

Southern Foodways Alliance Most Visited Places



ONE OF STEPHANIE HART'S FAVORITE WORDS IS *MERAKI*. "THIS IS A WORD THAT MODERN Greeks use to describe doing something with soul, creativity, or love," she says. "When I first learned it, I was like, 'Wow, that's the word for food: the creativity, the love, and the soul that goes into it.'" A 2019 semifinalist for the James Beard Foundation's Outstanding Baker award, Hart opened Brown Sugar Bakery in 2004. Located in the South Side neighborhood of Chatham, the bakery stands in the middle of a corridor of Black-owned businesses, including Soul Veg City (formerly Soul Vegetarian) and the legendary Lem's Bar-B-Q, which first opened in 1954. Hart's enterprises now include a bakeshop at Navy Pier and Life is Sweet, a candy shop that operates out of the historic former Cupid Candies factory in the Southwest neighborhood of Ashburn.

Brown Sugar Bakery

Navy Pier was an opportunity for me to export out of my community—but, you know, I never left. I made that stuff on 75th Street and took it to Navy Pier. And people started looking at Brown Sugar from a different light and coming to 75th Street, which then affected my whole community positively. Having the second store at the Pier—I'm not going to say that Kamala Harris wouldn't have come to the bakery, but probably not. And she didn't just come to the bakery. She came to 75th Street.



Soul Veg City

I found them years ago, in the 1980s. I would drive my raggedy Maverick on Sunday from Downers Grove (the Chicago suburb where I grew up) to Indiana Street to get that meal. The main thing was: You could get these greens. And they had cornbread and they made lima beans—and my grandmother made lima beans! And where are you going to get lima beans? Their intention is soul, but it's also well-being. And so I felt good eating the food; the vibration around it is good.



Virtue

The first time my grandmother took me to Mississippi, we picked the green tomatoes out of the garden. She always got great produce, but that was my first time really connecting to *her* connection—this is where that came from—and watching her go and retrieve this food. That memory of fried green tomatoes stuck with me. And [Virtue chef] Erick [Williams] took me all the way back to that memory of my grandmother picking the tomatoes, preparing them, and serving them. What I love is that it's my grandmother's food on a plate—on a fancy plate, in an environment that is uplifting, inspirational, and meant to pay homage to our history.

Museum of Science and Industry

The museum represented a way to take my child around the world at Christmas. It represented a way for me to expose her to opera. My daughter is an opera singer now because of a puppet show at the Museum of Science and Industry that she was completely fascinated by. It represented a way to just expose her to so many different things. And we could walk there. We'd go to the museum at least three times a month. We used it to explore, explain, and experience together.

