

SOUTHERN COMFORT

MORE THAN A DOUGHNUT SHOP, THE NEW KRISPY KREME IN HOOVER IS A HIGH CHURCH DEVOTED TO THE KING OF ALL PASTRY.

BY LOYD MCINTOSH



Few things rival Birmingham's deep-rooted love for church, football and barbecue, but perhaps a fresh box of Krispy Kreme doughnuts comes closer than anything else. I was practically raised on the confections, picking up a dozen or so with my father nearly every Sunday morning. We would head down Highway 11 to the Krispy Kreme doughnut shop on First Avenue in East Lake. My dad's three-speed-on-the-column pickup would plow down the empty highway, the two of us already looking sharp in our Sunday clothes, ready for the task ahead.

Once we pulled into the parking lot, I would wander on in and stake a place in line while my dad waited in the truck. This was an enormous responsibility for a six-year-old, and I took it seriously. Standing in line, I would watch the older couples at the end of the counter eating crullers with coffee and marvel at the bright

green ceramic tile and countertops the color of Aim toothpaste.

I imagine there have been thousands of similar scenes since 1937, as Krispy Kreme has grown from a small neighborhood doughnut shop in Winston-Salem, N.C., to one of the South's chief cultural and culinary exports. Krispy Kreme now has stores in 27 states, with more planned to open in such areas as Alaska, Oregon, Hawaii and Canada. New York's 1998 Zagat's Survey of New York City restaurants rated Krispy Kreme the #1 "Best Buy." The Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., has a collection of Krispy Kreme items on display, and the company has even developed an interactive website, replete with financial reports and doughnut trivia.

It's that blend of history and post-modernism that you'll find on display at the new Krispy Kreme off Highway 31 in Hoover. Replacing the original,

cramped store, the new Krispy Kreme is more of a museum or, shall we say, high church devoted to the king of all pastry. Murals of old-time Krispy Kreme stores and delivery trucks line the walls. Curious visitors can watch through a window as each doughnut makes its way down a conveyor belt. The smooth rings shuffle along until they reach a machine that drops the sugared glazing in a sheet like a waterfall. Each doughnut is eventually baptized—or Christened, depending on your religious affiliation—in the sugar mixture before being boxed up, hot and fresh, right before your eyes. Krispy Kreme t-shirts, baseball caps and coffee mugs are among the souvenirs you can purchase when you drop in for a visit. You can even pick up an authentic paper hat, just like the Krispy Kreme employees of old used to wear.

The furniture is a little more modern than Krispy Kreme junkies might be used to—no wobbly round stools with a crack in the vinyl to sit on here. The effect is all modern-retro.

And while the doughnuts and coffee are as delicious and hot as they are anywhere else, I'll always be partial to that old location in East Lake. Even now, I go out of my way to swing by whenever I find myself on that side of town. Despite the many changes in our city's landscape and in Krispy Kreme, the old shop on Highway 11 still stands proud, as it has since 1963. It's been redecorated a few times, but the green and white tile and neon "Hot Doughnuts" sign still welcome hungry strangers at all hours of the day and night. You can even find a few old-timers enjoying a cruller, a cup of coffee and good conversation. ☺