

The Southern Agenda

GOINGS ON IN THE SOUTH & BEYOND



★
Editors'
Choice

TELEVISION

Hemingway's Reel World

KEY WEST, FLORIDA

"Big-game hunter. Deep-sea fisherman. Brawler. Drinker." That's how the filmmaker Ken Burns says he viewed Ernest Hemingway before shooting *Hemingway*, a three-part docuseries for PBS, which airs April 5–7. How does he see Papa now? "Ever questioning. Sensitive. Fearful. Complicated." By combining rarely seen manuscripts and letters with expert interviews, Burns and his longtime collaborator, the director and producer Lynn Novick, reveal a man few really understood. "We worked hard to get past the myths surrounding



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SOUTHERN AGENDA

his life,” Novick says. In the series, Jeff Daniels provides the voice of Hemingway, while Meryl Streep, Keri Russell, Mary-Louise Parker, and Patricia Clarkson voice his four wives. *Hemingway* pays close attention to the seminal backdrops of the writer’s life, including Key West, where he lived on and off from 1928 to 1939, first settling on the isolated spot with his second wife, Pauline. But New Deal construction brought bridges, and tourists arrived as Hemingway was solidifying his reputation as a hard-fighting, harder-drinking outdoorsman. “He was experiencing this fantastic explosion of fame,” Burns says. “Just as Key West was becoming Key West, Ernest Hemingway was becoming Ernest Hemingway.” Even though the author raised two of his sons and wrote novels such as *To Have and Have Not* there, in time he grew restless. “For a while, Key West provided Hemingway with extraordinary inspiration,” Burns says. “The second it didn’t, he was gone to a new wife and onward.” ■ pbs.org/hemingway

SPORTING

Alabama

TALK TURKEY

When he walks the woods during **spring turkey season** (March 20–May 2 in most of the state), chef Chris Hastings of Hot and Hot Fish Club in Birmingham focuses on the hunt, but if he sees a patch of tasty mushrooms, he’ll make a mental note and go back later to gather chanterelles or chickens of the woods. His turkey recipe is fairly straightforward: After hanging the bird at room temperature for three days to mellow (something Hastings swears by), he seasons it with olive oil, salt, pepper, and thyme—turkey is delicate, and you can easily step on its flavor, he says. He trims the bird and slices the breast, lightly breads it and fries until crispy, and then layers it over watercress with sautéed mushrooms, foraged if he’s lucky. “All of the elements of this dish are representative of the time and the place of the hunt,” Hastings says. “It’s a way to celebrate and honor the life of the bird you were fortunate enough to harvest.” ■ outdooralabama.com
■ hotandhotfishclub.com

FOOD

Arkansas

AN EVEN BETTER BISCUIT

Chocolate gravy warm and slathered on a biscuit is dessert for breakfast. No one knows the precise origin of the Ozark and Appalachian sauce made with butter, sugar, cocoa, flour, and milk—Spanish Louisiana trade routes might have brought Mexican chocolate to early Appalachia, or perhaps it’s a riff on sweet sorghum syrup. Although **chocolate gravy and biscuits** are usually made at home (and would make a perfect Mother’s Day brunch addition on May 9), some Arkansas restaurants regularly serve them in the morning. “There’s not just one way to make chocolate gravy,” explains Jerri Todd, the co-owner of Ozark Cafe in Jasper, which has been serving it since the 1970s. “Some people use water, some make a roux, some add butter at the end. It’s regional, and it depends on what your grandma wrote down.” ■ ozarkcafe.com



CONSERVATION

Georgia

FEELING PECKISH

When it’s time to nest, the **red-cockaded woodpecker** gets a little picky. “They need live pine trees that are old and infected with red heart fungus to make excavating easier,” says Chuck Martin, the director of the Nature Conservancy’s Moody Forest



Hat Tip to Willie Nelson

Fresh on the heels of his seventy-first album, the Red Headed Stranger will celebrate his eighty-eighth birthday on April 29. In tribute, five Southern artists share their favorite songs from the Texas legend.

By Dacey Orr Sivewright

“The Part Where I Cry”

“The entire album...*And Then I Wrote* is one of the finest ever recorded. And not just in country music. Willie changed popular music with his songwriting, and it all started here.” —Charley Crockett

“Blue Skies”

“His soothing voice is a natural fit for this lullaby-like melody. Despite all the chaos and confusion life throws, this song somehow makes me feel like we’re all gonna be all right.” —Hailey Whitters

“It Will Come to Pass”

“The lyrics are profound, mystical, and quite psychedelic—and, as far as I can tell, they’re true. A simple song about the incomprehensible nature of things, it’s the kind every songwriter wants to write.” —Parker Millsap

“Summer of Roses”

“As tender a love song as I am aware of.” —Joe Firstman of Cordovas

“Angel Flying Too Close to the Ground”

“Leave me if you need to, I will still remember / My angel flying too close to the ground. For us, Willie has been an angel. You very seldom get a chance to have an angel in your life, so when it happens, you treasure them forever. Happy birthday, Willie.” —Regina McCrary of the McCrary Sisters

Preserve in southeastern Georgia. The endangered woodpecker, also known as the Yankee Doodle bird for the tiny strip of red on the males’ heads, is native to Southeastern pine forests, which are fast disappearing. Recently, it has received a boost from relocation programs: Biologists take young birds from healthy populations and release them into pine habitat with ready-made love shacks—cavities in younger trees that save the birds the one-to-three-year process of pecking out a nest. “We just always hope the released birds will hit it off,” Martin says; if a pair does, the birds mate for life, and the male will start sprucing up his house in April by flaking off pine bark until the sap runs (scientists believe this is to ward off climbing snakes). Happy home intact, by May baby woodpeckers—which look like tiny dinosaurs when they hatch, says Martin—will occupy the cavities until they grow their handsome black-and-white feathers and take wing. To spot red-cockaded woodpeckers in Georgia this spring, keep your eyes peeled for peeping heads in high pine trees on Tavia’s Trail at Moody Forest, at the Piedmont National Wildlife Refuge in Hillsboro, and near the Florida border in Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge.

■ nature.org

EQUESTRIAN

Kentucky

TENURE TRACK

For Shannon Bishop Arvin, racing is a family affair—her grandfather served as the first general manager of Keeneland in Lexington, and her father became its lawyer and then a trustee. “I grew up around the track and always had a reverence for Keeneland,” Arvin says, and this year, she became the track’s first female CEO and president. “People would probably say that racing is a man’s industry, but I never let myself believe that being a woman was a limitation.” On April 2, horses line up for the first run of **Keeneland’s spring race meet** (through April 23). Two prime events of the season happen April 3: the Central Bank Ashland Stakes for three-year-old fillies and the Toyota Blue Grass Stakes for three-year-olds, respective prep races for the Kentucky Oaks (April 30) and the



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AGENDA

Derby (May 1). Although Arvin promises to bring plenty of fresh ideas to Keeneland, she insists at least two things will stay the same: the track's Kentucky burgoo recipe, and its bread pudding topped with Maker's Mark sauce.

■ keeneland.com

OPENING

Louisiana

NEW IN NOLA

After Hurricane Katrina, the colossal former New Orleans World Trade Center on Canal Street sat idle on the Mississippi riverfront. But on May 15, not only will it reopen as the **Four Seasons Hotel New Orleans**, but also the James Beard Award-winning chef Alon Shaya will bring delicious new life to the ground floor with his restaurant **Miss River**. (Then in October, chef Donald Link will join with a spot of his own.) Shaya's other two restaurants, Saba in New Orleans and Safta in Denver, focus on the Israeli cuisine of his heritage, but Miss River highlights the worldliness of the Crescent City. Classic gumbo and Cajun couvillion will share menu space with dishes inspired by the farmers and fishermen Shaya has met over his eighteen years in town. "We'll have a crabmeat ravigote that you see piled on crackers or salads, but we're serving it in a lettuce wrap with mint, basil, pickled cucumbers, and jalapeños to give it a taste of the Vietnamese culture that is so impactful here," he says. Beverage carts will rove between tables, with aperitifs and digestifs poured as live music plays. "It's important that it's a place where locals want to go, too," says Emily Shaya, Alon's wife and business partner. "Lucky for us, New Orleanians love to go out to eat."

■ fourseasons.com/neworleans

ART

Maryland

BRANCHING OUT

The only certainty about an installation by **Patrick Dougherty** is that it will be made of sticks. The North Carolina artist, known

for his towering natural sculptures, will visit Maryland Hall in Annapolis—an arts center inside a former high school—this spring to construct a massive sculpture alongside a stone labyrinth path. "The space we have chosen has a majestic oak, and since I am a certified tree lover, I look forward to building there under the auspices of such a worthy companion," says Dougherty, who will work May 3–21, enlisting the help of community volunteers and students from nearby Wiley H. Bates Middle School. The finished piece, made entirely of saplings, should stand for years after its assembly before decomposing. "As I come to know the site and take its full measure," he says, "I constantly adjust the work to fit any new revelation." While the artwork stands, exhibitions coordinator Emily Kohlenstein hopes it will inspire a sense of shared ownership in the community: "The students will be able to walk by every day and say, 'I made that.'"

■ marylandhall.org
■ stickwork.net

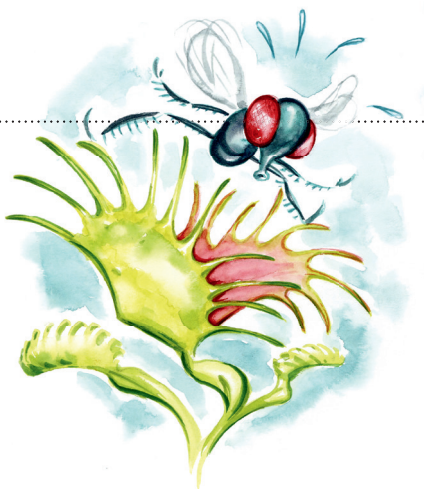
GARDEN

Mississippi

THE BONSAI WHISPERER

The Memphis suburb of Olive Branch, Mississippi, is home to the country's largest collection of miniature trees. **Brussel's Bonsai Nursery** is roughly the size of New York's Grand Central Station and stocks some 100,000 tiny trees, from \$33 dwarf jades to a Japanese juniper worth thousands. Brussel Martin, who founded the nursery in 1973, says cooped-up quarantiners have doubled his sales during the pandemic: "I'm selling ten thousand trees a week; I can hardly keep up with the demand." Martin ships all across the continental United States, but those who shop in person can tour the specimen house filled with rare bonsai, including that six-hundred-year-old juniper. Best season to visit? "Spring is by far the most spectacular time around here," Martin says. "The place is alive with color." April standouts include a dwarf boxwood that resembles a magnolia ("It has that same oval leaf"); in May, the azalea bonsai are among his most popular bloomers.

■ brusselsbonsai.com



OUTDOORS

North Carolina

OH, SNAP!

"A **Venus flytrap**'s first true leaves are traps, and they come out snapping," says Johnny Randall, the director of conservation at the North Carolina Botanical Garden in Chapel Hill. The teeny opportunistic, photosynthesizing predator is just one of thirty-two species of carnivorous plants native to North Carolina. The acidic and nutrient-poor wet pine savanna habitat that Venus flytraps call home, in the southeastern portion of the state, makes a juicy ant, spider, or beetle a welcome dietary boost. "Watching a Venus flytrap is like watching natural selection and evolution in action," says Randall, who works to conserve the increasingly rare plant in the face of habitat loss, poaching, and fire suppression, and collects its seeds for the garden's seed bank. In May, flytraps bloom with clusters of white flowers, making the plants easier to spot on a springtime walk through the botanical garden, at Carolina Beach State Park in New Hanover County, or at Wilmington's Stanley Rehder Carnivorous Plant Garden.

■ ncbg.unc.edu

ART

South Carolina

LOWCOUNTRY LEGEND

Alice Ravenel Huger Smith (1876–1958), a leading figure of the Charleston Renaissance, was known for her dreamy watercolors of marsh vistas. But the creative also painted portraits, sketched architectural drawings, and started a local movement of artists dabbling in Japanese woodblock printing inspired by the work of

Utagawa Hiroshige and Katsushika Hokusai. In a new book, *Alice: Alice Ravenel Huger Smith, Charleston Renaissance Artist*, Smith's relatives Caroline Palmer and Anne Gaud Tinker and close family friend Dwight McInvaill describe how Smith was an innovator and influencer long before the latter term became trendy with the Instagram set. "She inspired so many of her contemporaries to strive for artistic excellence," McInvaill says. Her rarely exhibited Japanese-influenced painting *Moonlight on the Cooper River*, and many more of her works, at the Gibbes Museum of Art in Charleston (April 30–October 3), just might inspire a new generation of artists.

■ aliceravenelhugersmith.com



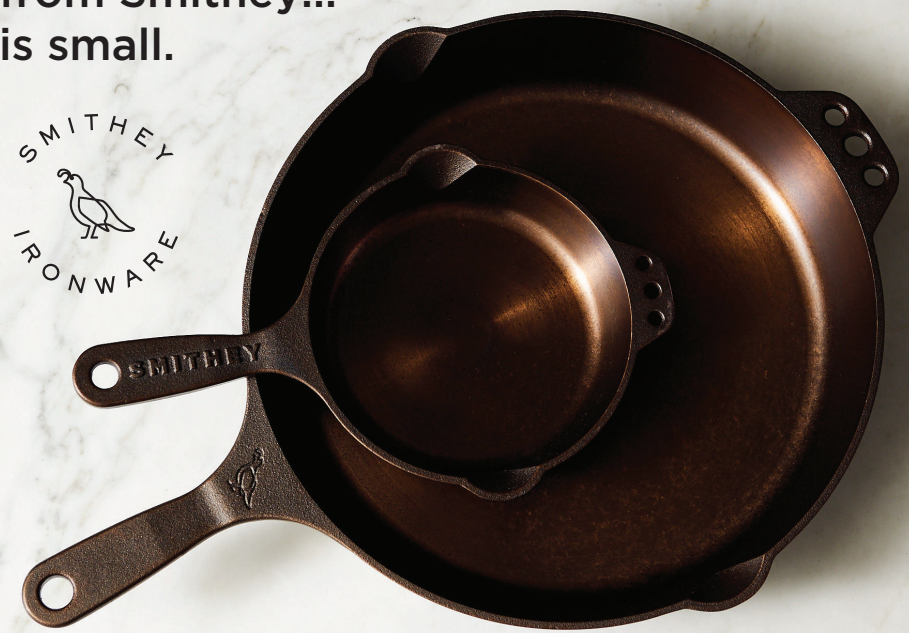
TRAVEL

Tennessee

ALL ABOARD

With a brass section mimicking the lilt of a train whistle over the thrum of wheels on a track, the song "**Chattanooga Choo Choo**" rocked America's musical landscape when the Glenn Miller Band released it eight decades ago. Coinciding with the height of big-band jazz and America's entry into World War II, the song details a trip from Penn Station in New York back home to Chattanooga where a sweetheart awaits. After premiering in the movie *Sun Valley Serenade*, the tune hit number one on the charts on the now infamous date December 7, 1941, scored an Oscar nomination, and sold more than a million copies, becoming music's first ever gold record. Eighty years later, the song remains Chattanooga's catchiest claim to fame. "*Chattanooga* is a very musical word—and the city has done a lot to keep the song alive," says the Nashville music historian Robert K.

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Oermann. Today, the city has transformed Southern Railway's defunct Beaux-Arts train terminal downtown into a hotel centered around the Glenn Miller Gardens, where guests dine inside a train car turned beer hall and spend the night in a refurbished locomotive.

■ choochoo.com

HOTEL

Texas

WORTH A STAY

"When I visit somewhere, I want to feel like I got the vibe and energy of the city," says the Fort Worth native and entrepreneur Jonathan Morris, who hosts *Self Employed*, a show on the new Magnolia Network that highlights small-business owners nationwide. Getting the mood of Fort Worth just right was one of the motivations behind the twenty-one-room **Hotel Dryce**, which opens soon in the city's booming Cultural District. Along with his business partner, Allen Mederos, Morris carved the hotel out of a former dry-ice factory, turning the once industrial space into a cultural destination of its own, and the work of local makers is a pillar of the property. "We launched a grant program called You Are Here with the nonprofit Art Tooth to promote local artists of color," Morris says. Pieces by watercolorist Brenda Ciardiello, fiber artist Niki Dionne, and photographer Guillermo Tapia line the walls. Local carpenters 6572 Build designed the wooden bed frames and a check-in desk near the inviting living room bar.

■ hoteldryce.com

OPENING

Virginia

ESTATE PLANNING

In 1912, Robert B. Crawford built a Georgian Revival and Italian-style manor just outside Charlottesville, ordered a menagerie of peacocks and miniature donkeys, and called the whole thing *Villa Crawford*. It didn't stay in the family long, and eventually fell into ruin. Sir Bernard Ashley, the widower of famed British textile designer

Laura Ashley, rescued the estate in 1990 and promised to turn it into "your uncle's great country mansion," decking the walls with his late wife's wallpaper, adding a snooker room, and faux-wood painting the elevators. "Those are going to go," says current co-owner Molly Hardie, who with her husband, Robert—they also own the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville—has spent the past four years gutting what today operates as an inn called **Keswick Hall**. When it reopens this spring, it'll sport a lighter and brighter color palette, a new guest wing, an infinity pool that looks out over legendary golf architect Pete Dye's Full Cry course, and the chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten's farm-to-table restaurant Marigold. The Victorian wallpaper and donkeys may be just memories, but Hardie reassures cue sport enthusiasts that "the snooker room is here to stay."

■ keswick.com

SPORTS

West Virginia

DIRT TRACK DREAMING

Cody Watson, West Virginia Motor Speedway's promoter, remembers his first visit to the dirt track. "I was maybe ten," he says. "I brought my lawn chair up on the hillside, and then I heard the announcer say, 'Here's Scott Bloomquist out of Mooresburg, Tennessee!'" (Bloomquist is one of the best dirt track racers ever.) Racers can hit speeds of 160 miles per hour on the straightaway there, and for decades the venue, which opened in 1985, was known as the World's Fastest Dirt Track. But in 2013, the track closed, and nature quickly moved in to reclaim it. Watson took over the lease last August, and with his own hands hacked back overgrown trees and weeds, laid fresh clay, and relandscaped the hillside spectator seating. Engines will rev again at the grand reopening **Super Late Model** race (April 25), but it's the June 4 event that Watson really can't wait for. Some of the best vets in the biz plan to return for the **National Dirt Late Model Historic 100**, including Bloomquist himself.

■ wvmotorspeedway.com

—Allison Entrekin, Kinsey Gidick,
Lindsey Liles, and Caroline Sanders