



Les Dames d'Escoffier
INTERNATIONAL



Founded in 2013

Ideibirmingham.org

Winter 2023

President's Note

Dear Dames,

The holiday season has begun and I'm so excited to share this festive time of year with all of you. This is officially our chapter's 10th anniversary and we have a lot to celebrate, as you'll see in this newsletter.

We had a jam-packed fall, proof that our chapter is thriving. Our annual meeting at Innovation Depot, at which we approved a slate of new members and new board members, was followed by StrongHER, a city-wide event honoring women leaders, including our LDEI chapter, and five weekends of the Les Dames Takeover at the Market at Pepper Place.

In September, we also held a sparkling new member reception at the Botanical Gardens, organized and hosted by VP of Membership LaCrista Hutchinson with help from Kathy G. We networked until we dropped at the BBJ Women's Summit, showed off our colors at Fiesta (awarding a top scholarship to a promising Latina nutrition student at UAB), and then the next day worked from dawn until dusk to put on the most successful Champagne & Fried Chicken event to date. We were blessed with perfect weather and our guests showed up and stayed, dining, drinking and

continued on page 23, see Letter

Better Than Ever

Champagne & Fried Chicken 2023 was another successful fundraiser for our record books



This year's event built upon our past success, but with some changes—like greater capacity for on-site dining and frying the chicken on-site—that made the event better than ever. Photos by Joe DeSciose.



Lots to Celebrate from the Fundraiser

by Donna Cornelius

You know what they say: The more things change, the more they stay the same. That was true for this year's Champagne & Fried Chicken fundraiser! It was once again a big success—but also featured a few tweaks.

As in years past, the Oct. 1 event was held at Pepper Place and featured a drive-through picnic, with guests stopping at various stations to pick up their food, bubbly, and a beautiful bouquet of fresh flowers from Stone Hollow Farmstead. Restaurant raffle tickets and cocktail kits were additional offerings. The reusable canvas tote bags imprinted with our logo were so popular last year that we again used them to hold all the homemade goodies.

C&FC 2023 was another financial success: We raised over \$135,000. We had solid sponsorship sales and sold 375 picnic totes—that's a lot of fried chicken!

One major change this year was that the chicken, kicked up a notch with seasoning from Yo' Mama's, was breaded and fried on-site by Dames Crystal Peterson, Lindsey Noto King, Cheryl Slocum, Maureen Holt, Brittany Cheatham, Raquel Ervin, Clara Darling, Mary Grace Viado, Emily Tuttle, Kay Reed, and Tina Liollo, with help from honorary "Dude d'Escoffier," Porter McCollister. A vegetarian meal—a vegetable frittata and pesto pasta salad from Dame Joy Smith—was an option for the main course.

The gourmet picnic for two also included a new potato salad with shallot vinaigrette and fresh herbs from Kathy G. and Co. and Tre Luna Catering, fall kale salad with sherry vinaigrette and fresh greens from



This year's event had our standard drive-through line, but guests could also stay for an onsite party and enjoy their picnic at Pepper Place.

Snow's Bend Farm made by chef Rita Bernhardt, Ashley Mac's biscuits, Southern pickles from Lindsey Noto King, a fruit and cheese board from Iz Weddings & Events, a demi baguette from Hinkel's Bakery, and honey from Eastaboga Bee Co. Sweet treats were banana pudding from Betsy McAtee at Dreamland Bar-B-Que as well as Champagne macarons from Kristen Farmer Hall of Bandit Patisserie or French lavender pound cake from April McClung of Emily's Heirloom Pound Cakes. And our menu wouldn't have been complete without a festive bottle of Faire La Fete Brut.

While we greatly appreciated each donor and sponsor, one guest got an especially warm welcome when he drove through the line. Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin showed his support for our organization by coming in person to pick up his picnic—and to cheerfully pose for selfies!

We made a bigger push this year to encourage guests to have their meals

on-site, and many enjoyed eating at festive tables set up at Pepper Place while they listened to live music.

While everyone worked hard, it was nice to remember that because of our efforts, we'll be able to fund more scholarships and grants, to boost our operating budget, to add to our endowment, and to spread the word about our mission. It's a tribute to our collective efforts that such an enjoyable event results in our increasing ability to support the future of food in Alabama!

"We truly involve all our membership in myriad ways that make the entire enterprise gratifying and worthwhile," said our president, Leigh Sloss-Corra. "Champagne & Fried Chicken is a winner we hope to replicate for years to come!"

As the day ended, weary but happy Dames gathered for a toast to yet another successful—and fun—fundraiser. Now it's on to the 2024 edition of Champagne & Fried Chicken!

Champagne & Fried Chicken in Pictures



A stellar team of Dames, including Crystal Peterson, Lindsey Noto King, Cheryl Slocum, Maureen Holt, Brittany Cheatham, Raquel Ervin, Clara Darling, Mary Grace Viado, Emily Tuttle, Kay Reed, and Tina Liollo, as well as Porter McCollister, made the on-site preparation of the chicken happen—to rave reviews. All photos by Joe DeSciose.



All photos by Joe DeSciose.



At left and directly below:
When Birmingham Mayor
Randall Woodfin arrived
in the drive-through line,
he received an enthusiastic
welcome from Birmingham
Dames!

Far bottom left: Susan
Swagler walked through
the pick-up line with Gary
Youngblood, a returning
sponsor of our fundraiser.
All photos by Joe DeSciose.



Thank You to Our 2023 Sponsors!

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in memory of
their mother,
Caroline Sloss



Pardis Stitt



Liz Huntley



Champagne & Fried Chicken
was produced in partnership with



Making the Most of the International Conference in Louisville

by Susan Swagler

“I have a question for Birmingham.”

If we had a dollar for every time we fielded questions about our chapter—how we put out such a fantastic newsletter, how we recruit new members, how we keep current ones, how we get sponsorships, how we connect with our community, what’s our “secret sauce,” AND especially how do we make Champagne & Fried Chicken so successful—we would have been able to really increase our odds on that record Mega Millions lottery that was happening while we were there. Alas, the tickets we bought were not winners.

Seriously though, your delegation to the 2023 Les Dames d’Escoffier International Conference in Louisville, Kentucky, represented your chapter with purpose and pride. Other chapters know about Birmingham, and they want what we have. We are a force!

Here are some of the sessions we attended and the takeaways we took away.

Legal Matters

This was a real workhorse meeting with International’s lawyer, Jackie Henson. It’s all about navigating the business of running a chapter like a business. Which it is.

We talked about conflicts of interest (there’s an online form we need to get everyone to sign).

Some chapters have instituted whistleblowing policies to properly report unprofessional behavior by members or issues that are detrimental to the chapter. The idea is to



The Birmingham delegation proudly represented our chapter at the international conference in Louisville in October.

have established processes in place so the chapter board can address issues and inappropriate conduct properly and consistently and fairly.

We also learned what we can and cannot do with our social media as it relates to promoting Dames (generally there needs to be an educational or a charitable component to any such posts).

This is because of our 501(c)(3) status. *Members cannot benefit financially from our nonprofit chapter social media.* It’s a fine line we have to walk. We can promote our members to a certain extent, but if it provides something of value to them (free advertising for their new menu or new cookbook, etc.) it begins to blur the line.

How to Put It Out There

This session, focusing on PR and marketing, featured a panel of women from national PR agencies. They talked about knowing your audience—those you are trying to sell to AND those in the media who are helping you reach that audience. Do your homework before reaching out. Other key takeaways:

- Figure out what makes you unique and capitalize on that.
- Distill your brand into a concise package and message.
- Look on YouTube for iPhone tutorials to up your photography game.
- Earned media (like the television and radio segments we do ahead of our C&FC) is better than paid media.

- Follow your customers and potential customers on Instagram and Facebook and LinkedIn and lean into what they are already talking about; figure out how that relates to you.
- Consider Pinterest as an additional platform.
- Invest in media training for yourself; there are tutorials on YouTube.
- Follow the people you want to engage with you.
- There’s a free version of HubSpot to help you keep up with contacts.
- Beware of AI when crafting your press releases and messages.
- Promote your own clients and customers, and they will do the same for you.

And remember this: The easier you make the media’s job (with great press releases, photos, video, facts) the better your chances of getting coverage. Do their work for them!

Why Bourbon Matters Even if You Don’t Drink

Well, we did drink. Six different tiny tastes took us through two centuries of bourbon making and all the interesting ways it aligns with U.S. history. It’s all connected! We are ready for trivia!

Award-winning author and bourbon expert, Susan Reigler, shared a lot of bourbon-related facts.

- Bourbon is made from a sour mash (like sourdough bread).
- The earliest mention of bourbon was in an 1812 newspaper article.
- To fund the war of 1812, Madison reinstated the whiskey tax that Jefferson had repealed.
- Old Forester was an early “whiskey as medicine.” George Gavin Brown signed his name to every bottle to signify its authenticity and purity. That signature is still on bottles today.



Birmingham Dames met and learned from each other...and a lot of bourbon was enjoyed by all! Some took a side trip to the Angel’s Envy Finishing Room bar for The Henderson, that distillery’s official cocktail and a twist on an Old Fashioned (at right).



- The Bottle and Bond Act of 1897 was the first consumer protection law, followed by the Food and Drug Act in 1906.
- The “angels’ share” refers to the amount of an alcoholic drink (such as whiskey, cognac, brandy) that is lost to evaporation when the liquid is being aged in porous oak barrels.
- The 18th Amendment (Prohibition) is the only amendment to take away a right.

- Because Prohibition eliminated the whiskey tax, personal income tax was started.
- During Prohibition, every man, woman, and child (no matter the age!) was entitled to one pint of “medicinal alcohol” every three weeks.
- In 1945, Kentucky produced nearly half of the country’s

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industrial ethanol and helped with the war effort.

- Today, bourbon adds \$9 billion annually to Kentucky's economy.

Reigler, who is a Certified Executive Bourbon steward, told us the right way to taste bourbon: Pass the glass under your nose a few times (with your mouth slightly open); don't sniff it like wine. Sip and get some on your upper lip. Wait a moment and taste. Then take another sip and savor.

A Taste of Kentucky's Makers

Local women-owned businesses took the lead here in an informative session of tasting bourbon, confec-

tions, and cheeses. Those represented included Craig's Creek Farm, Capriole Farms, Buzzard's Roost Whiskey and The Pie Queen.

Rebel Negley attended this session and says her friend and longtime Kentucky Dame, Susan Reigler, a professional bourbon taster (see Why Bourbon Matters on page 11) and education director for Buzzard's Roost, explained how some bourbons don't have their own distilleries and must partner with other companies to produce their products.

Rebel and the other Birmingham Dames in attendance thoroughly enjoyed their food and beverage tastings.



The always-fabulous Kathy G.

Tour Highlights Women-Owned Businesses

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

The LDEI Annual Conference in Louisville was packed with meetings, experiences, food, and fun for all who participated.

I attended a terrific morning excursion, Louisville Handcrafted and Handmade on the first day of the conference, which took two dozen Dames on a tour of some of the city's iconic and most-beloved women-owned businesses.

We started with breakfast and a tour of the Butcher Rose, one of the oldest homes in Louisville. It was recently beautifully redesigned and now operates as a woman-owned, woman-themed Bed & Breakfast, co-workspace and event venue. Our next stop was the manufacturing home of Hadley Pottery, a locally owned ceramics maker with an international reputation, started by a pillar of Louisville society, Mary Alice Hadley, in 1939.

We enjoyed a cheese and wine tasting and then lunch at the pop-



One stop on this tour was at the popular Dame-owned eatery, Harvey's Cheese, where Dames enjoyed a cheese and wine tasting.

ular Dame-owned eatery, Harvey's Cheese, and then topped that off with a full tour and tastings at Gilberto's Gelato, a local favorite spot owned by Dame Kristin Gilbert and her husband.

Birmingham is fortunate to have a

robust hand-crafted food and drink scene, but Louisville clearly holds its own, too. All the places we visited would be worth returning to. And the time shared with Dames from other chapters was one of the best treats of all.

A Walking Tour of Louisville: Notes from Cristina Almanza and Dulce Rivera

Dames Dulce Rivera and Cristina Almanza were part of "Tour 3: Tour of Louisville Distilling with Matson & Gilman;" this was the first time they attended the international conference.

The tour was co-hosted by Dame Sarah Bryan from Republic National Distributing Company "top wine, spirits and CBD distributor in the nation" and Dame Nicole Stipp, co-founder and co-owner of Matson & Gilman and Trouble Bar.

We started the conference with this walking tour and it was amazing! We truly got to see so much of Kentucky's Whiskey industry and our breakfast was exceptional. But what was most meaningful is that we were able to meet Dames from the England chapter, San Antonio chapter, and Georgia chapter.

The tour started with a breakfast and bourbon pairing at PROOF on Main. PROOF on Main is one of Louisville's premier dining destinations, and we had its quirky art-filled private dining room all to ourselves!

"Dame Nicole Stipp walked us through the different pairings and the breakfast was to die for," said Dame Dulce Rivera. Each breakfast course was accompanied by a new whiskey to try, with some of them exclusive to PROOF.

After breakfast, we walked into the hotel to which the restaurant was attached. The hotel concept is named 21c Museum Hotel and was voted among the Top 10 Hotels in the World in the Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards



Both Cristina Almanza and Dulce Rivera were first-time attendees to the international conference. They both were excellent ambassadors for our chapter.



in 2009, 2010 and 2011. It was also voted as the #1 Hotel in the South in the 2012 Condé Nast Traveler Readers' Choice Awards.

The idea behind this hotel is that the owners loved art and wanted a museum that was open day and night for the public to admire and

enjoy art, so they came up with the idea of a hotel. The hotel has over 9,000 feet of exhibition space.

After visiting the hotel, Nicole and Sarah took us through their favorite places up and down Main

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Street, which is also known as Distillery Row. We stopped for tastes of whiskey at Evan Williams Downtown Experience where we were able to have a Prohibition-style experience in their basement and tasted 6 different types of bourbons.

We then went on to ArtEatables where we were able to taste some delicious bourbon chocolates and see some of Louisville’s local art and had some shopping time.

We then walked to Michter’s Fort Nelson Distillery. Before entering, we were able to take a photo with Louisville’s Slugger Bat, which has been known for creating pro baseball bats. Once we were inside Michter’s Distillery we were given a tour on the distillation process of bourbon.

Then we went upstairs to their bar, “The Bar at Fort Nelson” where we had some delicious cocktails, but what was the most stunning, was that they had a special printer that printed images on the cocktails. Vicky Fugitte, the director of hospitality and guest experience was our tour guide. Vicky was so impressed with our group that she asked if she could become a Dame—I believe we recruited a new Dame for the Kentucky chapter.

After Michter’s we passed by the Belvedere and then headed on to Old Forrester, stopping at the gift shop. We then walked to our final stop, Angel’s Envy Distillery. Though it was a good 20-minute



Art is everywhere along Distillery Row and much of it involves bourbon and cocktails!

walk, the walk was worth the wait. We were taken to their private bar and had their version of an Old Fashioned. “The Henderson” is an award-winning bourbon cocktail with hints of baking spices, citrus, and subtle fruit notes. Both Dulce and I loved Angel’s Envy so much that we came back later with Kathy G., Susan, and Leigh to share The Henderson with them.

In all, the experience was probably one of the best walking tours I have taken. I had the opportunity to meet amazing women who are part of our organization and had insider’s scoop of the best places in Louisville. It was the best start to the conference and a memorable

experience that I will never forget.

Both Dame Nicole and Sarah truly showed us their love and passion for Louisville; their hospitality was bar none. So much so, that I am hoping to be able to celebrate my birthday back in Louisville later this year.

—Cristina Almanza

“The walking tour of Louisville was very well rounded. We had delicious food and great drinks that made this non-bourbon drinker appreciate and enjoy a nice Old Fashioned. We got to see the beauty of the old architecture while enjoying a more modernized and revitalized Louisville!”

—Dulce Rivera

The Feast of Hope Gala Returns March 2

by Leigh Sloss-Corra

One of our most valued partnerships as a chapter is with the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama.

What began a few years ago with Dames volunteering to pack boxes each month at the Food Bank’s main facility near West Oxmoor Road turned into a successful collaboration on a new Food Bank fundraiser, the Feast of Hope Gala.

Kathy G. showed everyone why she is the Queen of Fab Events when she came up with the idea of styling the Food Bank warehouse with chandeliers and beautifully set tables, serving curated wines paired with a multi-course dinner, all prepared and served by Dames.

The event would showcase the expertise of our members and our chapter would benefit by getting our message directly in front of their biggest donors.

The Food Bank also agreed to pay for an annual scholarship to a female student focusing on hunger and public health for the next three years. Year one was a hit, and in year two in March of 2023, more Dames saw more funds raised, more attendees and more excitement around the event.

Planning has begun for Feast of Hope Gala 2024, to be held Saturday, March 2, and it promises to be even more fabulous, if that’s possible.

Once again, Dame Alexis Douglas will curate the wines and introduce the wines and courses with the help from other Dames. Short video interviews will provide information about LDEI during the 300-person seated dinner. Dames will prepare and serve



The warehouse of the Community Food Bank of Central Alabama undergoes a transformation for the annual Feast of Hope Gala with chandeliers and beautifully set tables and an amazing five-course dinner.



the food, though the five-course menu will have a few changes that are yet to be decided.

Heading up the catering committee are Kathy G., Sara Walker, Erin Mooney, Kay Reed, Lindsey Noto King, and Fanoula Gulas. The Food Bank expects to raise even more money this year from sponsors who have learned the value of that organization and its partnership with LDEI.

As many Dames as possible are asked to assist with food prep or to participate in the event as wine servers and hostesses. There is nothing like this event in Birmingham.

We are proud to help raise funds that feed hungry members of our community. It’s a worthwhile use of our time and effort. We hope more chapters will adopt this model, which is a win for LDEI, the Food Bank, and our entire community.

FOOD+Culture Fest Celebrates Region’s Culinary Scene

by Jess Bennett

October saw a new food festival enter the Birmingham scene—FOOD+Culture. The multi-venue event’s mission is to build a better Birmingham by celebrating and elevating the diverse and dynamic cultures through the region’s culinary traditions, innovators, and breakout talent. The four-day festival featured six signature events celebrating aspects of culinary culture and heritage, as well as a dinner series of chef takeovers and collaborations hosted by local restaurants.

Dame Rebecca Gann, FOOD+Culture’s programming director, sees the event as timely due to increasing interest in the city as a destination for culinary tourism. She noted that the event follows a recent rise in national recognition of the city’s culinary landscape, from long-standing traditions like barbecue and the meat-and-three, to acclaimed regional chefs staking new claims in Birmingham, and especially the recognition of trail-blazing local culinary icons such as Frank Stitt, who was the inaugural recipient of the festival’s Frank Stitt award for Industry Excellence.

“We want to provide a platform—a table—where people can come together to learn about and celebrate our region’s rich culinary scene, culture, and topics of deeper cultural significance through one thing that brings everyone together—food,” said Gann. “The festival is unique, in my opinion, because of its intimacy—its large-festival feel but in a small town—and the way that we tie in topics of deeper significance. Each event has a deeper cultural motive, like celebrating Black chefs and honoring



Above: Cathy Sloss Jones, Cheryl Slocum, Leigh Sloss-Corra, and Valerie Thomas (Festival Board), all standing, hosted guests from the Mayor’s office and major sponsor Regions Bank. At right: Betsy McAtee and Kathy G. welcomed Nashville Dame Erin Byers Murray.



the 60th anniversary of the Civil Rights Movement or showcasing women in the culinary industry—but these were topics we brought to life through food, entertainment, and camaraderie.”

In addition to Dame Rebecca Gann as programming director, the non-profit event included three Birmingham Chapter Dames serv-

ing as board members. Cathy Sloss Jones served as president, with Leigh Sloss-Corra as vice president and Cheryl Slocum as community and food advisor.

LDEI Birmingham was a presenting sponsor of FOOD+Flair: Changing the Menu, a lunch celebrating iconic women in the industry and their roles in the

evolving landscape of Southern cuisine. Birmingham Dames assisted in organizing a cocktail hour and mini-market showcasing female artisans and entrepreneurs. Participating talent included Chefs Becky Satterfield, Mary Grace Viado, Fanoula Gulas, and Ashley McMakin, with mixologists Steva Casey and Jessica Bennett. The multi-course seated lunch was hosted by Dame Toni Tipton-Martin, food writer and cofounder of the Southern Foodways Alliance, and featured dishes from Chefs Sophina Uong, LaMara Davidson, and Kristen Hall. Sommeliers Alexis Douglas and Kelly Mitchell offered thoughtful wine pairings throughout the event.

Organizers are already at work on next year’s event. Dates have been announced for September 19th-22nd of 2024.

“Triumphs this year included successfully setting ourselves up for the future, creating a premier event with high-caliber programming, and having guests and chefs alike say they would do it again,” Gann said. “We plan to continue with our mission and create an even better event in 2024. Each year will bring new themes, new topics to celebrate, and new opportunities for talent to get involved.”

Tickets and information regarding next year’s FOOD+ can be found at bhamfoodplus.com.



Above: Dames Brittany Cheatham and Rita Bernhardt at FOOD+Fire at Sloss Furnaces. At left: Dame Jasmine Smith was a featured chef at FOOD+Heritage at Pepper Place. Below: AL.com reporter Shauna Stuart covered FOOD+Funk at Sloss Furnaces on Sunday morning with Dames Leigh Sloss-Corra and New York Dame Nancy Hopkins.



Our Fiesta Scholarship Partnership

by Susan Swagler

Our scholarship partnership with Fiesta allows our chapter to reach people we might never reach otherwise, extending our impact in ways we can only imagine. It also gets us a table at one of the most fun parties in town.

This year, Anna Theoktisto and Susan Swagler dressed our table in colorful sarapes, put out popular bowls of colorful Mexican candy and hung paper flowers from the top of our tent. They were joined during the day by Leigh Sloss-Corra, Pat Terry, Gia McCollister, and Cheryl Slocum. Cristina Almanza and Dulce Rivera, who are on the Fiesta Board, stopped by, too. And all of us got on the main stage for the check presentation.

But Fiesta is about more than a fiesta.

The beloved Birmingham event, the largest Hispanic festival in Alabama, was started 21 years ago to offer educational scholarships to young people. Our contribution is a \$3,000 scholarship that we know impacts lives.

Our 2023 Fiesta Partner Scholarship recipient, Diana Hurtado, is pursuing a degree in dietetics at the University of Alabama at Birmingham with the goal of being a registered dietitian. She's studying remotely from Fairfax, Virginia, where she lives with her family.

So, on Saturday, Oct. 21, Cristina and Dulce, with their connection to both Fiesta, Inc. and Birmingham LDEI, organized a Zoom call so we could get to know this young woman better. Leigh Sloss-Corra, Gia McCollister, Anna Theoktisto and Susan Swagler were also on the



Above: Fiesta is the largest Hispanic festival in Alabama. It celebrates the arts, culture, and food of more than 20 countries. At right: A group of Dames was on hand to present the \$3,000 scholarship check on the main stage at Fiesta.



Zoom call. We talked about who we are as Dames and what our organization is about and the partnership between Fiesta and LDEI Birmingham.

Diana came to the U.S. at age 5 from Bolivia. She is a DACA resident (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals). She says she

initially found it hard to navigate securing this next step of higher education with her DACA residency. UAB's remote study program made getting a degree easier, and the program is open to our country's young "Dreamers."

Diana says when she was in high school, she didn't even know what

a dietitian was, but once she found out, she recognized immediately what she wanted to do with her life. She told us that this desire came, in part, from the Bolivian culture in which thinness is valued and encouraged. As a student athlete in high school (cross country, track, and basketball), Diana rejected that cultural norm and instead began studying nutrition to better fuel her own performance.

While enrolled in community college, she got a job in a local hospital working with dietitians (she still works there part time while pursuing her degree; that's one reason remote learning was important).

Diana is currently doing rotations (she has four more remaining). Most recently she was working in the Fairfax County Public Schools evaluating menus and experimenting with foods the schools receive; her goal: to use what they get in ways that are both healthy and tasty. Her work impacts children from elementary school through middle school to high school. It involves working with other departments such as procurement and budgeting, while adhering to federal nutritional guidelines and coming up with healthy foods the kids actually want to eat.

As someone who has dealt with body insecurity issues, Diana says, "I like working with kids, knowing I can make a difference in that field."

Events Calendar

Monday December 11	Holiday Party \$35 per person	Bistro 218 5:00-7:00 p.m. Valet parking will be available.
Wednesday January 24	Emily Roy cooking class	Time and location TBD
Saturday, February 10	Sweet Treats fundraiser \$50 per box	Market at Pepper Place 7 a.m. - noon
Monday, February 26	Susan Notter Easter sugar demo	Time and location TBD

Remembering Dame Eileen Hallmark

Dame Eileen Hallmark passed away on August 24, leaving behind a legacy of joy and a tremendous zest for life. She joined the Birmingham chapter in 2021, but she was a familiar face at many of our events, including our very first fundraiser in 2017, serving wine at the event with Dame Rosalyn Bloomston.

From Kathy G. Mezrano: "Eileen was always warm and gracious. She was extremely knowledgeable in her field. She grew up in the wine industry, as her mother was an expert wine rep as well. She excelled at Vineyard Brands, becoming their top sales representative all over the world. She was fun-loving and made friends in the food and wine industry that she loved. She was proud to be included in the Birmingham



chapter of LDEI and felt closer to the Dames here having lived here rather than the joining the Atlanta group. Eileen was always generous to our chapter in helping secure the Champagne for our major event Champagne & Fried Chicken from the very first year at Jones Valley though the beginning year at Pepper Place. She was a treasure, and we'll miss her greatly."

Meet Our New Members!

Our chapter gained 15 new members in August 2023. Here, get to know the first six of these extraordinary women a little better. The remaining Dames will be featured in the Spring 2024 newsletter.

Amanda Stanfield

Place of birth: Washington, D.C.
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: Hampton University; bachelor’s degree in journalism; Johnson & Wales University, associate degree in culinary arts
Current position: Food Studio coordinator and recipe developer/ tester at Dotdash Meredith
How did you get your start? Working as a pastry assistant for pastry chef Claudie Martinez.



What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I enjoy getting to create recipes that will reach thousands of people weekly and being a part of an industry that is bursting with creative and innovative thinkers.
Favorite restaurant in Birmingham/where you live? That’s a hard one, but I always enjoy drinks and dinner at Cayo Coco

Rum Bar & Restaurante. I always have a good time, and the vibe is incredibly welcoming and cozy.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? I honestly have two last meals: two slices of classic NYC pepperoni pizza or a perfectly cooked filet of red snapper over a seasonal succotash.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? Easy, I’d travel to the nearest island with white sand beaches and aquamarine waves and lounge the week away.

Anne Born

Place of birth: Norfolk, VA
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: BBA from the University of Texas; MBA from the University of Dallas
Current position: Market Manager On Premise at Brown-Forman Beverages
How did you get your start? First job out of school was at a bank then moved to the public sector working for the City of Dallas. Left the public sector for the private sector after getting my MBA moving from finance to marketing and finally to a sales position.
What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I love talking about my products and working for my company Brown-Forman. Generally the



public has lots of questions for me about the different spirits we make and I am happy to let them know all about us.
Though I am not a bartender, working with different brands has given me experience in mixing up a few fun cocktails.
Favorite restaurant (besides your own, if applicable) in Birmingham/where you live? So many choices it is hard to pick just one, but East/West is always a go-to for me.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Probably pasta, though I do enjoy French food, anything rich and decadent.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where

would you go & what would you do? Though I’m not big on beaches in general (too hot), I’d probably want to go to Costa Rica or Belize then head into the rainforest to see all the birds and the sloths. Might dive if I had the time.
Bonus: I worked at movie theaters in high school and college. Always enjoyed the “old” black and white movies, but now many of the movies I worked are showing up as “classics” on TCM. For three years I worked the Rocky Horror Picture show on Friday and Saturday nights. In spite of the fact that I only saw the movie a handful of times, I could hear it as I was closing out the receipts from the day. The speaker was next to my office. So, I know most of the lines and songs. Of course, that information is starting to fade now, thank goodness.

Amanda Callahan

Place of birth: Houma, Louisiana
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: Jefferson State Community College
Current position: Program manager for Brownell Travel (Corporate Incentive Travel)
How did you get your start? When I was in high school, I would help with festivals like City Stages and the Schaeffer Crawfish Fest. From that exposure, I knew I wanted to be in the event world, but back then, I wasn’t sure how to go about achieving said goal. After going the route I thought was the “adult” choice, I knew I wasn’t going to be fulfilled. I still helped and volunteered with events around town as



often as I could until I decided to take a leap of faith; in 2013 I called my friend and former boss, Jennifer Gow-ers of GoPro Event Solutions, and asked if she needed full-time help. The rest is history!
What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I love meeting so many new people from around the world and building relationships. This industry is life-changing for so many reasons, and I love being a part of such a vibrant and fast-paced community.

Favorite restaurant in Birmingham/where you live? Chez Fonfon
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? My last meal would be bites of all of my favorite things: a slice of pizza, sushi, a perfectly cooked steak, and a slice of cheesecake!
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I would go back to the small town of Girdwood, Alaska. I would go whale-watching, sight-seeing, hang out with the locals, and just slow down. It is the most beautiful, peaceful town!
Bonus: I am a skilled archer. My dad started coaching me when I was around the age of 9.

Joy King

Y’all, I especially requested to interview Joy because she is the most fun to chat with! Cassandra King, preferring to go by Joy, is the creative mind behind Eat.Drink.Ride Food Tours & Travel. Joy takes us on a journey from food blogs to the delicious world of food tours. Armed with a broadcasting degree from Auburn University at Montgomery, Joy’s journey into the culinary world began with a love for food that she couldn’t contain. After co-hosting a radio show where her passion for food shone through, she ventured into food blogging. Realizing the impact her blogs had on local restaurants with an uptick in clients, but not making the kind of money she wanted, she went to TV. The turning point came when a bus company approached Joy asking if she could do something with a bus. Recognizing the



absence of food tours, Joy saw an opportunity to satiate the curiosity of food enthusiasts who are always saying “we want to eat where you eat!” Fast forward six years, and Eat.Drink.Ride has become a fun way to celebrate with friends and celebrate our local restaurants! For Joy, the real satisfaction in our industry comes from building relationships with restaurant owners and witnessing her tour guests or followers revisit the places she’s introduced them to. She takes pride in the uptick in business that restaurants experience after her promotions and videos. (I’ve personally been on the chef side of Joy’s tours and it is a VERY fun time!) As for a favorite restaurant? Joy says “It’s too hard to choose because

I love them all!” Joy is a lover of fried chicken so if there’s good fried chicken then it’s at the top of the list (I heartily agree!). But if she had to just name one, right now her favorite upscale restaurant is Helen. If she could plan her last meal, Joy envisions a grand feast featuring juicy fried chicken from Yo Mama’s, oxtails from Jake’s Soul Food, churros, hibiscus water, cookies from Cookiefix, a rib plate and a fish sandwich from Brenda’s Barbecue. If it’s the last meal you gotta go big! When not immersed in the culinary delights of her tours and taking care of her guests, Joy dreams of being on a Caribbean beach, sipping endless Tamarind Margaritas and rum punch with her best friend. As for an interesting tidbit? Joy reveals her love for the taste of olives, both black and green, despite admitting they are NASTY!

—Rita Bernhardt

Emily McDaniel

Place of birth: Birmingham, AL
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: After graduating from Oak Mountain High School in 2002, I went to a small, local community college, Jefferson State. I graduated with a Business associate degree.
Current position: Owner at Helen Restaurant where I am in charge of front of the house interviewing, accounts payables, licenses and taxes, payroll, and HR. The not so glamorous parts of the restaurant business. However, I only work during the day so I can be home with our girls at night.
How did you get your start? I started working at Jim ‘N Nicks Greystone when I was 16 years old; I started as a host, however I re-named my title to ‘Director of First Impressions’. I quickly fell in love



with the hospitality industry and trained to be a server then when old enough, I started to bartend-
er. I went on to open 15+ stores throughout the Southeast and Colorado on the JNN training team.
What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I love all of our staff at Helen. I love that when you come on board to work with us, you are automatically part of the family and I think that was so fun and wonderful about the hospitality industry. It’s full of people wanting to serve others, make them feel good and have an enjoyable experience.
Favorite restaurant (besides your own, if applicable) in Birmingham/where you live? My husband

and I love to date night and take our girls out to eat in Birmingham. If it’s date night, we like Chez Fonfon; and as a family, we like North Italia at the Summit.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Oh gosh, I love the burrata and warm bread at Bettola, so it would probably be that.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I would love to go to Miami to eat, drink, and sunbathe on the beaches. I’ve not been and am dying to make that trip happen soon!
Bonus: My husband, Rob, and I have twin girls who are 6 years old. Having twins can seem like you have unicorns—people are amazed. Besides having two wonderful children, it was awesome to only have to go through one pregnancy to have two children. Win, Win!

Jenn Nix

Place of birth: Memphis, TN
College/professional school(s) attended, major/degree earned: University of South Alabama; bachelor’s degree in geography and biology
Current position: Owner of Fork & Leaf Travel and travel adviser
How did you get your start? As a destination manager for Ecuador and the Galapagos Islands
What do you enjoy about your current position and the industry in general? I love creating person-



alized itineraries tailored to a client’s preferences. There’s nothing better than fulfilling their travel dreams and exceeding expectations in service.
Favorite restaurant in Birmingham/where you live? Fine dining: Chez Fonfon. Meat & 3: Niki’s West.
If you could plan your last meal, what would it be? Assorted crudo,

escargot, arugula salad with avocado, blood orange and gorgonzola dolce, my grandmother’s cornbread and then zabaglione with raspberries and blackberries.
If you had one week free of all obligations and \$5,000, where would you go and what would you do? I’d take my family to a Canadian mountain resort for fun winter sports and to eat fine food.
Bonus: I am a Master Gardener, have a motorcycle license, and my family and I lived in Italy in the late ’80s.

New Member Reception at The Gardens Café



On September 12 , our chapter welcomed our 15 new members during a reception at the Gardens Café at the Botanical Gardens. Kathy G. Mezano provided the beautiful food, and we toasted all of our amazing new members with bubbly and words from President Leigh Sloss-Corra and VP of Membershp LaCrista Hutchinson.

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dancing until the party was over and then some.
We have such a winning formula that LDEI’s Nashville chapter copied us with their own version of the event in early November. Three days after C&FC, 11 Dames headed to Louisville for a long weekend to gather and learn from others at the LDEI Annual Conference.
And when we returned to Birmingham, we threw our party dresses back on for the four-day FOOD+Culture Fest, which kicked off Thursday, October 12 with the LDEI-hosted women’s lunch, FOOD+Flair, and wrapped with FOOD+Funk on Sunday. Good thing our Dames have stamina, be-

cause the weeks that followed were packed with back-to-back recap meetings and gatherings at Dame-owned bars, eateries, and festivals sprinkled along the way, including a Beer Tasting program at TrimTab. One must stay fueled to keep up this pace!
So what’s next? Our annual Holiday Party will be December 11th, which is right around the corner. What’s on your wish list this year? I’m hoping for some of those pave potatoes from Bar La Fete, a bottle of Une Femme champagne, and a nap.
Until then, I encourage you to pour yourself a glass and read through this newsletter cover to cover. Acquaint yourself with the businesses of our new and existing

Dames and patronize and support them as much as possible during the holiday season. Invite other Dames to join you for a shopping spree or happy hour drinks. Enlist another Dame to help you solve a problem or plan an event or dream a new dream. With LDEI, we have a fabulous community of powerhouse women at our fingertips. Let’s celebrate our 10th anniversary by making the most of that. And of course thanking and toasting each other. There is hope for this city and for this world, because women are stepping up. It’ll be back to work in 2024, but, in the meantime, let’s celebrate another great year. Happy 10th Anniversary and happy holidays!
Cheers,
Leigh Sloss-Corra

Iceland: Fire and Ice

by Susan Swagler

I rarely train for vacation. But Iceland was different.

Between the two of us, my husband and I hiked for miles and miles, climbed a steep sheep trail up a mountain, he competed in a 100k gravel bike race, I snorkeled between continents, and raced up hills on a spirited but sweet Icelandic horse. We also chased waterfalls, crossed rugged lava fields to see an actual erupting volcano, visited thermal baths (fancy and not), rode a Zodiac into a glacial lagoon filled with icebergs, and traversed black sand beaches to see puffins.

I just celebrated one of those “big-decade birthdays,” so this trip was a reminder to do what I want while I can.

Here are the highlights along with some tips.

We arrived in Iceland first thing in the morning, stopped by duty free for a bottle of Buffalo Trace bourbon (trust me, alcohol is ungodly expensive in the regular state-owned liquor stores), hopped in our rented 4x4 SUV and headed to Reykjavik, the world’s northernmost capital city.

As we always do, we took a city tour to get a feel for the place. We began in front of Hallgrímskirkja, a beautiful church with a statue of explorer Leif Erikson in front. (This church, rising above all else, was our guiding landmark around the city.) Its unique architecture is based on natural elements—especially the hexagonal basalt columns of the famous Svartifoss as well as glaciers and lava formations. We went to the top for the panoramic



The Blue Lagoon, a world-famous tourist destination with its milky, mineral-rich waters, is like an oasis in the middle of vast lava fields.

view and timed that to the ringing of the church bells. We marveled at the Harpa (concert hall) with its cladding of geometric-shaped glass panels that resemble fish scales, the Sun Voyager sculpture of a Viking longship on the waterfront and Laugavegur Street (translates to “wash road” but is also known as Rainbow Street and is highly Instagram-able) with its cool shops and restaurants. We visited The Handknitting Association of Iceland for souvenirs (that way we knew they are made in Iceland of Icelandic wool.) We walked around Tjörnin, a natural pond surrounded by beautiful Icelandic architecture in the heart of Reykjavik. In the nearby City Hall, we saw a 3-D map of the entire country. (We revisited this map at the end of our trip, and it was even more fascinating having

traversed much of the South and Southeast by that time.)

Adventure

The next day, we headed east, and the adventures began.

We periodically exited the Ring Road (Route 1) for waterfalls. The 200-foot Seljalandsfoss is one of the most photographed in Iceland and it was our favorite because we could walk behind it. We walked to the nearby Gljúfrafoss, which is in a short slot canyon. We drove to the less crowded Gluggafoss (Window Falls) about 20 minutes away to see this two-step fall where water rushes out of “windows” in the soft, eroded bedrock. Then we hiked up the steep sheep trail on the right of the waterfall and left the other tourists behind. There are three more falls on this trail, and



we hiked past all of them along the Merkjá River where we had a great view of the glacier volcano Eyjafjallajökull (pronounced EH-ya-FYAH-tia-YUR-kutl) which paused the world by disrupting global air travel when it erupted in 2010 and also jumpstarted a surge in tourism here by reminding people of what a geologically fascinating place Iceland is. We filled our water bottles straight from the Merkjá before we hiked back because why not? Iceland has some of the purest water in the world. Back in the car and still heading east, we stopped by the majestic (and crowded) Skogafoss.

The next day we traveled further east on the Ring Road for icebergs and glaciers.

We started with a Zodiac boat

tour of Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon where we marveled at the newer blue icebergs; the older white ones; the occasional sleek seals; and the very edge of the immense Vatnajökull glacier, which covers about 10 percent of the country. This glacial lake, Iceland’s deepest, is teeming with icebergs large and small that have broken off the glacier. Later, we walked along the beaches near the lagoon to see the pieces of water-polished ice that wash up and sparkle like diamonds on the black sand. (We were going to go to Diamond Beach, but our lagoon guide said there were very few “diamonds” there at the moment.) And we visited the nearby Fjalísarlog glacial lagoon because it’s less crowded than its neighbor but no less beautiful.

Then we headed to Vatnajökull National Park and the Skaftafell Nature Reserve where we hiked to Svartifoss (the black waterfall) shooting off a cliff of distinctive black hexagonal basalt columns.

Later that afternoon, we spent a few hours hiking along Fjaðrárgljúfur Canyon (“Feather River canyon”), an epic, massive canyon with lots of great and sturdy infrastructure in place for anyone’s prime viewing.

All this was in one day. Having 22 hours of daylight in the summer means you can do so much!

The next day, on our way back west to the site of Rick’s bike race in Hvalsvollu, we stopped by the world-famous black sand beach at

Right off the Ring Road, Seljalandsfoss is one of the most photographed waterfalls in Iceland. Don’t worry about waterproof pants when walking behind it. Just wear a waterproof jacket. And non-slip shoes!

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The Sun Voyager sculpture of a Viking longship is a landmark on Reykjavik's waterfront.

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Reynisfjara, near Vik, with its enormous basalt rocks and cave and the sea stacks called Reynisdrangar (the Troll Rocks). We saw our first puffins on the cliffs above this stunning beach. Then we drove to the nearby Dyrholaey (translates to “the hill island with the door hole”) promontory arch and lighthouse where we got to see the pretty, little puffins up close!

While Rick and a friend were on their 100k (62-mile) race over gravel paths and through glacial rivers, a friend and I took a ferry to Vestmannaeyjabær (the Westman Islands) for the day. We started with a self-guided tour (from Rick Steves’ book) of the fishing village

on Heimaey the largest and only inhabited island in the Westmans. Then we took an inflatable boat tour around the island and saw more puffins (the largest Atlantic puffin colony in the world is here) and, from afar, the newest piece of earth on earth: Surtsey island, which formed from an undersea volcano in 1963. We hiked along paths through moss-covered lava fields to the Eldheimar Museum, which is dedicated to telling the story of the devastating 1973 eruption of Eldfell, the volcano that buried half the town. There is a recovered (not restored) house in the middle of the museum, and the audio on the self-guided tour has a first-person account from the homeowner of that terrible night.

Then we climbed up to the crest of the Eldfell volcano for amazing views of the village, the harbor and the surrounding islands—and a neighboring volcano that erupted 6,000 years ago.

But we had not had our fill of the volcanos.

Iceland’s latest volcano, Litli-Hrútur, (“Little Ram”), began erupting on July 10 on the Reykjanes Peninsula about a week before our trip. By the time we arrived, the government had laid a fresh path to it, put up directional signage and had lots of search-and-rescue people in place. So, we went to see it! We had to hike 10 miles round trip over rocky ground and across uneven lava fields, but we packed a picnic lunch and headed out—along with a couple thousand other people.

The first view of an active volcano spewing rivers of lava (and even spinning up small tornados!) is unforgettable. The eruption stopped after about a month—another reminder to do what I want while I can.

I seriously trained for my day on an Icelandic horse. I had signed up for the “experienced rider” tour with Eldhestar Horse Riding in Ölfus on the South coast, having ridden a lot as a kid and then again competitively as an adult. But that was 30 years ago, so I took some refresher lessons before our trip. The group of only eight riders (including our guide) was indeed experienced, so we had a thrilling day of tölting (it’s a gait between a trot and a canter and is naturally unique to these beautiful, stocky, sweet-natured horses that are descended from a protected gene pool that is more than 1,000 years old). We also raced up a few hills. The scenery was breathtaking—fields full of horses, streams leading to the sandy coast, lava fields with green and pink moss and mountains in the near distance.

We spent a day touring the Golden Circle where we hiked in Þingvellir National Park. This is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for a few reasons. Iceland is divided by the Mid-Atlantic Rift; some parts of it, such as the Westfjords and Reykjavík, are on the North American tectonic plate, while others, such as Vatnajökull glacier and the East Fjords, are on the Eurasian plate. Iceland is the only place in the world where this widening rift is above sea-level, and nowhere can you see the edges of both plates as clearly as in Þingvellir. Actually, you can



Above, we took a Zodiac boat tour of Jökulsárlón glacier lagoon with its beautiful icebergs. Right, we got up close and personal with puffins at Dyrholaey lighthouse near Vik.



hike between them. Þingvellir also is culturally significant as the site of an ancient version of a modern-day representative parliament (about 800 years before the U.S. and France thought of it.) Þingvellir, (pronounced “THING-VET-leer” and translating to “the fields of parliament”) is where the nation truly began

and where almost all its major historical decisions were made.

There’s a pretty waterfall here called Öxarárfoss, and the Almannagjá gorge was a shooting location for HBO’s Game of Thrones series. Then we drove to the Geysir

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geothermal area, within the Haukadalur Valley, to see Great Geysir and Strokkur Geysir. Great Geysir (or simply ‘Geysir’) is the earliest documented geyser in European literature and has been active for around 10,000 years. The smaller, more reliable Stokkur Geysir gushes every five to 10 minutes. From there, we went to the iconic Gullfoss waterfall, famous for its power, scale and beauty. We ended our day at the Secret Lagoon, which is a family-friendly thermal pool and not really a secret.

For my final Icelandic adventure, we returned to Þingvellir and I snorkeled between the tectonic plates at Silfra, one of the world’s top five dive sites. The water, between 32 and 35 degrees, is meltwater from Langjökull glacier. It travels underground for decades through porous lava rock, so it’s incredibly pure and crystal clear. We put on dry suits (two bulky layers) and entered another world of magical blue light and neon green “troll hair” algae clinging to giant boulders in this ravine between the tectonic plates. The only tricky part of this: We had to swim around an outcropping of rock and get ourselves into a lagoon before the rift current took us into Þingvallavatn, Iceland’s largest natural lake—where we’d have to be rescued by helicopter. Our guide, Claudia, took beautiful GoPro photos of each of us touching the North American and the Eurasian plates. The best souvenir!

We finished our Icelandic vacation with a laid-back afternoon at the world-famous Blue Lagoon, where we lounged in the warm



Icelandic horses are sturdy and steady and sweet-tempered. My horse tour was the highlight of this trip!

water, visited the swim-up mask bar (three different facial masks—lava scrub, silica mud and algae—from the lagoon) and the swim-up bar bar for cold beers.

We always end our vacations the same way: We find a place for people watching, we order something local and cold to drink and we talk about what we loved most about the trip.

We’ve never done this in a thermal lagoon, and we’ve never had so much to love.

Food

I’m going to tell you now that food in Iceland is expensive.

At the Bryggjan Brugghús, a brewpub in an old fish processing

plant near the harbor in Reykjavik, we had two draft beers and a hamburger each and that was \$120. (Interestingly, full-strength beer was illegal in Iceland until 1989 and since then, the craft beer scene has surged.)

We steered away from the fermented-shark-served-with-a-Brennivín-shot and found lots of other local dishes to enjoy. We ate lamb hot dogs at Baejarins Beztu Pyslur in Reykjavik, lamb sandwiches at Systrakaffi in Kirkjubæjarklaustur out east and traditional lamb soup with rye bread at Café Loki in Reykjavik. (We did not get tired of lamb.)

A few words about Baejarins Beztu Pyslur since we loved this

hot dog experience so much. The name translates to “The best in Town!” This hot dog stand was founded in 1937, and the iconic cart in Reykjavik always has a line. But the guys get “paid by the dog,” so the line moves quickly. Eat there at one of the tables with the built-in hot dog holders. Watch for hot dog-thieving seagulls! The hot dogs, a blend of lamb, beef and pork, are best ordered eina með öllu, or “one with everything”: that is ketchup made from apples, Icelandic mustard, raw onions, fried onions and remoulade. Delicious!

We loved Icelandic Street Food, a family-owned restaurant in the oldest part of town. (We found it by Googling “cheap eats Reykjavik” after the brewpub hamburger surprise.) This place offers soup and bread and beer as well as “Happy Marriage Cake” and dessert pancakes. All grandma’s recipes. And there are free waffles. It’s the first fast-food concept in Iceland with traditional Icelandic fare. We had shellfish soup with scallops and shrimp in a langoustine broth, but there also was traditional lamb soup as well as two other soups including a spicy tomato concoction. The deal was this: Buy the soup you want, and you get unlimited free refills of the others.

Fish is a must on this island, and we enjoyed a delicious and romantic dinner at Fish Company in Reykjavik. Sort of below ground level, it looks like it’s from another century—because it is. The restaurant is in one of the oldest houses in Reykjavik. We watched a couple next to us play chess with their extensive sushi platter while we enjoyed the three-course “fish festival” tasting menu



Litli-Hrútur began erupting on July 10 on the Reykjanes Peninsula about a week before our trip. So we packed a picnic and went to see it. The eruption was over a month later.

with a delicious lobster soup made with chestnuts and cardamom, three different kinds of fresh fish and tiramisu.

But the real culinary highlight of the trip was dinner at Dill Restaurant, a New Nordic restaurant inspired by the landscape around it and the first in Iceland to be awarded a Michelin star. Dill Chef Gunnar Gíslason is a foundational figure in Icelandic cooking. In 2009, he opened Dill, which completely energized Reykjavik’s entire food scene. Hidden away up a spiral staircase on the city’s main shopping street, the restaurant serves a 16-course menu highlighting small producers (seaweed foragers, organic barley farmers) and seasonal ingredients (lumpfish roe, crowberries). We had monkfish cheeks with sea truffles, sirloin (from cows that are fed beer and massaged daily)

and parsnip ice cream with caviar. Presentation is as amazing as the food. We had cured wild goose served on a rock, tiny onion cakes with carrots on a jewel box full of onion skins and fermented bilberries nestled in a nest of dried leaves. Three hours later, we were convinced we had experienced the very best of modern Icelandic cuisine.

I have an itinerary I will happily share with links to hotels, restaurants, and activities, and I highly recommend reading *Rick Steves’ Iceland* and getting the accompanying map. Also, listen to *How Iceland Changed the World: The Big History of a Small Island* by Egill Bjarnason before you go for important cultural and historic info that will enhance your trip; listening to this book helps you learn to pronounce the very difficult place names, too.

Wine: Don't Sleep on Syrah

By Alexis Douglas,
certified sommelier

Syrah, also known as Shiraz in Australia, is one of the most under-rated but exciting grape varietals. It is my go-to for pairing with steak and grilled meats. Often used for blending with Grenache and other varietals, but on its own shows notes of black cherry, smoke, dried herbs, and meat! Here are a few of my favorites, all available at Hop City:

1. Domaine Lafond Tavel Rosé, France \$19.99

Pink wines made from Syrah are usually dark in color like this version from the Tavel region. Great grilling wine to pair with chicken or burgers!



2. Stolpman “La Cuadrilla,” Santa Ynez, CA \$24.99

My absolute favorite red blend for the price. The blend and label changes every year, but it is predominantly Syrah. Smooth texture, rich fruit, and complex notes of herbs and smoke make this an incredible value.

3. Terre Rouge “Les Cotes de L'Ouest,” California \$24.99

Wines from this producer are aged before release by the winery, so they are super smooth and drinkable—and offer excellent value!

4. Railsback Frères “Bien Nacido” Syrah, Santa Maria, CA \$47.99

One of my favorite producers, their Syrah is excellent and beautifully made...and worth the price tag.



5. Jasmin “la Giroflarie” Cote Rotie, Rhône Valley, France \$68.99

Syrah from the Northern Rhône is considered the benchmark for this varietal. They're super interesting because they are co-fermented with Viognier, a floral and elegant white grape, which helps Syrah retain its dark color. Dark, brooding, earthy, smoky, and complex, these are special wines to pair with elegant meats such as rack of lamb.

6. Torbreck “Woodcutter’s” Shiraz, Barossa Valley, Australia \$22.99

Shiraz styles range from easy, fruity sippers to serious, ageable, tannic monsters. Torbreck is considered to be one of the better producers and this wine offers a great amount of bang for your buck every year.



Stone Hollow Farmstead mother-daughter owners **Deborah Stone** and **Alexandra Stone Flowers** made it on “Oprah’s Favorite Things 2023” list for the third year in a row. Their Blissful Breakfast Box features wildflower honey, rose geranium syrup, sprouted flour pancake mix, and honeysuckle jelly.



Raquel Ervin celebrated the grand opening of SLIDE Café’s new location in Five Points South (shown below at 2012 Magnolia Ave. S.) on December 2. The menu features an array of tasty



slider sandwiches and appetizers as well as her hand-cut fries and mac and cheese. Ervin also opened SMOKE Bistro at The Pizitz Food Hall in May 2023 and is CEO and executive chef at Panoptic Catering.

Dulce Rivera was named a Top 40 Under 40 by the *Birmingham Business Journal* for 2024.



Jan Walsh, food and wine writer, has created her first cartoon series, *That Guy!* featuring a foodie who causes a scene wherever he goes but thinks he is charming and charismatic. It is published monthly on Cartoons page of CulinaryCartoons.com and on SubStack.



Geri-Martha O’Hara, co-owner of Big Spoon Creamery, is working with top Birmingham chefs to create a new, chef-inspired



ice cream flavor monthly. Neapolitan from James Beard Award-winning chef Frank Stitt features Valhrona chocolate, Madagascar vanilla bean and strawberry ice creams. Upcoming chefs are featured on the website.

Brooke Bell

and Brian Hart Hoffman have authored a holiday cocktail book dedicated to their favorite glass, the coupe. There will be several signings in Birmingham so you can get your own copy of *Holiday Coupetails*.



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