

what a D[👑]aME!

*Salute to the indomitable **Nathalie Dupree**—cookbook author, television cooking show host, teacher, mentor, and now Charleston's very own Grande Dame*

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Photograph by Christopher Shane*



Nathalie—pictured with her 11 cookbooks and ever-present Diet Coke in her downtown dining room—was named a “Grande Dame” by Les Dames d’Escoffier International last month.

**A Life In Food
She's Cooking
A Cook's Life**



1971: The restaurant C'an Poleta in Majorca, Spain, where Nathalie was chef for a season

1943: With her older sister, Marie, at a relative's home in Maryland; poultry clearly made an early impression.



1970: Nathalie's graduating classmates at Le Cordon Bleu, London



1976: Instructing a class at Rich's Cooking School in Atlanta, Georgia, which she founded in 1975 and directed for a decade



1975: Featured in Family Circle magazine in her Covington, Georgia, restaurant, Nathalie's, where she grew vegetables and herbs for her dishes



1977: Bon Appetit covers Nathalie and Rich's Cooking School.



1978: With Julia Child at an International Association of Culinary Professionals conference; Nathalie was the first woman since Child to film more than 100 cooking shows for public television.



1980: With her Rich's assistants, Shirley Corriber, Kate Almand, and Anne Galbraith



1985: On her first television set for the show Nathalie's New Southern Cooking



1986: With friend, celebrity butcher, and cookbook author Merle Ellis



1986: On set with author, restaurant critic, and New York Times food editor Craig Claiborne for her holiday show



1986: With Cynthia Stevens (Graubart) on the set for Nathalie's New Southern Cooking



1986: On set with celebrity chef Paul Prudhomme and his wife, Kay



2008: Photographed for a Charleston magazine feature on cooking from her garden; Nathalie also regularly writes and produces webcasts for The Post and Courier.



2006: With coauthor Marion Sullivan signing copies of their book Shrimp & Grits at the first Charleston Wine + Food Festival, of which Nathalie was founding board chair

2005: With the charter members of the Charleston chapter of Les Dames d'Escoffier: (from left) Susan Slack, Marion Sullivan, Cathy Forrester, Patricia Agnew, Sarab Graham, and Paige Crone



2007: With Art Institute of Charleston culinary students at a Les Dames cookbook signing and fundraiser



2008: With her husband, author and professor Jack Bass, on their downtown piazza



2010: Les Dames, including Nathalie (second from left) and Virginia Willis (center), at the White House for the launch of the First Lady's "Chefs Move to Schools" initiative

My first job in a professional kitchen was in 1992 on Nathalie Dupree's Atlanta-based PBS cooking show, *Nathalie Dupree Cooks*. Stepping into her world as a scared, unpaid apprentice, I may have washed a lot of dishes, but I knew instantly I had found my calling. In her mother-hen fashion, Nathalie calls her protégés her "little chickens," and she infused this little chick with her knowledge, passion, and skills. A demanding and diligent instructor, she would make me whip egg whites by hand with a big balloon whisk in her copper bowl. Egg whites, when properly

whipped, will cling to the bowl even when turned upside-down. Nathalie would tease me by perching the bowl above my head and asking if I was certain the job was done correctly. (Not once, by the way, did they pop onto my concerned crown.) During her career—which has spanned two generations—Nathalie has helped legions of cooks find their way, and that includes professionals such as myself, cookbook author Rebecca Lang, and award-winning food scientist Shirley Corriher. But first and foremost, Nathalie is the champion of home cooks. Through her 11 books on American Southern cooking, entertaining,

and technique; more than 300 cooking shows on the Food Network, The Learning Channel, and PBS; and decade of classes at Rich's Cooking School in Atlanta, which she founded and directed, she's taught countless people how to feed themselves and their families. Her books belong in the soul of the house—the kitchen—not the coffee table. Many a cook made her first biscuit with Nathalie by her side in the sauce-splattered pages of her well-written recipes. Without a doubt, she is the preeminent authority on Southern food and cooking alive today. In recognition of her extensive influence and achievement, Nathalie was recently

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF NATHALIE DUPREE, PAIGE CRONE, & LES DAMES D'ESCOFFIER.

awarded the prestigious title of "Grande Dame" by Les Dames d'Escoffier International, a worldwide philanthropic society of professional women leaders in the fields of food, beverage, and hospitality. The invitation-only membership, composed of 28 chapters across the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, is highly diversified and reflects the multifaceted fields of contemporary gastronomy and hospitality. The Grande Dame, only awarded every two years to the absolute crème de la crème in the industry, is a tremendous honor. Past recipients include culinary legends such as Julia Child, Alice Waters, Marion Cunningham,

Marcella Hazan, and Edna Lewis. For the past decade, Nathalie has lived with her husband, Jack Bass, in a downtown Charleston single house. There—surrounded by a battalion of teacups, mountains of cookbooks and culinary magazines, and an enviable collection of asparagus tongs—she continues her work: testing biscuit recipes or whipping egg whites with her most recent apprentice, on her laptop writing and researching, playing host to visiting authors and dignitaries, and even running for office. Her universe seems like utter chaos, but there she is at the center, calm as the eye in the storm.

Her friend Pat Conroy once wrote that Nathalie was "more like a fictional character than a flesh and blood person." That still makes me howl with laughter. But, it's not just because she's a culinary icon or that she comically putters about in myopic fashion, uttering epithets such as, "If I were the woman I wish I was" or "Do as I say, not as I do." It's because it's impossible to imagine that anyone could actually be as generous with her time, passion, and expertise as she is and be a real live person. Nathalie is a true Southern treasure and a Grande Dame indeed.