

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

“Shrimp lovers, both cooks and eaters, absolutely need this book, but so does any traveler or armchair epicure who values the culinary traditions of coastal America.”

—MICHAEL STERN, coauthor of *Road-food: The Coast-to-Coast Guide to 900 of the Best Barbecue Joints, Lobster Shacks, Ice Cream Parlors, Highway Diners, and Much, Much More*

“Not only is *Shrimp Country* a complete compendium of southern shrimp, it is a tasty treat for both reading and cooking.”

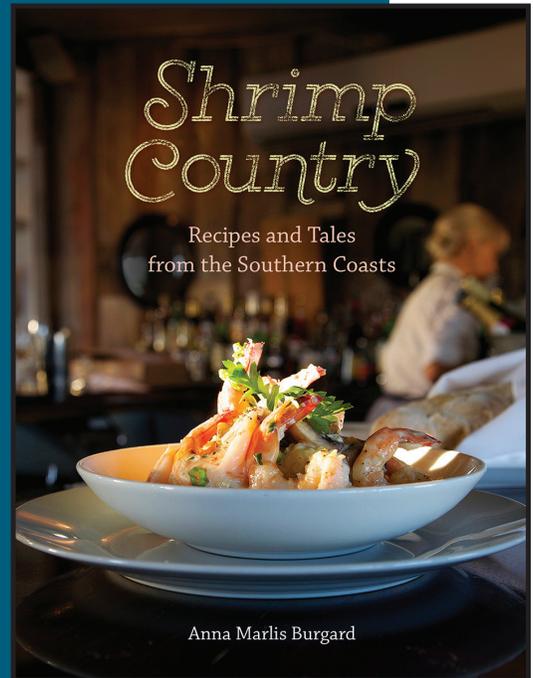
—ELIZABETH WILLIAMS, author of *New Orleans: A Food Biography*

“Takes us on a journey through the creeks, bogs, sounds, and seas that yield one of America’s most precious resources—sweet, tender shrimp.”

—NANCY WHITE, author of *Jacksonville Food Trucks: Stories & Recipes from the Road*

“A wonderful culinary journey. From the recipes peppered with chefs’ anecdotes and information for home cooks and travelers, Burgard has compiled a mouthwatering celebration of the sweet crustacean.”

—HEATHER MCPHERSON, coauthor of *Good Catch: Recipes and Stories Celebrating the Best of Florida’s Waters*



## SHRIMP COUNTRY

Recipes and Tales from the Southern Coasts

**ANNA MARLIS BURGARD**

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ANNA MARLIS BURGARD is the creative force behind hundreds of books including the bestselling *A Guide for Grown-ups: Essential Wisdom from the Collected Works of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry* and *Hallelujah: The Poetry of Classic Hymns*. Her work has been featured on Atlas Obscura, BBC Radio 1 and NPR, and in the *New Yorker*, *USA Today*, and the *Wall Street Journal*. She honed her shrimp-cooking skills on Tybee Island, Georgia, where the trawlers moored along Lazaretto Creek bring wild shrimp to the docks, and has explored more than 100 coastal and inland islands for her *Islands of America: A River, Lake and Sea Odyssey* project.

Anna Marlis Burgard  
is available for interviews and appearances



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# Q&A

with

**ANNA MARLIS BURGARD**

author of

**Shrimp Country**

## **You've been creating books since you were seven years old. How did that start?**

Our farmhouse was filled with books—overflowing from bookcases, stacked on tables and steps. My mother was a poet; if you ever dared to say you were bored, her response was always, “Read a book!” I began making little books from loose leaf paper and magic markers, but an aunt who was a professor of literature later gave me a bookbinding kit, and I’ve been writing, editing and art directing them ever since.

## **How did you approach collecting the recipes in the book?**

I first drove 2,500 miles from Spokane, Washington down to the southern start of America’s Gulf Coast—South Padre Island, Texas—then traveled 3,300 more miles through every coastal state to Swanquarter, North Carolina—the “Inner Banks.” To collect not just the recipes themselves (many of which I’d sampled during my *Islands of America* travels to 100+ islands) but the authentic voices of chefs, captains, and so many other walks of life, I knew I had to make the full pilgrimage along our shrimp coasts. I was on the road for more than a month straight.

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## **What was the most fun you had during your trip?**

There were scores of great moments—so many beautiful places, generous, interesting people, and delicious dishes—but hanging out with Tony Reisinger on South Padre Island, Texas, and watching him make a *Gyotaku* print from a colossal shrimp was a perfect start to the adventure.

## **After interviewing a number of trawler captains along the Gulf and Atlantic coasts, what would you say are the common traits of successful captains?**

Fierce determination, trust of instincts, ability to rise up over fears, respect for the sea, ability to read weather and people, and common sense.

## **How did you come to know the captains you met?**

Tybee Island, Georgia, is home to a long-standing shrimping community; living there for seven years, it wasn't hard to meet them, given they all dock at Lazaretto Creek. In Florida, North Carolina, and South Carolina, I just walked up to the docked boats and introduced myself. In Corpus Christi, Texas, the Chamber of Commerce did some advance work for me. The captains were universally candid, friendly, and full of stories. Generous with their tales and their time.

## **You write briefly about the importance of names to shrimp boats. If you had a shrimp boat, what would you name it?**

*The Wrangler*—gathering all of the recipes from so many sources wasn't unlike the captains searching for and hauling in their shrimp!

## **What's it like to catch seafood during a jubilee?**

I've never experienced a jubilee—you really have to live at Point Clear to have that pleasure. Ralph Reynolds's description in the book is the next best thing! But it's not so much catching seafood as gathering it or scooping it up. It's on shore for the taking.

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## **What was the most surprising thing you learned about shrimp?**

How quickly they can move. I always thought of shrimp as aquatic insects that hung out in specific areas—pretty low on the sentient being chain. I didn't know they migrated—shrimp troupes can migrate from South Carolina to Florida in three days, according to Captain Jack Kemp of Tybee Island. And, according to other captains, they can be wily in the way they “hide up.”

## **What is the first dish you ever cooked?**

I made desserts and helped with party appetizers when I was little, but the first real dinner I recall making was chicken and mushroom crepes when I was about 13.

## **Out of all the species of shrimp you've worked with, which do you like to cook with best?**

I like Florida's pink shrimp for my Hot Buttered Rum Shrimp, Georgia's white shrimp for my Scampi, and Texas's brownies for heavily-spiced dishes.

## **What recipe are you most proud of?**

My scampi was the longest recipe in the making, and is my most-requested dish from friends, but my Hot Buttered Rum Shrimp is one of my most original recipes—not just my take on a standard, but a real creation. I've never heard of or tasted anything exactly like it.

## **Are there any recipes you wish you could have included in the book but didn't?**

Many! There's a Voodoo Shrimp recipe in New Orleans, for instance, and a Cuban shrimp dish from Key West that I just couldn't get in time, even though the chefs were willing.

## **At what point do you usually consider a recipe perfect?**

When I'm no longer tempted to tinker with it!

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# Shrimp Country

Recipes and Tales  
from the Southern Coasts

Anna Marlis Burgard



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## Captain Cook

Captain Barry Woods, the *Island Girl*, Fernandina Beach, Florida

Crews that are out at sea for weeks at a time eat what's fresh, and while shrimpers haul in their share of bycatch (the flounder and other small fish that also get scooped up by the nets), they most often eat shrimp boiled in the very salt water the critters called home or fried, with variations on a shrimp and sausage gravy that's a favorite on trawlers all along the Gulf and southern Atlantic coasts. The captains I've spoken with each have their favorite way of cooking it, prepared by look and feel, with few measurements beyond "a handful" and other old-school amounts.

Captain Barry Woods prides himself on his version. Woods was "borned" on my old haunt, Tybee Island—which he pronounced "Taahbee," forcing me to ask him to repeat himself three times before I got it (tabby is a lime and oyster shell material used like stucco on coastal Georgia structures, which is part of what threw me). He was raised by a shrimper, and was pulling coin

Captain Woods indicates the size of the onions for his recipe.



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as a header (“beheader” is a more apt title) on his father’s boat, the *Elizabelle*, when he was six. He knows shrimp—from finding where they’re “buried up” to hiring skilled strikers to pull in the nets and get the “flickerin’ and flippin’ prawnies” into bushel baskets, and then selling them at market and directly to chefs.

In between watching the weather, navigating to the wily shrimp, and working with the crew once a catch is hauled in, Woods cooks up his gravy. Within a few minutes of meeting him on Amelia Island and my describing this book, he took a stand: “I’ve been offered lotsa money for one of my recipes, but I don’t think I’ll ever give it up.” About forty-five minutes later, though, after we’d talked awhile about Tybee and how “it don’t matter what the deal is, you gotta be around that salt air,” he decided I needed to learn how to make shrimp gravy, so he talked and gestured his way through his recipe:

“Coat your shrimp in nothin’ but flour—fry ’em in enough peanut oil just to turn ’em over ’til they’re brown, and keep the dribblins. Fry up salt pork, cut up in little bitsy pieces, with veggies in the dribblins. Butter’s always a little bit in there, and this ’n’ that, and Worcestershire sauce. Fry two cut-up links of sausage in it all, then add the shrimp back in, and put it on some rice. The only vegetables I use are onions, bell pepper, and celery. Of course Cajuns cook theirs up with boudin, but you can use different sausage, any kind you like. Just have to balance it all so you taste the shrimp—not too much rice or green pepper or celery.”

Without knowing what the “this ’n’ that” is, or the real amounts, I’m sure I’ll never truly make Woods’s version, but, no doubt, this’ll “make your tongue slap your brains out.” ❀

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# Sometimes the Shrimp Come to You

## The Maritime Mystery of Mobile Bay's Jubilee Events

On steamy summer nights along Mobile Bay's coast, when fresh water swirls with the salty Gulf of Mexico and winds press down just so, sea creatures come ashore in droves of their own volition: slithering eels, flapping flounder, crawling shrimp, and scrambling crabs. So many beach themselves that folks spread the word to their sleeping neighbors, ringing bells along the waterfront back in the day, and through phone calls in this more recent era. They come armed with buckets, nets, bushel baskets, and gigs to haul in the free catch that's known as a jubilee. It happens every summer, sometimes more than once, usually in August just before dawn—but all of the timing and the right conditions can be present without the same effect. This fable-worthy exodus has been scarcely recorded elsewhere in the world, but it's only here along a short stretch of Alabama's eastern coast between Daphne and Point Clear that it's a reliable annual ritual.

Part of the magic is that even in this advanced technological age, the



occurrence remains unpredictable. Texas Sea Grant agent Tony Reisinger, whose mother hailed from Mobile, helps to explain by referencing Edwin May's 1930s studies—but also admits no one really knows for sure how jubilees come to be. “Estuaries have a dense saltwater wedge that slips like a long tongue reaching from the ocean’s side underneath the less dense, fresher bay water. Jubilees can occur when that bottom water, oxygen deprived from decaying organic matter, is pushed onto the shallow eastern shelf of the bay. The incoming tide sometimes coaxes the low-oxygen—hypoxic—water toward the shallows, driving marine life to seek refuge along the eastern shoreline, where in early morning, already low levels of oxygen are being consumed, not produced, by algae in the water. This doesn’t explain everything, because the result is not always a jubilee. It could be that the easterly wind that’s usually present is another factor in the equation, and that adds to the enigma. Ultimately, I’ve always thought of jubilee as one of the mysteries of life I simply have to accept without question, having those bay waters in my veins.”

With a home smack on the water, Point Clear resident Ralph Reynolds has experienced a number of jubilees.

He describes the atmosphere preceding the event as dead still and humid.

One recent summer morning, he was heading out to the Gulf around 6:30 a.m. when he heard a commotion and saw gulls and herons swooping down and crowding his pier. From his porch, he could make out some boats and people with flounder gigs and nets. Walking down to the beach, he saw the shrimp, crabs, and flounder piling up, and soon learned how determined the creatures were: “A gull dropped an eel on my head; I threw it back in the water, only to see it shimmy right back onto shore.” He scooped up all the shrimp he could for an impromptu feast that night.

Sometimes the jubilee forces more of one kind of creature than another out of Mobile Bay; on one occasion, Ralph said, the sand was so filled with eels buried up to their necks, all of them gasping for air, that it was hard to walk without stepping on one. “It was like the sand had sprouted Medusa heads.” ❀



# Blackened Shrimp with Black-Eyed Pea Vinaigrette

Chef Adam Miller, Amen Street Fish & Raw Bar | Charleston, South Carolina

Amen Street's name is inspired by an eighteenth-century stretch of road between East Bay and Church Street where the faithfuls' amens rang out every Sunday from St. Philip's Episcopal Church and the Methodist Meeting House. Amen, indeed: All the food I've tried here is praiseworthy. This appetizer is a quartet of flavors: the heat of the shrimp playing in savory melody with a black-eyed pea vinaigrette and tomato fondue, harmonizing with a sweeter cornbread that counteracts the shrimp's seasoning and vinaigrette's acidity. This is an original gathering of tastes and textures that's wholly rooted in its region's earth. Chef Adam Miller calls it a "scream of Southern"; he's lived in South Carolina since he was a kid, so understands the Lowcountry's symphony of flavors. It's a recipe that is actually four recipes—but it's *so* worth the time.

**Serves 4**

## INGREDIENTS

24 large shrimp, peeled and deveined	1 cup Tomato Fondue, at room temperature (see recipe, page 45)
¼ cup vegetable oil	1 cup Black-Eyed Pea Vinaigrette Salad (see recipe, page 234)
2 to 4 tablespoons blackening seasoning (depending on heat preference)	
4 pieces of Sweet Cornbread (see recipe, page 233)	

## PROCESS

- 1** Toss the shrimp, oil, and blackening seasoning in a bowl; set aside to marinate for 15 minutes.
- 2** Cook the shrimp on an outdoor grill or in a well-seasoned cast-iron skillet until opaque.
- 3** Spoon a puddle of the warm tomato fondue onto each plate or shallow bowl; top with a piece of cornbread off to the side. Place six of the cooked shrimp on top of the fondue; stir the black-eyed pea vinaigrette and spoon it over the shrimp and cornbread. Serve immediately.

# Old School Shrimp Salad

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There are as many variations on shrimp salad as there are southerners, it seems. Some people include a whisper of sherry, some prefer shredded cabbage or jicama to celery, some punch it up with intense spicing, and others add more exotic ingredients. For me, shrimp salad needs to taste like shrimp, so I like to keep things simple. I cannot abide tarragon and other taste invaders. I use half low-fat mayonnaise and half low-fat sour cream to cut the calories back (and because I don't love mayonnaise). I like the sweeter white shrimp best for a delicately flavored salad.

**Serves 2 as a main course**

## INGREDIENTS

1 pound medium shrimp, steamed, shelled, and deveined, still warm	⅓ cup mayonnaise (reduced fat is fine)
1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice	⅓ cup sour cream (reduced fat is fine)
½ teaspoon distilled white vinegar	⅓ cup thinly sliced celery
½ teaspoon seafood boil spice, or more to taste	½ small red bell pepper, diced (optional)
Dash of celery seed	¼ cup finely diced red onion (optional)
	2 ripe avocados

## PROCESS

- 1 Slice each shrimp in half lengthwise.
- 2 Whisk the lemon juice, vinegar, seafood boil spice, celery seed, mayonnaise, and sour cream together in a large bowl. Add the shrimp, celery, bell pepper, and onion (if desired) and toss to coat. Cover and refrigerate until ready to serve.
- 3 Cut the avocados in half; remove pits. Use half an avocado for each appetizer serving, filling with shrimp.

*Tip:* Lydell “Delly” Easton of Rockville, South Carolina, suggests bruising each shrimp between your thumb and finger while still warm to break up the meat, allowing it to absorb flavors more easily.

Photo by Charity Burggraaf.



# Sautéed Shrimp

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Chef George Spriggs, North Beach Grill | Tybee Island, Georgia

Chef Spriggs tops salads with these shrimp; you can incorporate them into omelets, tacos, burritos, grits, and lots of other dishes.

**Serves 2 to 4**

## INGREDIENTS

1 tablespoon olive oil	2½ tablespoons Cajun seasoning
1 pound medium shrimp, shelled and deveined	½ cup shrimp or fish stock (see page 25)
1 tablespoon minced garlic	2 tablespoons butter

## PROCESS

- 1** Place a sauté pan over high heat and allow to heat for about 1 minute. Add the oil to pan, followed by the shrimp.
- 2** Toss or stir the shrimp until the first signs of pink coloring appear, then add the garlic.
- 3** Continue to toss the shrimp for 30 seconds, then add the Cajun seasoning and stock. Allow the shrimp to simmer and the liquid to reduce until the shrimp are cooked through. Add the butter just before the shrimp are done to help thicken sauce.

*Overleaf:* Jared Keefe (left) and Charles “The Shrimp Pimp” Riley haul, sort, and head shrimp aboard Captain Roy Woodard’s *Las Ninas II*. Woodard is a Tybee native who’s been shrimping for more than fifty years. Photo by Jay Fleming.



