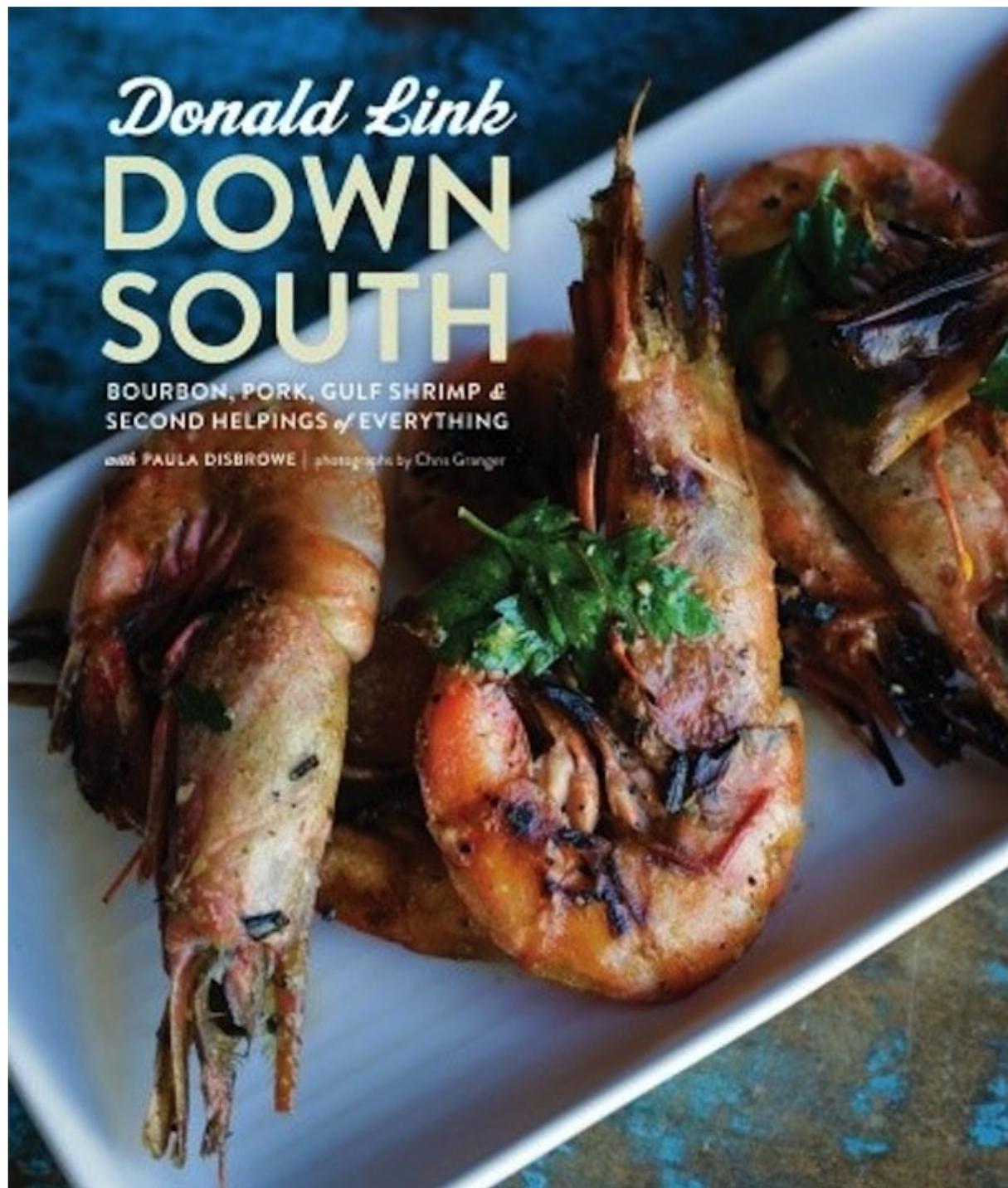


Cook the Book: 'Down South' by Donald Link

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Google the words "Southern cookbook," and you'll be inundated with enough books to fill even the largest of kitchens. So for those with even a minor interest in learning more about Southern cuisine, it's hard to know where to start. From my perspective, Southern cookbooks tend to be divided into two camps: there are the heavier, soul food-influenced love letters to everything fried, and then there are the more refined "new South" books that attempt to elevate okra pods and field peas to something spectacular. Neither of these categories are inherently flawed, but they each paint an exaggerated picture of what truly matters to Southern cooks.

As a Southerner (and proponent of nuance) myself, I was pleased to find that [Donald Link](#)'s new cookbook, *[Down South](#)*, treads between the two extremes. The chef-owner of fine New Orleans institutions like [Herbsaint](#) and [Cochon](#), Link is a staunch advocate for local foodways, and he is a familiar face to anyone versed in the aforementioned "new Southern" cuisine. But he's also not afraid to let the soul of his food come through. In other words, his food may be local and organic, but it's far from precious.

[Down South](#) hits all the major categories of a good Southern meal, from bourbon to barbecue to biscuits. Link manages to include classic dishes from all regions in the South while also keeping his eye toward his home in southern Louisiana. He places a heavy emphasis on seafood and pork (as he should), but balances things out with a reasonably long chapter on vegetable-heavy sides. The two highlights of any Southern party—cocktails and pie—make a strong appearance as well.

Link's recipes are, for the most part, very simple. He does give a few detailed recipes for more complicated charcuterie preparations like headcheese and fried country terrine, but such challenging recipes are few and far between. Many recipes call for only a few flavor-packed ingredients; as is the Southern tradition, these dishes make the most out of very little. Pork shoulder is rubbed down with paprika and salt, stuffed with chilies and citrus, and then braised in, wait for it...water. Fresh beans are seasoned with only a couple of ham hocks, along with onion and bay leaves. (There's water in that recipe as well.) For such a chef-focused book, *[Down South](#)* is surprisingly practical and accessible.

Oh, and it's fun. Any book that uses the words "bourbon" or "beer" on every other page is bound to be.

This week, we'll explore a bit of what the South has to offer. We'll braise that **pork shoulder** and simmer those **beans** first. Then we'll make a classic picnic dish—**carrot raisin salad**—before grilling **chicken skewers with Alabama white barbecue sauce** and baking a party's worth of **Parmesan and bacon gougères**.

Win 'Down South'

Thanks to our friends at Clarkson Potter, we have five (5) copies of *[Down South](#)* to give away this week. All you need to do for a chance to win a copy is tell us about **your favorite Southern dish** in the comments section below.