



# BITE by BITE

Conquering My Culinary Bucket List One Dish at a Time

By Emily Banks Wooten

# Celebrating 100 Issues of Bite by Bite

# The history of Southern Cuisine

Over New Year's when we were in New Orleans for the Sugar Bowl we took in an attraction our last day there that I highly recommend when you're in the area - the Southern Food and Beverage Museum.

I first learned about the Southern Food and Beverage Museum, or SoFAB as it's referred to, through a podcast that I listen to - The Kitchen Counter Podcast. Roger Anderson, host of the podcast, spoke glowingly of it and I immediately made a mental note that the next time I was in New Orleans, it would be on my itinerary.

We went there not really knowing what to expect. As we entered, the nice young man at the front desk had just begun telling about the place to a woman who'd entered shortly before us. He started over for us, giving an overview of the museum including directions and information about various exhibits. He was very informative and answered any questions we had.

As we went on a Monday morning shortly after it opened at 11 a.m. there were just a handful of other people so we basically had the run of the place. Hubby and Daughter stayed together but I ventured off on my own to explore.

SoFAB features very detailed, educational and entertaining exhibits of each of the Southern states. These were fascinating. They ran the gamut but each one spotlighted the various foods, beverages, flavors, cooking styles and what have you that are particular to that state.

I couldn't wait to see the Texas exhibit. Just as everything's bigger in Texas, this exhibit was definitely one of the larger and more elaborate ones. The amalgamation that is Tex-Mex was highlighted - from the Mexican blanket used as a tablecloth to the colorful flags festooning the display, reminiscent of the ones in San Antonio's Historic Market Square. A pyramid made up of a number of Blue Bell ice cream cartons sat on top of a crate. Interspersed with Mexican pottery and drool-worthy photographs of barbecue were nods to Whataburger, Big Red, Dr Pepper, Fritos and Pace Salsa - all well-loved products of Texas origin.

"Despite some dissenters, Texas is still southern. Mayhaws, pecan, sorghum, sugar and the seafood of the Gulf connect the state to the rest of the south," reads a sign near the display. Another, that really made me chuckle, was this quote from American Novelist and Academy Award-Winning Screenwriter Larry McMurtry, "Only a rank degenerate would drive 1,500 miles across Texas without eating a chicken-fried steak."

Another elaborate and informative southern state exhibit was the Mississippi one which was a smaller-scale recreation of The Shed, a well-known down-home barbecue and blues joint that originated in a shack in a junkyard in Ocean Springs. Having burned in a fire and then rebuilt, the floor of the exhibit is made from blackened, charred wood that was recovered from the remains.

SoFAB was founded in 2004 by Elizabeth Williams, who wanted a place where the intersection between culture and food could be studied. The museum began with pop-ups around the city of New Orleans and the first of-



## Take a road trip to New Orleans

The Southern Food and Beverage Museum is located at 1504 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd., New Orleans, LA 70113. It is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Thursdays through Mondays. For additional information, go to [southernfood.org](http://southernfood.org). Admission is \$10.50 per person. Children under 12 are free. Students (with ID), military and seniors over 60 are \$5.25 per person.



icial exhibit was on the history and influences of beverages in New Orleans, created with borrowed artifacts. After the first exhibit, individuals began donating family artifacts to the museum.

There's a large exhibit featuring Al Copeland, the founder of the Popeye's Louisiana Kitchen fried chicken chain, and the creation and

subsequent rise of the fast food chain. There are also exhibits paying homage to the historic Brennan's Restaurant and Dooky Chase's restaurant, truly OGs when it comes to the New Orleans restaurant scene.

SoFAB occasionally hosts special exhibits, demonstrations, lectures and tastings that showcase the food and

drink of the South. It also offers cooking classes, team-building events and events for kids.

The Museum of the American Cocktail (MOTAC), originally located in the Pharmacy Museum in the French Quarter, became a permanent part of SoFAB's collection in 2014. MOTAC features a collection of rare

spirits and books, as well as examples on the cocktail's place in history. It was founded by craft cocktail pioneer Dale DeGroff and a group of eminent cocktail authorities.

Covering almost an entire wall of the building, it's truly a fascinating look at history. There's a replica of the original cocktail that was created

in 1803 using either brandy or whiskey. The recipe calls for one piece of loaf sugar, Stoughton's bitters, water and two ounces of spirit. Ice was considered a seasonal treat and the original cocktail did not contain ice. There's an old bottle of Girard, which was known as "medicinal whiskey," in which prescriptions would be placed over dry gin bottles during prohibition. There's a collection of post-cards and stamps sent out by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, considered propaganda for prohibition.

Also featured in MOTAC is "La Galerie d'Absinthe, home to the largest collection of absinthe artifacts in the United States, with all sorts of absinthe and absinthe-related artifacts. The exhibit features a life-size diorama of the Old Absinthe House Bar circa 1895.

I could've easily spent half a day or more at SoFAB. Hubby and Daughter were hungry so we only spent an hour but I'm grateful for that. And they both admitted that they enjoyed the museum more than they expected to. I recommend it if you're ever in the area. I'll definitely go back again. I came away with a book and a T-shirt that I'll enjoy until my next visit. ■