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Review: *Bon Appétit, Y'all: Recipes and Stories from Three Generations of Southern Cooking*

Virginia Willis. Ten Speed, \$35 (320) ISBN 978-1-58008-853-4

The playful title of this Southern-French cookbook belies its studious attitude to cookery. Willis, a chef who has cooked for the White House and stars like Aretha Franklin and Jane Fonda, grew up in Georgia and Louisiana, absorbing her mother's and grandmother's repertoire of grits, casseroles and gumbos before developing her professional skills at French cooking academies. The result is a hybrid cuisine she calls "refined Southern," which applies traditional French technique and lighter ingredients to produce new versions of Southern staples. Her collard greens are cooked up with smoked salt instead of hog jowl; her cornbread is dressed with panko. Sprinkled liberally throughout are the Southern ingredients that Willis was raised on: Vidalia onions, okra, Georgia pecans and peaches. Willis's approach is faithful, yet she's unafraid to reinvent culinary clichés when necessary—like making pimiento cheese from scratch. Some of her creations—like a "tipsy" salad, riffing on the frat boy combo of watermelon and vodka; Yukon Gold and Edamame Mash; and Coca-Cola Glazed Baby Back Ribs—elevate mundane flavors with sheer ingenuity. Magnificent color photos; detailed, helpful tips; and Willis's cheerful, trustworthy guidance make this an original and welcome newcomer to a classic cookbook library. (*Feb.*)