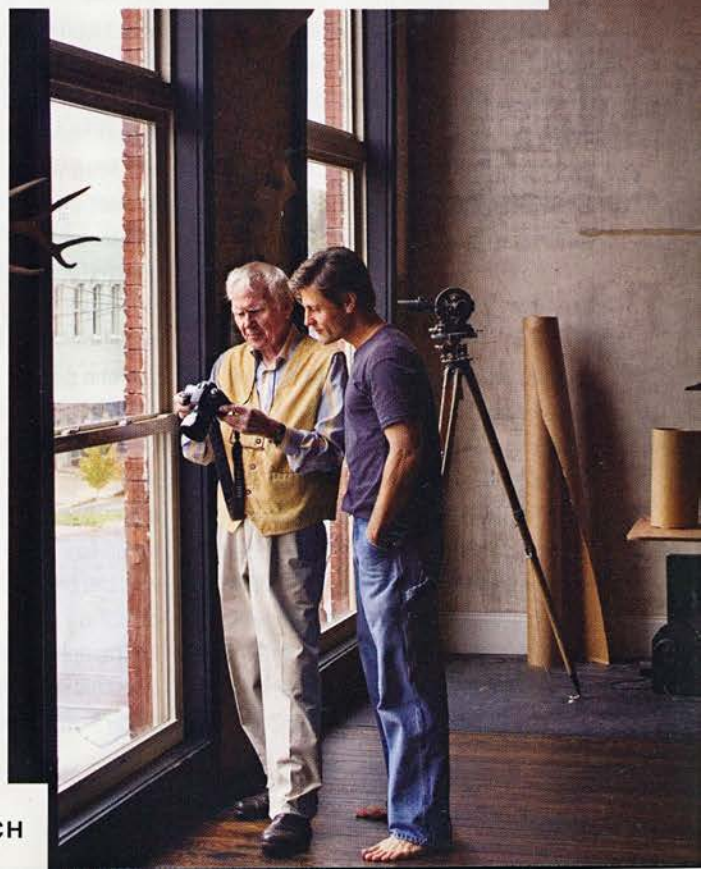




ALABAMA'S BEST

At their monthly potluck dinners, a group of Alabama photographers, fashion designers and artists—all good friends and good cooks—gather to celebrate Southern handcraft.

COVERED-DISH DINNER



BY JOHN T. EDGE
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ROBERT RAUSCH

IN THE NORTHWESTERN ALABAMA TOWNS of Tuscumbia, Sheffield, Muscle Shoals and Florence, known collectively as the Shoals, a community of homegrown artists, designers and cultural provocateurs gathers each month for a potluck dinner. By and large, they are not cooks by trade. Instead, they are cooks by habit and social inclination. Surety with a cast-iron skillet is bred in their bones.

This place made these people. The Shoals was once a textile center; the forebears of these artists and designers were cotton farmers and laborers who earned their wages with their hands. When the mills closed, blue-collar jobs with benefit packages and pensions vanished. But an appreciation of handwork remained. Nowadays, among this diverse coterie, respect for that tradition serves as common ground. Honoring handcraft is a common cause. And food—culinary handwork—offers a reason to gather, a catalyst for conversation.

The group is deeply Southern, but the people defy stereotypes. Metal artist, builder and hunter Audwin McGee of Tuscumbia is the man behind the juicy garlic-rubbed pork roast at the center of the table. With his fiancée, Sandi Stevens, a lithe Alabama-born gymnast and sculptor, he's this month's host. To a casual observer, his second-story loft, set amid a row of redbrick storefronts in downtown Tuscumbia, calls to mind downtown Manhattan, but it's bona fide Southern. "Cleaning up before renovation," says McGee of the hardwood-floored rectangle that once served as storage space for a dry goods store, "we found dozens of blue-and-white-striped seersucker suits."

THE FLOW OF THE DINNER IS EASY. NO ONE STANDS ON ceremony. No one raises a toast to signal either the beginning of the meal, or the end. Across a table piled high with Southern sacraments, the friends talk about their mothers' recipes for leaf-lard piecrust and their fathers' formulas for barbecue sauce. They talk about great local cooks. About the men who gather on fall mornings to stir giant pots of chicken stew for church fund-raisers. About the women

at Florence's Hollywood Inn who fry cornmeal-dusted okra to a peerless crisp. And, yes, they swap recipes.

Natalie Chanin, who hails from Florence, baked the downy buttermilk biscuits that everyone is slathering with butter. She's the designer and entrepreneur behind Alabama Chanin, who, through her former label, Project Alabama, sold the runway critics on densely patterned and elaborately beaded dresses stitched by local sewing circles. "Love your thread," Chanin was fond of telling the women who joined together at her country ranch house headquarters. "Love your thread." With Chanin are her boyfriend, Butch Anthony, a laconic and dry-witted artist whose work—cake stands bolted together from cast-off

garden implements, serving bowls cleverly crafted from cow vertebrae—defies easy categorization, and Thom Driver, who helped style Chanin's Project Alabama catalog.

Angie Mosier, proprietor of retro-hip Blue-Eyed Daisy Bakeshop in Palmetto, Georgia, is a welcome interloper. She earned her entrée by pan-frying chicken drumsticks and thighs. Mosier also brought a tin of pecan sandies and creamy lemon chess pies. She got to know the Shoals crowd when the University of Mississippi-based Southern Foodways Alliance, of which Mosier is the board vice president, teamed with Chanin to collect oral his-

stories of area cooks and showcase their stories and recipes in Chanin's Project Alabama catalog and on its Web site.

The cheese grits casserole—so light it might as well be called a soufflé—is a specialty of Billy Reid and his wife, Jeanne. From a second-story atelier set in an antebellum Florence home, he designs eponymous lines of clothing that evoke sepia snapshots of a vague Southern past. Yet Reid is quick to buck convention. At his Florence shop as well as at boutiques in Charlotte, North Carolina, and Dallas and Houston, he mixes and matches genres, displaying Alabama-designed and Italian-made wingtips atop gilt-rimmed cake plates that look as though Reid lifted them from his great-aunt's china cabinet.

Charles Moore, a Tuscumbia native who documented the civil rights movement for *Life* and the eldest of the group, has come, too. Along with local photographer



The covered-dish crew, OPPOSITE (CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT): Host and metal artist Audwin McGee; fashion designer Billy Reid with his wife, Jeanne; photographers Charles Moore and Robert Rausch (in jeans); and fashion designer Natalie Chanin with her boyfriend, artist Butch Anthony. **ABOVE:** Stylist Thom Driver and baker Angie Mosier.

What's a Southern potluck without fried chicken and biscuits?
OPPOSITE: Natalie Chanin samples wine while her friends finish prepping dinner, including celery stuffed with pimento cheese.





Robert Rausch—bearer of a broccoli casserole bound with homemade cream of mushroom soup and topped with a crumble of Ritz crackers—he's taken on the task of documenting dinner.

AT THE TABLE, IT BECOMES CLEAR THAT while these Southerners are rooted in place, they are not bound by it. As the biscuits are passed and the fried chicken is reduced to a jumble of bones, Chanin tells the story of quitting her life as a stylist in Vienna to hone her kitchen skills while working as a cook on an island in Los Roques, a Venezuelan archipelago. "The fishing families on the island couldn't pronounce *biscuit*," she says, "so they started calling what I baked *pan de Alabama*." McGee is full of stories from a trip to Mozambique, where, along with fellow Alabamians, he has been developing a sustainable hunting preserve and pondering how to develop the East African nation's tourism industry.

In the tradition of the church suppers of their youth, everyone talks at once, and almost everyone returns for seconds. As Chanin recalls her early days in New York City, snipping apart and then stitching back together T-shirts to make contrarian couture, the men debate the relative merits of two local steak houses. There's no clear victor apparent until Chanin steps in. "Dale's still gives you a glass of cold tomato juice to start your meal," she says. "It's really old-school." And the debate is settled, for now.

About the time Mosier slices into a chess pie and passes plates to all, a bottle of bourbon appears. Someone suggests a dessert wine as the proper accompaniment but is shouted down as three fingers of bourbon go into each diner's glass. In time, the group adjourns to the sleeping porch, and conversations trail off as everyone watches the moon rise alongside the Tuscumbia water tower.



John T. Edge is director of the Southern Foodways Alliance and author of *Southern Belly: The Ultimate Food Lover's Companion to the South*.

POTLUCK CREW

BUTCH ANTHONY is proprietor of the Museum of Wonder, a quirky gallery in Seale, Alabama, that doubles as his studio (museumofwonder.com).

NATALIE CHANIN owns Alabama Chanin, a line of clothing and accessories (alabamachanin.com).

CHARLES MOORE displays some of his photos at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (bcri.org). His book, *Powerful Days*, is now available in paperback.

ANGIE MOSIER owns Blue-Eyed Daisy Bakeshop in Palmetto, Georgia (blueeyeddaisy.com).

ROBERT RAUSCH runs a photo studio called GAS, in downtown Tuscumbia, Alabama (gasphoto.net).

BILLY REID sells his fashion designs through his own boutiques in Florence, Alabama; Dallas; Houston; and Charlotte, North Carolina (billyreid.com).

To learn more about **SOUTHERN FOODWAYS ALLIANCE** events, go to southernfoodways.com.

SOUTHERN POTLUCK

STARTERS

Pimento Cheese
Cheddar-and-Cayenne Crackers
Spiced Pecans

MAINS

Supercrispy Pan-Fried Chicken
Slow-Roasted Pork
Broccoli and Wild Mushroom Casserole
Sweet Potato Casserole
Cheesy Grits Casserole
Buttery Buttermilk Biscuits

DESSERTS

Pecan Sandies
Lane Cake
Lemon Chess Pie





Butch Anthony tries a drumstick that's been fried to a perfect crisp. OPPOSITE: Slow-roasted pork is heady with garlic and rosemary.



Pimento Cheese

TOTAL: 25 MIN PLUS 1 HR CHILLING
MAKES 3 CUPS

Pimientos are large, sweet, heart-shaped peppers that are typically used for canning. Pimento cheese—the simple combination of grated cheddar cheese with mayonnaise and pimientos—is a Southern staple often served on crackers or vegetables. The key to making the best pimento cheese is top-quality sharp cheddar. But Angie Mosier, owner of Blue-Eyed Daisy Bakeshop in Palmetto, Georgia, says her personal secret is using sweet onions like Vidalia or Walla Walla.

- 1 cup mayonnaise
- ¼ small Vidalia onion, finely chopped
- ½ teaspoon hot sauce
- 1 pound sharp cheddar cheese, coarsely shredded
- ½ cup diced drained pimientos (from one 7-ounce jar)

In a food processor, blend the mayonnaise, onion and hot sauce. Add the shredded cheese and pulse until finely chopped. Add the pimientos and pulse until combined. Transfer the pimento cheese to a bowl. Refrigerate until firm, at least 1 hour.

SERVE WITH Crackers or vegetables.

MAKE AHEAD The pimento cheese can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.

Cheddar-and-Cayenne Crackers

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR 45 MIN
MAKES ABOUT 10 DOZEN

CRACKERS

Natalie Chanin, who has a clothing label called Alabama Chanin, makes cheddar crackers with a deep cheesy flavor and a crispy, blistery texture. She adds a touch of cayenne pepper for kick.

- 1 stick unsalted butter, at room temperature
- 1 pound sharp cheddar cheese, coarsely shredded
- 1 teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper

Dash of hot sauce

1½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling

1. In a standing electric mixer fitted with a paddle, beat the butter with the cheese, salt, cayenne and hot sauce at medium speed until blended. Add the 1½ cups of flour and beat at low speed, scraping the side and bottom of the bowl, until a soft dough forms. (Alternatively, mix the dough with a handheld mixer.) Pat the dough into 2 disks, wrap in plastic and refrigerate until chilled, at least 2 hours.

2. Preheat the oven to 350°. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper. Work with 1 disk of dough at a time and keep the other one refrigerated: On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough to a 12-by-10-inch rectangle. Cut the dough into 2-by-1-inch strips. Transfer the strips to the baking sheets. Bake for 25 minutes, or until the crackers are lightly browned, shifting the baking sheets halfway through. Slide the paper onto racks and let the crackers cool. Repeat with the remaining dough.

MAKE AHEAD The cracker dough can be refrigerated for up to 2 days. The baked crackers can be stored at room temperature in an airtight container for up to 3 days. Recrisp in a warm oven.

Spiced Pecans

ACTIVE: 10 MIN; TOTAL: 30 MIN
MAKES 5 CUPS

The pecan, which grows best in warm climates, is beloved in the South. At parties, Southerners often set out giant bowls of spiced nuts like the ones here, deliciously seasoned with cayenne, cinnamon and brown sugar.

- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ¾ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

Scant ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper

- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1½ tablespoons light brown sugar
- 5 cups pecan halves (18 ounces)

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Preheat the oven to 350°. In a small bowl, combine the salt, black pepper, cayenne, cinnamon and brown sugar. Spread the pecans on a large, rimmed baking sheet and toast for 10 minutes, until fragrant. Transfer the pecans to a large bowl and toss with the butter. Add the spices and toss to coat. Return the pecans to the baking sheet and toast for 3 to 4 minutes longer, until fragrant. Let cool.

MAKE AHEAD The spiced pecans can be stored in an airtight container for 3 days.

Supercrispy Pan-Fried Chicken

TOTAL: 1 HR 15 MIN PLUS OVERNIGHT MARINATING

12 TO 16 SERVINGS

Instead of deep-frying chicken in a vat of oil, Angie Mosier prefers pan-frying, which creates delightfully crunchy and moist chicken without requiring quite so much oil. "For a covered-dish dinner, there's nothing better than a tray of drumsticks, which are easy to eat standing up," she says.

continued on p. 125



Billy and Jeanne Reid
drink wine with their meal,
OPPOSITE, but decide that
bourbon is a better match
for these pecan sandies.

SUPERCRISPY CHICKEN *continued*

- 16 pieces of chicken (preferably drumsticks and thighs)**
- 6 cups buttermilk**
- 3 cups all-purpose flour**
- 4 teaspoons salt**
- 2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- 1½ quarts vegetable oil, for frying**

1. In a large bowl, toss the chicken pieces with the buttermilk. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate the chicken for at least 8 hours or overnight.

2. In a large, resealable plastic bag, combine the flour, salt, black pepper and cayenne. Set 2 large wire racks over rimmed baking sheets. Working in batches, drain the chicken, scraping off most of the buttermilk against the side of the bowl. Add the chicken to the bag, a few pieces at a time, and shake to coat completely. Transfer the chicken to the racks, pressing the flour to help it adhere as you remove the chicken from the bag.

3. Pour 1 inch of oil into each of 2 large cast-iron skillets and heat to 350°. Add about half of the chicken to the oil, being sure not to crowd the skillet. Fry over moderate heat until the chicken is golden, crisp and cooked through, 20 to 25 minutes; an instant-read thermometer should register 165° for thighs or drumsticks and 160° for breasts. Line the racks with paper towels and drain the chicken. Continue frying the chicken in batches, being sure the oil temperature stays at 325° during frying. Serve warm or at room temperature.

MAKE AHEAD The fried chicken can be kept at room temperature for up to 4 hours. Serve at room temperature or reheat in a low oven before serving.

WINE Crispy, juicy fried chicken needs a fairly substantial white wine as a partner. Look to Chardonnays from California's Santa Lucia Highlands—they're fruity and lush, but they also have a satisfying edge of acidity thanks to the cool breezes that blow in from the Monterey Bay. Consider the appley 2005 Morgan Highland or the 2004 Paraiso Chardonnay, which finishes on a hazelnut note.

Slow-Roasted Pork

ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 5 HR 30 MIN
12 SERVINGS

Hunter and metal artist Audwin McGee is a big fan of slow-cooked meats: "You just can't mess up a big hunk of pork. I like to use a bone-in Boston butt or shoulder with good fat content, so it doesn't dry up." His pork is smothered in a garlic-rosemary paste, then cooked at a low temperature for several hours until it's supertender.

- 3 garlic cloves, mashed to a paste**
- 1 teaspoon minced rosemary**
- ½ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil**

Salt and freshly ground pepper

One 9-pound fresh bone-in Boston butt or picnic ham, with skin, at room temperature

- 2 pounds cipollini onions, peeled**
- 6 thyme sprigs**

1. Preheat the oven to 325°. In a small bowl, mash the garlic paste with the rosemary, cayenne, 2 tablespoons of the olive oil and 1 teaspoon each of salt and pepper.

2. Using a sharp paring knife, make 1-inch-deep slits all over the meat. Press as much of the spice paste into the slits as you can and spread the rest all over the skin. Set the pork in a large roasting pan and cover tightly with foil. Roast for 3 hours. Remove the foil and roast for about 1 hour and 45 minutes longer, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the meat registers 165°.

3. Meanwhile, in a medium baking dish, toss the onions with the remaining 2 tablespoons of olive oil and the thyme sprigs and season with salt and pepper. Roast for 1 hour and 15 minutes, until the onions are tender and browned in spots.

4. Let the pork rest for 20 minutes. Remove the skin. Slice the meat as thinly as possible and serve with the onions.

MAKE AHEAD The roasted pork and onions can be refrigerated overnight. Serve the pork at room temperature; reheat the onions to serve.

WINE The marbling that keeps this tender, garlicky pork from drying out when it's roasted also makes it pair well with a firmly tannic red wine (the raspy tannins

cut through the richness of the meat). Try a Cabernet from Napa Valley's robust 2004 vintage, such as the juicy, focused Ehlers Estate, or the firm, oak-inflected Tamber Bey Two Rivers Vineyard.

Buttery Buttermilk Biscuits

ACTIVE: 10 MIN; TOTAL: 30 MIN
MAKES FIFTEEN 2¼-INCH BISCUITS

When she was growing up, Natalie Chanin ate homemade biscuits every day. "Now, I suppose, people don't make them from scratch as much," she says. "They seem like some kind of luxury." In truth, Chanin's light, flaky biscuits are incredibly easy to make—just don't overwork the dough or the biscuits will get tough.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling**

- 2 teaspoons baking powder**

- 1 teaspoon salt**

- 1 stick plus 2 tablespoons unsalted butter—1 stick cut into cubes and chilled, 2 tablespoons melted**

- ¾ cup buttermilk**

1. Preheat the oven to 425°. In a large bowl, combine the 2 cups of flour with the baking powder and salt. Using a pastry blender or 2 knives, cut in the cubed butter until the mixture resembles coarse meal. Add the buttermilk and stir with a fork or wooden spoon until a soft dough forms. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead 2 or 3 times, just until it comes together.

2. Using a lightly floured rolling pin, roll out the dough ½ inch thick. Using a lightly floured 2¼-inch round cutter, stamp out biscuits as close together as possible. Pat the dough scraps together and stamp out more biscuits. Transfer the biscuits to a large baking sheet. Bake for about 20 minutes, until the biscuits are risen and golden. Brush the hot biscuits with the melted butter and serve them hot or at room temperature.

MAKE AHEAD The biscuits can be kept in an airtight container for up to 4 hours. Serve at room temperature or briefly reheat in a low oven before serving.

continued on p. 126

Broccoli and Wild Mushroom Casserole

ACTIVE: 45 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR

12 SERVINGS

Photographer and Alabamian Robert Rausch grew up eating vegetable casseroles—he and his mother are both vegetarians. The broccoli casserole his family loved is a step up from the standard church cookbook recipe, which calls for using canned mushroom soup: In place of that, Rausch uses wild mushrooms. He still relies on Ritz crackers, though, for the buttery topping.

- ¾ pound mixed wild mushrooms, such as cremini and shiitake, stemmed and quartered**
- 1 stick unsalted butter, plus 1 tablespoon melted**
- 1 large onion, minced**
- 4 large celery ribs, finely diced**
- 3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**
- 1 cup chicken stock or low-sodium broth**
- ¼ cup milk**
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper**
- 1 cup mayonnaise**
- 2½ pounds broccoli—heads cut into 1-inch florets, stems peeled and cut into ½-inch dice**
- 1½ cups coarsely shredded sharp cheddar cheese (6 ounces)**
- 1⅓ cups crumbled Ritz crackers (from 1 sleeve, about 35 crackers)**

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. In a food processor, pulse the mushrooms until coarsely chopped. In a large saucepan, melt the stick of butter. Add the onion and celery and cook over moderately high heat, stirring, until softened, about 6 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook, stirring, until their liquid evaporates and they begin to brown, about 6 minutes. Sprinkle the flour over the vegetables and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add the chicken stock and cook, scraping up any bits stuck to the pan, until the mixture is very thick, about 3 minutes. Remove from the heat and stir in the milk. Season with salt and pepper. Transfer the mushroom mixture to a large bowl to let cool, then stir in the mayonnaise.

2. Arrange the broccoli florets and stems in a large steamer basket and steam until barely crisp-tender, about 3 minutes. Add the broccoli to the mushroom mixture and season with salt and pepper.

3. Butter a 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Pour in the broccoli-mushroom mixture, smoothing the surface. Sprinkle the cheese on top. In a small bowl, toss the cracker crumbs with the melted butter and scatter them over the casserole. Cover with foil and bake for about 30 minutes, until bubbling. Remove the foil and bake for about 40 minutes longer, until the topping is golden and crisp. Serve the casserole warm or at room temperature.

MAKE AHEAD The casserole can be refrigerated overnight. Reheat before serving.

Cheesy Grits Casserole

ACTIVE: 45 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR 20 MIN

12 SERVINGS

Clothing designer Billy Reid says, "Folks in the South start eating grits young. You learn to love them as a kid and it never goes away." Using old-fashioned, stone-ground grits, like those sold by McEwen & Sons in Wilsonville, Alabama (205-669-6605), gives the casserole a better texture and flavor than quick-cooking grits.

- 8 cups water**
- 2 cups coarse, not-instant stone-ground white grits (12 ounces), rinsed**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper**
- 1 stick unsalted butter, cut into chunks**
- ½ pound sharp white cheddar cheese, coarsely shredded**
- 3 large eggs, beaten**

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Butter a 13-by-9-inch baking dish. In a large, heavy pot, bring the water to a boil. Sprinkle the grits into the water, stirring constantly, and return to a boil. Cook over low heat, stirring frequently, until the grits are just tender, about 30 minutes. Season generously with salt and pepper and cook, stirring, until the grits are very thick and tender, about 10 minutes longer. Off the heat, stir in the butter and cheddar cheese, then stir in the eggs.

2. Pour the mixture into the prepared dish and bake for 1 hour, until bubbling and the top is golden. Let the grits casserole cool for 20 minutes before serving.

MAKE AHEAD The casserole can be refrigerated overnight. Reheat before serving.

Sweet Potato Casserole

ACTIVE: 45 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR 30 MIN

12 SERVINGS

Sweet potatoes grow throughout Alabama, where sculptor Sandi Stevens's family eats them year-round. This casserole is a Stevens favorite: silky pureed sweet potatoes topped with a sweet and crunchy pecan-cornflake topping. If you don't have pecans and cornflakes on hand, Stevens says, the topping can be made with whatever nuts and cereal are in the cupboard.

- 5½ pounds sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks**
- 2 sticks unsalted butter, melted, plus more for brushing**

Salt

- 1½ teaspoons freshly grated nutmeg**
- 1½ cups light brown sugar**
- 1 cup milk, warmed**
- 3 large eggs, beaten**
- 1 cup pecan halves (4 ounces)**
- 1 cup cornflakes**
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon**

1. Preheat the oven to 350°. Butter a 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Put the sweet potatoes in a large pot. Cover with cold water and bring to a boil. Cook over moderate heat until the sweet potatoes are tender, about 15 minutes. Drain well, shaking off the excess water. Transfer the sweet potatoes to a food processor (in batches, if necessary) and puree until smooth.

2. Scrape the puree into a large bowl. Add half of the butter, 2 teaspoons of salt, 1 teaspoon of the nutmeg, ½ cup of the brown sugar and the milk and stir until combined. Stir in the eggs. Pour the mixture into the prepared baking dish and smooth the surface. Cover with foil and bake for 40 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, spread the pecans on a baking sheet and bake for 5 minutes, until lightly toasted. Transfer the pecans to a work

continued on p. 128

SWEET POTATO CASSEROLE *continued*
surface and coarsely chop them. In a bowl, toss the pecans with the cornflakes, cinnamon and the remaining melted butter, ½ teaspoon of nutmeg and 1 cup of brown sugar. Season with salt.

4. Remove the foil from the casserole. Spoon small clumps of the topping all over the sweet potatoes. Bake, uncovered, for 40 minutes longer, until the topping is golden and sizzling. Let the casserole stand for 20 minutes before serving.

MAKE AHEAD The casserole can be baked up to 4 hours ahead and served warm or at room temperature.

Pecan Sandies

TOTAL: 50 MIN PLUS OVERNIGHT

CHILLING

MAKES 4 DOZEN COOKIES

These cookies are unbelievably light, delicate and crisp. The secret is to let the cookie dough chill overnight before slicing and baking.

- 2 sticks unsalted butter,**
at room temperature
- ⅓ cup sugar, plus more**
for sprinkling
- ½ teaspoon salt**
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- 2 cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 cup pecans, coarsely chopped**

1. In a medium bowl, using an electric mixer, beat the butter with the ⅓ cup of sugar and the salt at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes. Beat in the vanilla, then beat in the flour at low speed, scraping the side and bottom of the bowl, until the dough just comes together. Add the pecans and beat just until they are incorporated and lightly broken up. Divide the cookie dough in half and form it into two 2-inch-thick logs. Wrap the cookie dough tightly in plastic and refrigerate overnight.

2. Preheat the oven to 350°. Line 3 baking sheets with parchment paper. Working with 1 log at a time and keeping the other one chilled, cut the cookie dough into scant ¼-inch-thick slices and arrange the slices on the baking sheets. Repeat with the second log of dough.

3. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the cookies are lightly golden around the edges and on the bottom, shifting the baking sheets halfway through. Let the cookies cool on the baking sheets for a few minutes, then transfer them to a wire rack to cool completely.

MAKE AHEAD The cookies can be stored in an airtight container for up to 3 days.

Lane Cake

ACTIVE: 1 HR 15 MIN; TOTAL: 6 HR
12 TO 16 SERVINGS

Lane cake, an Alabama specialty, was created by a woman named Emma Rylander Lane, who wrote a cookbook called *Some Good Things to Eat* around the turn of the 20th century. Typically, Lane cake is a large white cake with a filling of egg yolks, sugar, raisins, pecans, fresh coconut and lots of bourbon. Here, it's frosted with silky vanilla buttercream. The bourbon in the filling is key—it helps cut the sweetness a bit.

CAKE

- 3½ cups all-purpose flour**
- 1 tablespoon baking powder**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 2 sticks unsalted butter,**
at room temperature
- 2 cups sugar**
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- 1 cup milk**
- 8 large egg whites (reserve**
the yolks for the filling)

FILLING

- 1½ cups pecans (6 ounces)**
- 1½ sticks unsalted butter**
- 12 large egg yolks**
- 1½ cups sugar**
- 1½ cups unsweetened**
shredded coconut
- 1½ cups golden raisins, coarsely**
chopped
- ¼ cup bourbon**

BUTTERCREAM

- 2 sticks unsalted butter,**
at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract**
- ¼ teaspoon salt**
- 1 pound confectioners'**
sugar, sifted
- ¼ cup half-and-half or milk**

1. MAKE THE CAKE: Preheat the oven to 325°. Butter three 9-inch round cake pans. Line the bottoms with parchment paper; butter the paper and flour the pans. In a large bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder and salt. In a standing electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, beat the butter and sugar at medium speed until light and fluffy. Beat in the vanilla. At low speed, beat in the dry ingredients and the milk in 3 alternating batches; be sure to scrape the side and bottom of the bowl.

2. In a clean bowl, beat the egg whites until soft peaks form. Beat one-third of the egg whites into the cake batter. Using a rubber spatula, fold in the remaining beaten whites until combined. Divide the cake batter among the prepared pans. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until the cakes are lightly golden and springy to the touch. Let the cakes cool in the pans for a few minutes, then invert them onto wire racks to cool completely. Peel off the parchment paper from the bottoms.

3. MEANWHILE, MAKE THE FILLING: Spread the pecans on a baking sheet and toast for 10 minutes, until fragrant. Let cool, then coarsely chop. In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over low heat. Remove from the heat and whisk in the egg yolks and sugar until smooth. Return the pan to moderate heat and cook the filling, stirring constantly, until slightly thickened and an instant-read thermometer reads 180°; be sure not to let it boil. Remove from the heat and stir in the chopped pecans, coconut, raisins and bourbon. Transfer to a bowl and let cool.

4. MAKE THE BUTTERCREAM: In a medium bowl, beat the butter until creamy. Add the vanilla and salt, then gradually beat in the confectioners' sugar, being sure to scrape the side and bottom of the bowl. Add the half-and-half and beat the buttercream until fluffy, about 1 minute.

5. ASSEMBLE THE CAKE: Place a cake layer on a serving plate and top with one-third of the pecan filling, spreading it almost to the edge. Top with a second cake layer and another third of the pecan filling. Top with the last cake layer. Using an offset

continued on p. 130

LANE CAKE continued

spatula, spread a thin layer of the buttercream all around the cake, being sure to fill in any gaps between the layers. Refrigerate the cake for 10 minutes, to firm up the buttercream.

6. Spread the remaining buttercream evenly around the side of the cake only, leaving the top with just the thin layer of buttercream. Spread the remaining pecan filling over the top of the cake. Let the cake stand at room temperature for at least 4 hours before cutting.

MAKE AHEAD The Lane cake can be refrigerated for up to 4 days before serving. Return the cake to room temperature before serving.

BOURBON The bourbon in the filling is crucial to this cake, but a glass of good bourbon to go with it is also important. Typically, small-batch bourbons command high prices, but one of the best, the Evan Williams Single Barrel, is remarkably affordable. The current 1997 vintage is a voluptuous toffee-vanilla whiskey that's great sipped with either a splash of water or a single ice cube.

Lemon Chess Pie

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 2 HR PLUS COOLING

MAKES ONE 9-INCH PIE

Chess pie, a classic Southern dessert, is basically a very simple custard in a pie crust. A common variation, like the one here, uses lemon juice. The origin of the name is not clear, but some speculate that it's based on an old custom of calling custard "cheese." Angie Mosier's version of the pie has a wonderfully tender, flaky crust and a sweet, puckery filling.

PASTRY

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour,
plus more for rolling
- 1½ teaspoons sugar
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons chilled unsalted butter, cut into cubes
- ¼ cup plus ½ tablespoon chilled solid vegetable shortening
- 3 tablespoons ice water

FILLING

- 4 large eggs
- 1½ cups sugar
- 1 tablespoon white cornmeal
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- ½ cup buttermilk
- ⅓ cup fresh lemon juice
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

1. **MAKE THE PASTRY:** In a food processor, pulse the flour with the sugar and salt until combined. Add the butter and shortening and pulse just until the butter is the size of small peas. Sprinkle the ice water over the mixture and pulse 4 or 5 times, until the pastry just comes together. Turn the pastry out onto a floured work surface and pat it into a disk. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until chilled, about 30 minutes.

2. Preheat the oven to 350°. On a floured work surface, roll out the pastry to a 14-inch round. Carefully roll the pastry around the rolling pin and unroll it over a 9-inch pie plate; ease the pastry into the plate without stretching or tearing. Trim the overhanging dough to ½ inch and tuck it under itself; crimp the edge decoratively. Freeze the pie shell just until chilled, about 5 minutes.

3. Line the pastry with parchment paper and pie weights or dried beans and bake for about 20 minutes, until nearly set. Remove the parchment paper and weights and bake the pie shell for 5 minutes longer, until set but not colored.

4. **MEANWHILE, MAKE THE FILLING:** In a bowl, beat the eggs with the sugar. Add all of the remaining ingredients one at a time and in order, whisking until smooth.

5. Pour the filling into the warm pie shell. Bake for about 30 minutes, until the custard is golden and nearly set but still quite jiggly; cover the edge of the pie shell with foil halfway through baking. Transfer the lemon chess pie to a rack to cool completely before serving.

MAKE AHEAD The pie can be refrigerated overnight. Serve at room temperature. ●

PORK DAUBE continued

8. Tuck the reserved bouquet garni into the daube. Add enough water to the casserole to just cover the meat and bring to a boil over moderately high heat. Place a round of parchment paper directly on the surface of the meat and cover with the lid. Transfer the casserole to the oven and bake until the meat is tender, about 2½ hours. Let cool to room temperature. Discard the parchment paper, bouquet garni and any bits of juniper berry. Refrigerate the daube overnight.

9. **MAKE THE GARNISH:** Preheat the oven to 250°. In a large skillet, heat 2 tablespoons of the oil until shimmering. Add the oyster and cremini mushrooms and season with salt and pepper. Cover and cook over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until the mushrooms are softened, about 5 minutes. Remove the lid. Continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until the liquid has evaporated and the mushrooms start to brown, about 4 minutes. Add the remaining 1 tablespoon of olive oil and the garlic and cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 3 minutes. Stir in the chopped parsley.

10. Scrape the fat from the surface of the daube and discard it. Mix the mushrooms into the daube and bring to a simmer over high heat, stirring frequently. Bake the daube for about 1½ hours, uncovered, until the liquid has reduced slightly and the meat is very tender. Stir in the vinegar, season with salt and pepper and serve.

MAKE AHEAD The daube can be refrigerated and reheated over the course of 4 days; add a little water if the stew seems dry.

NOTE Wolfert also had great results preparing this daube with domestic wild boar that she ordered online from d'artagnan.com and brokenarrowranch.com.

WINE Although this Provençal stew is made with white wine, it's so hearty that a red will make a better match. Conveniently, the rustic and substantial wines of Provence, where Barbara Wilde lives, have rich fruit bolstered by a firm tannic structure, making them an ideal choice. Try Routas' spicy, plummy 2003 Infernet or the raspberry-scented 2004 Mas de Gourgonnier Les Baux de Provence, made from organically grown grapes. ●