

Southern comforts

Chefs across the West are dishing up delicious stick-to-your-ribs fare.

Southern food, declares the website for Seattle's JuneBaby restaurant, is "a cuisine to be respected and celebrated." These days, a slew of eateries around the West are doing exactly that, bringing refined techniques and meticulous sourcing to bear on fried chicken, corn bread, and shrimp and grits. One hint that the chef means business? The menu names the mill that ground those grits. Here are six of the West's finest Southern food establishments.

■ Tanya Holland opened **Brown Sugar Kitchen** in Oakland, Calif., in 2008, and 10 years later, people still wait an hour or more each weekend to dig into her beignets, oyster po'boys, and blackened

catfish. Holland—trained at France's La Varenne cooking school—makes creative but unfussy changes on all the dishes. Food critic Jonathan Gold calls the crisp yet ethereally light cornmeal waffle (accompanied by brown sugar butter) "the best you will ever taste."

■ Joe Darr originally came to Bozeman, Mont., from Tennessee for the fishing, but he stuck around to open **Roost Fried Chicken**. He had the bona fides: His family's restaurants back home were famous for their coconut pies and barbecue. Darr doesn't serve any newfangled reinventions, just what he calls "real-deal Southern"—which feels apt, since he perfected the fried chicken rec-

ipe in his garage. The focus here is on the bird, whether fried, rotisserie roasted, or tinged with Nashville hot spice paste.

■ Like Reba McEntire singing at Caesars, **Yardbird** brings some down-home flavor to the glitzy Las Vegas Strip. The kitchen belts out the hits: deviled eggs, mac and cheese, and shrimp and grits. But the showstopper is the Chicken 'n' Watermelon 'n' Waffles—the bird brined for 27 hours, the waffle made savory with cheddar cheese, the watermelon seasoned, and the whole entrée topped with honey hot sauce and boozy maple syrup.

■ **Brenda's Meat & Three** is a homey Southern diner that somehow tele-



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Fried chicken and waffles rule at Roost.

just serve rice; it features rice from a different growing region nightly. Jordan also dishes up oxtails on the bone (forcing diners to dig in with their fingers) and a dark roux gumbo. Come on the weekend to enjoy Moonshine Hour.

■ Justin Beckett, chef at **Southern Rail** in Phoenix, has a broader definition of the South than some. To him, the region stretches from Atlanta to Arizona. So beyond gumbo and fried chicken, he serves huevos rancheros and enchiladas packed with seasonal vegetables. In fact, the chef's focus on produce is evident across the menu: Heirloom carrots fill the chicken and dumplings, and a casserole—yes, a casserole—stars rice, leeks, cauliflower, and broccoli, bound with a béchamel based on smoked onion. "When people taste that smoke," Beckett says, "they think they're getting away with something." —dan miller

ported itself, horseshoe-shaped counter and all, to the middle of San Francisco. It's named after its chef, New Orleans transplant Brenda Buenviaje, and a standard southland order: a protein of the day plus a choice of three sides. Here, those mains might include barbecue brisket and meat loaf, but you could make a meal of the fixins', which range

from *maque choux* (a vegetable mélange) to mac and cheese.

■ Edouardo Jordan has cooked at the French Laundry in California and crafted salumi in Italy. Now he's serving chitlins in Seattle. The Florida native calls **JuneBaby** "Southern food with roots," and those roots show. The eatery doesn't



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