

Collard-Kraut AND Blueberry BBQ:

DISCOVERING VIVIAN HOWARD'S CORNER OF THE SOUTH

an interview and essay by Sally F. Lawrence

PHOTOGRAPH BY ANGIE MOSIER



PHOTOGRAPH BY STACEY VAN BERKEL



When I opened Vivian Howard's *Deep Run Roots* cookbook, I wondered if she would come across as vivacious and as fresh and as honest on the page as she does in her PBS television show, *A Chef's Life*.¹ On her show, the camera courts Vivian: you see her glowing with excitement (greenish-gray eyes smiling), busting out laughing (often at her own mistakes), and stressing out as she worries about getting everything done. It's rare for an audience to go from screen to book, to read someone's stories after you've seen them on television. It's a lot to live up to when you've been as successful as Vivian has been: her show just finished its fifth season.

In 2013, *A Chef's Life* earned a Peabody award for "its refreshingly unsensational depiction of life and work in a modern restaurant" and for telling "stories that matter."² Vivian's Kinston, North Carolina, restaurants, *The Chef and the Farmer* and *The Boiler Room*, aren't just very busy every night, they are responsible for helping to jumpstart an economic downtown revival that now includes a microbrewery, a bed-and-breakfast, and a lunch room as well as other new businesses. Another new addition coming soon will be *Hot and Handy*, a bakery that Vivian and her husband, artist Ben Knight, are planning to open soon.

Her restaurants, the PBS show, and her cookbook have all made such a positive cultural impact on Eastern North Carolina that she was voted as one of *The News & Observer's* "Tar Heels of Year" for 2017. The co-award-winner is Raleigh restaurateur Ashley Christensen who owns three restaurants, a cocktail bar, a coffee shop, and an events space. In his acknowledgement to these two chefs, *N&O* writer Drew Jackson explains: "They've spent the past decade building restaurants and a dining community, revitalizing cities, writing cookbooks, championing causes and making plates of food that made North Carolina a better place to live."³

ABOVE TOP Vivian Howard's book *Deep Run Roots* (reviewed in *NCLR Online* 2018)

ABOVE BOTTOM Vivian Howard

Except when otherwise attributed, the photographs within this layout feature pages from Howard's book. The photographs from the book are by Rex Miller.

¹ Vivian Howard, *Deep Run Roots: Stories and Recipes from My Corner of the South* (New York: Little, Brown, 2016), subsequently cited parenthetically; *A Chef's Life*, writ. Vivian Howard, dir. Cynthia Hill, prod. Vivian Howard and Cynthia Hill (PBS, Markay Media), 2013–present.

² Awards: *A Chef's Life*, Winner 2013, Peabody: Stories that Matter, web

³ Drew Jackson, "These NC chefs have made their marks at home and on the national food scene: They're the Tar Heels of the Year," *News & Observer* 22 Nov. 2017: web. Read also Jackson's followup story "In returning to Kinston, Vivian Howard told the stories of her home – and found her voice," *News & Observer* 14 Dec. 2017: web.