints, and desk accessories. macandmurphy.com.

4/Candy Shop Vintage

Designer Deirdre Zahl's boutique is a local mainstay for vintage and vintage-inspired accessories. Her Charleston rice-bead necklaces (long, flapper-style chains popular in the 1970s) have become a signature. candyshopvintage.com.