

STRONGEST LINK

CHEF DONALD LINK PUTS A LIFETIME OF EXPERIENCE INTO HIS NEW COOKBOOK

words by **Karina Timmel**

What does the James Beard Award-winning chef behind some of the hottest restaurants in New Orleans, including Cochon, Herbsaint and Pêche, do in his time off? He cooks, of course.

“It’s fun to take a day and do it without a deadline. It reminds me of why I’m in the business in the first place,” says Donald Link, who began cooking for large family gatherings at a young age with his grandfather.

Thumb through his second cookbook, “Down South,” and you’ll feel Link’s deep sense of community, and abiding love for the South.

Each recipe is matched with a personal anecdote, and the pages are filled with on-location photographs not only of scrumptious dishes, but also of Link breaking bread with friends and family and regional food harvesters at work.

“This book is a lot less about black-eyed peas and collard greens and more about the new direction of Southern food,” he adds. “I wanted to get back to local ingredients and doing something new and interesting with them.”

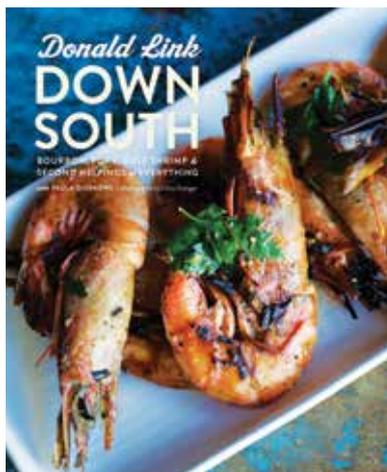
The book starts with drinks, like journalist Julia Reed’s scotch Old Fashioned, and Mississippi Delta-style, old-school cocktail parties with blue crab beignets and black pepper biscuits.

Next, it travels through the Gulf Coast, where Link spent all of his time growing up, exploring his take on the area’s offerings such as royal-red shrimp and Apalachicola oysters.

The Cook It Outside section, which includes the slow-cooked barbecue from his experiences with pitmasters in Tennessee and the Carolinas, revels in the camaraderie of food creation as an event for family, friends and the community.

And the chapter dedicated to heads, feet, neck and bones – something novice epicureans might ordinarily shy away from – is a fascinating read thanks to Link’s compelling narrative.

What’s next for the celebrated chef? As we try mixing his Flora-Bama rum punches and cooking meat over wood (charcoal and gas are big no-nos, says the expert), he’ll be bringing his famed Cochon Butcher concept to Nashville or Birmingham. Cheers to that. **OH**



“Down South: Bourbon, Pork, Gulf Shrimp & Second Helpings of Everything” by Donald Link and Paula Disbrowe (Clarkson Potter; February 2014), price \$22.14. amazon.com

SMOKED CHICKEN THIGHS

These easy and succulent smoked chicken thighs make for a very satisfying meal when paired with cold, dry pink or white wine, sliced tomatoes, a few pickled vegetables, and sharp cheese.

- 2 pounds** bone-in, skin-on chicken thighs
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon** kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon** black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon** paprika
- 1/4 teaspoon** cayenne

Rinse the chicken and blot dry thoroughly with paper towels. Combine the salt, black pepper, paprika and cayenne in a small bowl and season the chicken thighs with the spice mixture. Set up your grill or smoker for low-and-slow cooking with wood chunks at 225°F for about two hours, until the chicken is tender and pulls easily away from the bone. Add more hot coals and a few wood chunks every 30 minutes or so, and adjust the vents as needed to maintain a steady temperature. Serves 4.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS GRANGER