

cellist unlike anyone I had ever known. On the eve of our engagement, he was diagnosed with cancer. After chemotherapy, multiple surgeries and a lengthy recovery, he's doing fine, but we are changed forever.

To make sense of it all, I find myself turning back to the most unlikely place—the mysterious landscape of my childhood, Florida. I realize I was never so much a runaway as a missionary, preaching the beauty of Cracker Florida, carrying it inside me like an ache.

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So I've teamed up with another Florida filmmaker, Julie Kahn, to make a documentary about my story, and what we might learn from Florida. In honor of getting to the heart of things, we are calling it *Swamp Cabbage*.

Yes, it's true that sprawl and thoughtless subdivision development have devastated my state. Where sabal palms once grew like weeds, they are now, like Crackers, a disappearing species. But as anyone who has ever weeded a garden there knows, you can't contain Florida. You can try to pull it up and cart it away, but all the while it patiently waits, finding just the right moment to wrap its tendrils around you and draw you back home.

For their work on Swamp Cabbage: A Dark and Sweaty Documentary, Hayley Downs and Julie Kahn were recently awarded the SFA's inaugural John Egerton Prize.

IN THE KITCHEN with Dinah



By Timothy C. Davis

Back before signature sauces, back before anodized cookware, back when butter was too often margarine, there was a stately old dame by the name of Dinah Shore.

People will tell you that Dinah probably wasn't the greatest cook in the world. People, in this case, were no doubt right. Her vittles voice had much in common with her singing one. She was able to take the territorial and the traditional, synthesize (and sometimes sanitize) it, and deliver it to a much wider audience than any of her countrified contemporaries, Justin Wilson and Betty Feezor included.

Shore never hurt for an audience, thanks to her Hollywood bonafides. The Winchester, Tennessee, native talked up her native Southern cuisine whenever given the chance, most often to the cavalcade of stage-and-screen stars who shared the stage with her on one or more of the many talk shows she hosted towards the end of her career.

Her three cookbooks bend under the weight of celebrity anecdote—usually jibes about the weight she and her pals gained while writing them—and too often dipped into the trendy and tacky in a Junior League-like attempt to stay true to the times in which they were written: “Oriental” shrimp with ginger, scallions and peanut oil, dips with more canned ingredients than a country club potluck. They were excerpted, not in *Saveur* and *Gourmet*, but in tactless tabloids like *Star* and *National Inquirer*. She even put sugar in her cornbread, for crying out loud.

What she did have, however, was personality. She was wise enough to take as her unofficial theme song “Someone’s in the Kitchen With Dinah,” a song that has been variously thought to be a verse to “I’ve Been Working on the Railroad,” a late 1800s work song, or, as some say, an utterly salacious ode to infidelity. (Some versions of the original even have the line “Someone’s making love to Dinah”).

She was a shameless flirt who still maintained credibility with women and men, young and old alike. She was as home in an apron as après-skiwear, and that versatility was her hook: you could be this too.

So yes, she likely wasn’t any more at home at the range than any other moderately skilled Southerner of her era. At the same time, there’s no denying her impact. My own parents bought curry powder for the first time due to Dinah, much as they did olive oil after a recommendation on *Emeril Live!*

Her gift was the ability to personify subtle gradations of what it meant to be a woman, a singer, a Southerner, a star, in ever-changing times. Keeping her own star ascendant until her death was a trickier task than it appeared. If “In the Kitchen With Dinah” had a message, it might have been this: Girls, you don’t have to stay at that stove if you don’t want.

At Queen’s College in Charlotte, North Carolina, Tim Davis earned an M.F.A. He now lives in Nashville.

Pardis Stitt

READS UPTON SINCLAIR



By Ashley Hall

Much ink has been spilled on behalf of Frank Stitt, the toque behind three Birmingham restaurants, Highlands Bar & Grill, Bottega, and Chez Fon Fon. Not enough trees have been felled in the name of Pardis Stitt, his wife of nearly 14 years.

The dining room is Pardis’s domain. When asked to speak of herself, Pardis turns girlishly shy. Maybe that’s a natural response for a front-of-house savant, who reminds her colleagues that, when it comes to service, “It’s not about you.”