



BY JEN MURPHY | *AFAR* Editor

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WANDERING CHEF: BRANDON SHARP IN NORTH CAROLINA

Don't be surprised by the Southern subtleties on the menu at Solage Calistoga's [Solbar](#) restaurant (below) in Napa Valley, California. Executive chef Brandon Sharp attended the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill and worked at [Restaurant August](#) in New Orleans. His obsession with California produce came from stints at the [French Laundry](#), and [Gary Danko](#). Here, Sharp shares the North Carolina restaurants that inspire many of his menus, and the haunts he likes to return to on trips back east.



Allen & Son Barbecue

“Nothing fancy here, just delicious, North Carolina-style shredded pork and sweet tea, and all the sides you’d expect. I judge my barbecue joints the way I judge my car repair shops—if it has a dirt parking lot it’s probably worth patronizing. And if there’s a slightly scary dog out back, well then it could be world-class.” *6203 Millhouse Rd., Chapel Hill, (919) 942-7576*

Dead Mule Club

“In my opinion, this is definitely the best bar in Chapel Hill, and it specializes in brown liquor. This is not a place for the casual drinker. In fact, it used to be members-only, but that’s changed. I consider this the laidback antidote to the lineup of college bars in town.” *303 W. Franklin St., Chapel Hill, (919) 969-7659*

Sutton’s Drugstore

“Visiting Sutton’s is like walking through a gap in the space-time continuum. You’ll find great hot dogs and grilled cheese sandwiches at the counter of this old soda fountain. You’ll also probably see several Carolina basketball players.” *159 E. Franklin St., Chapel Hill, (919) 942-5161*

Crook’s Corner

“Bill Neal, in spite of being a Duke University grad, was a brilliant cuisinier and way ahead of his time as a professional cook in the South. His spirit lives on in the restaurant’s signature shrimp and grits, which Craig Claiborne, the legendary New York Times restaurant critic, once asked to watch him make in person.” *610 W Franklin St., Chapel Hill, (919) 929-7643, crookscorner.com*

The Ferrington House Restaurant

“This stunning plantation-style property just outside of town was the place that my family went only on *very* special occasions. I remember eating there twice, once for my grandparents’ fiftieth anniversary, and again when I graduated from culinary school. I even went back for a day in the kitchen after I’d cooked at The French Laundry for two years, and the food was delicious. But I’ll never forget my brother and me digging into those chocolate souffles as boys.” *2000 Ferrington Village Center, Pittsboro, (919) 542-2121, ferrington.com*

The basement of the University United Methodist Church

“You can’t get a reservation here anymore, but my grandparents cooked here every Wednesday night for many years when I was a boy, and all those down-home flavors—yams, green beans, cornbread, fried chicken, country-style steak—live on in my imagination and my own cuisine. It’s a warm Wednesday night in Napa Valley as I write this, and I’d give anything to be able to cook for the two of them tonight in Napa or North Carolina.” *150 E. Franklin St., Chapel Hill, (919) 929-7191, chapelhilluumc.org*