



## THE DESI DREAM TEAM: FIVE CHEFS TO KNOW

In January of this year, five Indian American chefs staged a dinner at Meherwan Irani's Chai Pani in Decatur, Georgia. It was the first in a planned "Brown in the South" supper series, featuring chefs of Indian descent who have made the American South their home. Read more about the dinner and what it meant to an adopted Southerner—our deputy editor, Osayi Endolyn, in her column on page 8. First, though, meet the chefs.

**VISHWESH BHATT** is a native of Gujarat state. He moved to the United States to attend college at the University of Kentucky, where he was student body president. He began graduate school at the University of Mississippi, before restaurant kitchens pulled him down a different path.

Bhatt is the chef at Snackbar in Oxford—don't miss his okra chaat.

**MANEET CHAUHAN** graduated from the premier school of hospitality & hotel management in India before making her way to the United States. She earned a degree from the

Culinary Institute of America and ran restaurants in New Jersey, New York, and Chicago. Since 2014, Chauhan and her family have made Nashville their home. Chauhan Ale & Masala House is the flagship of her growing empire.

**ASHA GOMEZ** founded

FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:  
Vishwesh Bhatt, Meherwan Irani,  
Maneet Chauhan, Asha Gomez,  
John T. Edge, and Cheetie Kumar

Cardamom Hill and Spice to Table in Atlanta. She now operates Third Space and recently launched DYAD Tea & Spice Company. Gomez's Kerala fried chicken put her on the map; less known but equally sublime is her black-pepper-inflected carrot cake.

**MEHERWAN IRANI** directs Chai Pani, an Indian street-food restaurant with locations in Decatur and Asheville. He takes inspiration from his grandfather, who owned a café serving tea, kababs, and Indo-Persian cuisine in the family's hometown of Ahmednagar, India.

Thanks to **CHEETIE KUMAR**, 14 W. Martin Street is the coolest spot in downtown Raleigh, North Carolina. There, Kumar and her husband, Paul Siler, operate three businesses: Garland, an Indian and Asian restaurant; Neptune's Parlour, an underground cocktail bar; and Kings, a live-music venue that Kumar and Siler revived after a much-lamented closure by the previous owners.

Above: Molly Milroy. Right: Kendyll Hillegas

## SOUTHERN SIP

YAUPON HOLLY IS MORE THAN ORNAMENTAL SHRUB

BY STEPHANIE BURT



SET ASIDE THAT YERBA MATE. ITS CLOSE North American cousin, yaupon holly, is poised to become a breakout American beverage. Southern drink makers have tapped this ancient plant as a black tea alternative that lends itself to culinary applications with a caffeinated kick.

Once brewed by Native American tribes like the Cherokee, Choctaw, and the Ais of Florida, "black drink," later called, yaupon tea was widely consumed in the North Carolina Outer Banks and other pockets of the South. As indigenous knowledge and foraging waned, so did sipping yaupon.

But the tea is making a comeback. "It tastes like green tea with more earthy maltiness," says Scott Blackwell of High Wire Distilling in Charleston, South Carolina. It's a star ingredient in the distillery's Southern Amaro Liqueur. Dai Due in Austin, Texas, serves black yaupon iced tea, and Asi Yaupon Tea outside Savannah, Georgia, distributes a bottled yaupon tea product. Although most yaupon is still foraged or grown on small plots, Asi owner Lou Thomann farms the shrub on seventy-six acres and expects to produce 30,000 pounds of tea in 2018.

The University of Mississippi, Mississippi State, the University of North Carolina, Clemson, and the University of Georgia are conducting yaupon research. "It's America's most important and neglected economic plant," says Arkansas-based herbalist and author Steven Foster. If Southern producers have a say, that disregard won't last much longer.

*Stephanie Burt hosts The Southern Fork podcast and is a writer based in Charleston, South Carolina.*