

CHARLESTON  
**CITY PAPER**

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Seafaring

# SPIRIT

## The New Spirit of Charleston

In a *New York Times* piece back in April, Matt and Ted Lee memorably characterized Charleston as "a town afloat on bacon-washed bourbon," but thankfully that culinary trend already seems to be fading.

As I sipped my Grocery Storm at the Grocery bar, I asked Kevin Johnson, the restaurant's chef/owner, what ingredients were getting him excited these days. He didn't mention bacon or belly or any other part of the pig. "I'm really much more interested in fish and vegetables right now," he admitted.

That echoed what I'd been hearing from other chefs like Mike Lata of the Ordinary. Back in January, he explained the concept of his fancy seafood and oyster house as a way of heading away from the whole "lardcore" thing. "Seafood has been kind of forgotten in the wake of pork," he told me. "But how much charcuterie and pork fat do you need?"

If there's more to Southern cooking than bacon, there's far more to Southern drinking than bourbon. The rising passion for pristine local fish links Charleston's

Bourbon be damned, it's time to return to rum **P28**



JOE PAINKILLER

### Pusser's Comes to Town

Charleston has had its own line of high-quality rums for a couple of years now, thanks to Wadmalaw's Firefly Distillery, whose Sea Island Rum line includes aged gold, coffee-infused, and spiced varieties. This February, Charleston gained its own locally based brand of old-style hogo rum too, when Pusser's Rum moved its corporate headquarters here from the British Virgin Islands.

Vendors like Pusser's have discovered a great way to win bartenders and imbibers over to their pot-still rums: market a signature cocktail that's hard not to like. For

Pusser's, that cocktail is the Painkiller. The drink was reputedly invented by Daphne Henderson, the proprietor of the six-seat Soggy Dollar on Jost Van Dyke in the British Virgin Islands. If you want to try a Painkiller for yourself, you should have no problem tracking one down in Charleston this month. Pusser's has organized a month-long "Painkillers on the Peninsula" promotion, with some 21 restaurants participating.

I stopped by Blossom, the headquarters for the promotion, to give one a shot. The bartender shakes together a generous dose of Pusser's along with pineapple juice, orange juice, and cream of coconut, then pours the frothy mixture over ice in a tall rocks glass. It's the kind of drink that really demands a hogo-rich rum. The citrus and coconut give it a smooth, sweet body, but the Pusser's still punches right through the sweetness of the pineapple and coconut and gives it a lingering bite that's accented beautifully by the dusting of freshly ground nutmeg over the top.



BLOSSOM IS THE HOME BASE FOR THIS MONTH'S PAINKILLERS ON THE PENINSULA