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2009 Holiday Preview
Christmas House



Under Cumberland's Spell

*A GROUP OF PASSIONATE FOODIES JOIN ATLANTA
CHEF LINTON HOPKINS FOR A SPECIAL SUPPER AT
CUMBERLAND ISLAND'S GREYFIELD INN*

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IT HAD THE MAKINGS OF FORGOTTEN PAGES FROM A RENOIR SKETCHPAD, A VARIED CAST THAT INCLUDED PHYSICIAN, CHEF, WALL STREET ÉMIGRÉ, WRITER, DESIGNER AND BALLROOM DANCER—MANY WHO'D MADE THE TRIP FROM ATLANTA—TOGETHER SIPPING WINE IN THE MUDDLED AFTERNOON LIGHT UNDER A MOSS-DRAPED CANOPY. ON THE PORCH, A YOUNG WOMAN IN A BREEZY SUMMER FROCK ROCKED LAZILY IN A SWING, CASTING HER GAZE TO THREE WILD HORSES CROSSING THE LAWN, THE ANIMALS INDIFFERENT TO THE NEARBY GATHERING.

After a day that included a walking tour of Cumberland's edible plants, a visit to the haunted ruins of Dungeness and Plum Orchard, a former Carnegie mansion, diners enjoyed aperitifs on the inn's front lawn under a tangle of leggy oaks. *previous spread* Chef Linton Hopkins and his wife Gina raised a glass to the guests of Greyfield, with a special toast to designer Marla Henderson, who organized the event and collected the cockle shells for the first course of the night—a chilled cucumber buttermilk soup.





"The secret to crispy fried-green tomatoes," says Hopkins of his cornmeal-coated delicacies, "is to cut them paper thin." *this page* The chef offered a mid-afternoon canning workshop. Here, sweet Georgia peaches are ladled into Mason jars. Brandied peaches, as well as jars of bread and butter pickles, were tasty parting mementos for the guests.



"All great cuisines have a regional identity built on canning and preserving fresh food," says Hopkins, left, with his wife, Gina. "That's why Greyfield Inn is so special. It has a definable sense of place." *this page* Enchanting paths off the island's main road weave through thickets of palmetto palm to sandy white dunes.

boutique of jewelry designer Gogo Ferguson—who grew up on Cumberland—her nature-inspired work entirely informed by wild objects found on the island. And those who opted for late-afternoon bicycle rides through the mystical shroud of moss-bearded oaks—occasionally escorted by a lazy phalanx of feral horses, an armadillo or even a wild pig—followed trails that led to pristine beaches stretching empty for miles. Back in the kitchen, Hopkins, aided by the inn's kitchen staff, prepared the evening's menu.

BUT INSTEAD OF THE MAISON FOURNAISE, the setting was the serene compound of Greyfield Inn on Georgia's remote Cumberland Island. The occasion: the debut of a full-moon supper club, a new bi-monthly event hosted by the renowned hotel. With award-winning guest chef Linton Hopkins, of Atlanta's Restaurant Eugene and Holeman & Finch Public House, and a tight guest list, the dinner provided an introduction to the inn's renewed vision for ambitious cuisine, seasoned with the distinctions of the island itself—timeless, simple and local.

The celebrated chef and his wife, Gina, arrived via the private boat the inn uses to ferry people across the Cumberland Sound, with baskets of fresh blackberries and peaches in tow for the afternoon's canning and preserving workshop. Among guests, talk of politics and the economy soon gave way to disquisitions on how quickly the extraordinary beauty of the island unfolds, with thickets of resurrection fern and saltwater palmetto palms fringing the quiet path to the inn, and how the enveloping latticework of ancient oak branches creates the sensation of entering a completely hitherto unknown wild kingdom.

While some chose to pass the day in languid idleness on the porch, a small group joined Fred Whitehead, the inn's naturalist, on a tour of the compound's edible plants as well as the ruins of a post-Civil War freedman's community, known as The Settlement (the site of the tiny African Baptist Church where John F. Kennedy Jr. exchanged marriage vows with Caroline Bessette). Others shopped the nearby

For starters, he created a white fish tartar with preserved chilies and lime, made from the morning's catch just off the beach. As dusk fell and guests filtered down to the front porch, he added finger food, including cheese straws wrapped with country ham and a butterbean purée on toast with pea shoots.

Greyfield dusted off Carnegie china for the event and even unearthed antique wooden serving platters from the early 1800s for the special supper. But to the delight of the diners, the first taste of the night, a cucumber buttermilk soup, was served in bowl-size cockleshells gathered from the shoreline.

Heading the table with his wife, the chef saluted Greyfield and his guests before sitting down to enjoy the fruits of his labor: fried green tomatoes with remoulade, roasted trout with cherry tomato fondue, succotash with butterbeans and sweet corn, and green beans with pecans and butter. "This is my way of communicating; food is its own language," he said. "And I love being part of the theater that keeps them eating and drinking."

On this night, guests experienced the island as a refuge, much like the Carnegies had. Cumberland is a sacred barrier island that, much like a deep affinity for food, proves that an exquisite mystique of a local treasure can be retained even today.

The next full moon supper is scheduled for December 2, part of a two-night package on December 1-2. greyfieldinn.com

Hopkins served a bowl of Allan Benton's bacon lardons as a garnish for the evening's trout entrée. *opposite* Pre-dinner bar snacks, including fried black-eyed peas tossed with Creole seasoning, herbed butter dollops and a butterbean puree on toast, topped with sweet corn, were presented on the Carnegie family's serving pieces, some of them dating back to the 1800's. Fresh catch: roasted trout with a cherry tomato fondue and green beans made for a winning entrée, while diners saved room for the final course of the night: peach cobbler. picture perfect: chef Linton Hopkins and his wife, Gina, with the staff of Greyfield Inn.



Held on the porch of Greyfield and served family-style, the full moon supper lured several culinary enthusiasts from Atlanta, including Jonathan and Jenna Schuh, (pictured below), former co-owner of The Grit restaurant in Athens. Biking along some of the island's 50 miles of unpaved trails.



past perfect

IN THE PRESERVED PARADISE OF CUMBERLAND ISLAND, Greyfield has long been known for its tradition of sharing meals around the dining room table. Once the private residence of 19th-century industrialist Thomas Carnegie—the younger brother of steel baron and renown philanthropist Andrew Carnegie—the house was converted into a hotel in 1964; the approximately 1,000-acre estate has been managed and run by his descendants since.

Built in 1901, Greyfield was patterned after a coastal plantation house complete with wide porches. The four-story, colonial-style mansion is still graced with time-worn heirlooms and portraits of the day, including a brooding picture of the irascible, knife-toting Lucy Ferguson, the most memorable of the island's grande dames. And so familial is the arrangement between hotel and guest that the well-stocked bar is run on a Johnny Honor system. A hand-painted sign tacked to the refrigerator reads: *Please Sign Chits For All Drinks.*

