

## POSTCARD FROM TOM

*Washington Post* food critic Tom Sietsema's monthly report from the road.

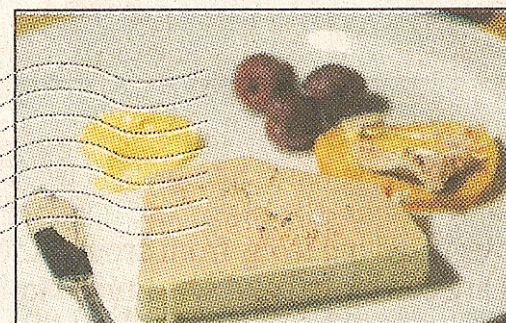
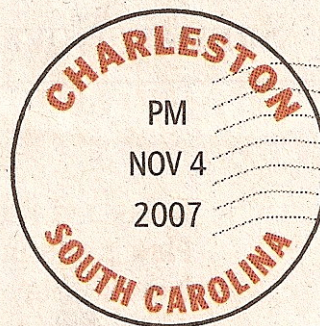
*If there's a single dish that sums up Charleston, it's shrimp and grits, a meal I encountered repeatedly (and gladly) in restaurants grand and restaurants humble during a recent visit to the South Carolina seaport.*

**BOWENS ISLAND RESTAURANT** (1870 Bowens Island Rd., 843-795-2757)

Oysters — roasted beneath wet burlap over an outdoor fire — are the main event at this cash-only Low Country institution about 10 miles from Charleston's center. A perch in the Dock House, stretching over the water, gives diners a sense of place, as do those meaty and juicy oysters, which are unceremoniously dumped on the tables in clumps for folks to pry open with short knives and eat simply with saltines and house-made cocktail sauce. Don't dig oysters? The lightly fried shrimp are just as succulent. All-you-can-eat oysters \$21.50.

**FIG** (232 Meeting St., 843-805-5900)

The name refers not to the fruit but to the owners' philosophy: "Food Is Good." Chef Mike Lata toiled in Martha's Vineyard, New Orleans and Atlanta before moving here, where all that experience — plus a fondness for



CHICKEN LIVER PÂTÉ AT FIG; PHOTO BY STEWART YOUNG

French food — surfaces in a lush chicken liver pâté (enriched with pork fatback), crisp duck confit and a generous fish stew. FIG is where I also found some of the best service in the city and a collection of local art worthy of its own gallery. Entrees \$22-\$25.

**HOMINY GRILL** (207 Rutledge Ave., 843-937-0930)

No Charleston restaurant does Southern charm better than this 11-year-old storefront, where the ceiling is pressed tin, fried green tomatoes dress up the BLTs and a slice of buttermilk pie — tangy with lemon and whispering of nutmeg — turns back the clock with its old-fashioned appeal. Chef Robert Stehling shops close to home: Fish is caught on local boats and farmers drop by in their trucks with eggplant and okra grown nearby. Among the kitchen's top draws are fried chicken with country ham gravy, and shrimp and grits gussied up with hot pepper sauce and cheese. Main plates \$6.95-\$14.95.

