

Bailliage Charleston | August 15, 2026

"Chef Scholar" Dinner:
Celebrating the Pioneers and Heros of Southern Cuisine

By Bailli Paula Traktman Duncan

Photography by Bailli Paula Traktman Duncan and Chevalier Stephen Duncan

Gathering at a Chaîne des Rôtisseurs event, it is worth asking: "What does food represent to us?" It's sustenance, pleasure, connection to land and sea, camaraderie, and expression of our heritage and communities. Think New England clam chowder, New Orleans beignets or Baltimore crab cakes. For Chef Rôtisseur Kevin Mitchell, culinary historian and instructor at the Culinary Institute of Trident Technical College, telling the stories of African American chefs whose pioneering work led to the development of Southern cuisine is a passion.

In 2015, Chef Mitchell was instrumental in recreating and commemorating the remarkable dinner held in 1865 by Chef Nat Fuller to celebrate the end of the Civil War and slavery. Fuller, a former enslaved man, had become a leading Chef and Restauranteur in Charleston. Chef Mitchell and wife, Chef Rhonda Mitchell, owner of The Drizzled Pear Catering Co., have since developed a series of "ChefScholar" dinners honoring transformative African American chefs and showcasing refined Southern cuisine. Together they create exciting dinner events.

We gathered at the beautiful SC Society Hall for a private ChefScholar event. This perfect setting imbued the evening with a sense of history. In the reception room, we enjoyed a custom “Gentleman Jack Mint Julep” cocktail or “Charleston Hibiscus Tea Spritzer” mocktail accompanied by passed hors d’oeuvres, including: compressed watermelon, truffle pearls, Ethiopian kale; Carolina gold rice and shrimp fritter; and sweet tea vodka barbequed quail with grit cake and pickled okra. Fortified and intrigued, we followed the grand staircase to the upstairs dining room for our sumptuous meal.



An amuse-bouche, a delicious briny Lowcountry cup oyster with a pear mignonette, paired with Campo Viejo Cava Brut Sparkling Wine, Rioja, Spain, produced from xarel-lo, macabeo and parellada grapes. Each of the dinner courses paid homage to a pioneering Chef. The first course was a chilled summer corn velouté with a green tomato and crab salad, corn bread crouton and herb oil. The delicious accompaniments added acidity and texture to the flavorful soup. This dish, an homage to Chef Nat Fuller (1812-1866) was beautifully paired with Château Bélingard Bergerac Blanc, Pomport, France,produced from sauvignon, sémillon and muscadelle grapes.



The second course followed with a benne seed-crusted grouper with berbere-spiced stewed okra, smokey tomato gravy and micro kale. The fish was cooked perfectly, with the accompaniments enhancing the depth of flavor. The fruity and herbal 2017 Gambino Vini Feu d’O Bianco, Sicily, Italy, produced from grillo grapes, was a perfect accompaniment. This course honored Chef Edna Lewis (1916-2006),





the granddaughter of an emancipated slave. She became a renowned chef in New York City and Charleston, cook-book author and founder of the Society for the Revival and Preservation of Southern Food.

For the third course, we enjoyed a pan-roasted duck breast with braised collards, sweet potato fondant, red eye gravy and pickled blackberries. This dish had deep and bright flavors and the fruity 2024 Ropiteau Pinot Noir, Burgundy, France, was a perfect pairing that accentuated the blackberries. This dish honored Chef Joe Randall (1946-2026), a chef, educator and author, sometimes known as the “Dean of Southern Cooking”.

To finish the evening, a brown butter pecan cornmeal cake with roasted peaches and peach caramel, provided the perfect finishing touch. The dessert, deliciously Southern, was paired with a rich Blandy’s 5 Year Malmsey Madeira, Portugal. This dish paid tribute to Chef Mashama Bailey, founder and Executive Chef of the award-winning The Grey restaurant in Savannah, and Chair of the Edna Lewis Foundation. What a superb finale to an outstanding meal!

“Posteritati”, the Latin motto that graces the façade of the SC Society Hall, underscores the concept of legacy and the influence and impact of the past on future generations. The ChefScholar event offered an historic setting, inspired food, gracious service, and a meaningful immersion in the history of the innovative and dedicated chefs whose ground-breaking work shaped Southern cuisine. Past and present came together in a memorable and delicious way!

Vive la Chaîne!