



Lowcountry High

In a New York minute, Charleston became the coolest city in the South | By George W. Stone |

Who knew Brooklyn and Charleston have so much in common? They do now—and you can start by blaming the *chocolate clouds* that have everyone in town racing to get **Baked** (160 E. Bay St.). Pair this “most intense chocolate cookie ever” with fast fashion, a cutting-edge art scene and cuisine both cool and cultivated, and you’ll see why hipsters are high on the oldest city in the Carolinas.

If you’ve been to NYC’s Red Hook hood lately, you’ve heard of Baked, the brainchild of two New York admen who ditched pitches to launch a cakery. Their sweet treats made them BFFs with Martha Stewart—who can resist a sugarbomb called Aunt Sassy’s Pistachio Surprise?—and when they decided to expand their brand, they naturally chose...*Charleston?* “We took a weekend to see for ourselves,” says co-founder Renato Poliafito. “I fell in love with the place, the people, the history, the architecture, the *food!* There was a scene—it was alive, and we wanted to be a part of it.” Their chic café is now rocking the French Quarter.

These cake aces are hardly the only New Yorkers to swoon over Charleston. Über-designer Cynthia Rowley, who has opened shops in only a few cities, considers this elegant coastal enclave a hotbed of hip. **Cynthia Rowley** (341 King St.) opened less than a year ago, bringing bold fashions to a pastel playground. “It’s a beautiful city with history and culture. The residents of the city are smart, stylish, sophisticated and supportive of the arts,” she says.

The arts are key to the city’s hipification. Historic Charleston is a storied web of cobblestone streets, antebellum mansions and aesthetic grace. Galleries abound, but most canvases depict scenes more beachy than boho. Except at **Scoop Studios** (57½ Broad St.), an edgy, new spot dedicated to emerging artists. Paint-provocateurs Angel Powell and Colleen Deihl curate mixed-media events featuring artists who are turning this city into a mod pod. Robert Lange is one of the city’s most celebrated young artists; in September, his **Robert Lange Studios** (151 E. Bay St.) will stage *Measure: Creatures Great + Small*, a show of the artist’s ingenious, disproportionate juxtapositions of objects and animals.

Creative minds need inspiring cuisine, *natch*. **FIG** (232 Meeting St.), which stands for “Food Is Good,” is a sensational farm-to-table bistro serving crafty classic cocktails and local infatuations: John’s Island roasted tomato tart-tatin, Anson Mills farro piccolo. The world’s most decadent 12-layer coconut cake is sliced—after delirious courses of panéed frog legs, seared foie gras and black grouper—at **Peninsula Grill** (112 North Market St.). And a night in Charleston skips a beat if it doesn’t end at **Charleston Grill** (224 King St.), where local-jazz-giant Quentin Baxter drums up a storm. A flute of Champagne and bowl of truffle-parmesan popcorn is surely the most fitting toast to this sensual Southern city’s surprisingly mad-meets-trad mojo. ■

TIPPING THE SCALES

Clockwise from top left: Sunrise casts ethereal light over historic Battery Park. Quentin Baxter keeps the beat at the Charleston Grill. Chocolate takes the cake at Baked, the city’s essential coffee and dessert shop. Painter Robert Lange’s *The Viewer* tweaks artful expectations in September.