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Gorgeous Greenville, South Carolina

By: Robert J. Nebel

It was 10:30 a.m. on a recent weekend and I was dining on a plate of shrimp and grits. I've had this dish several times before, but not like this.

I couldn't put my finger on it. Was it a different type of cheese? Did the chef acquire a special type of grits?

After several minutes, I came to the conclusion that the dish was indeed mouth-watering, but it was the restaurant's atmosphere that made the moment complete.

I admitted that this was no ordinary dining experience. This was Mary's at Falls Cottage. No, this delightful little cottage cum restaurant isn't in Savannah, Chattanooga or Raleigh. This Mary's is in Greenville, South Carolina.



Runners in downtown Greenville, South Carolina - photos by Robert J. Nebel

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What was once known as a tiny hamlet that has been a pass-through to Asheville, Greenville has become a cosmopolitan community filled with scores of unforgettable restaurants like Mary's.

Built in 1893, Mary's was a private residence in Greenville's West End neighborhood until the late 1960s. Restored in the mid-1970s, the cottage served in a variety of roles for the city. About four years ago, the Falls Cottage became a restaurant.

As I was sitting on the cottage's top floor eating their creamy shrimp and grits, I exclaimed, "Now this is the New South."

While my wife and I were waiting for dessert, we walked out of the back door to the cottage's porch and were treated to a view of the falls that spill into the Reedy River.

After our brunch at Mary's, we had to explore the long and winding path that runs near the falls and follows the Reedy River. This is greenspace at its best.

Once we made our way back to Mary's, we walked the historic West End neighborhood where I purchased some unique gifts at the Greenville Army and Navy Store.

Scrumptious Soby's

All of that walking made us hungry. We checked into Soby's on South Main Street. I was thankful that we made reservations on this particular weekend evening. The crowds build around 6 p.m.



The Shrimp and Grits at Mary's Cottage in Greenville is a scrumptious treat for brunch.

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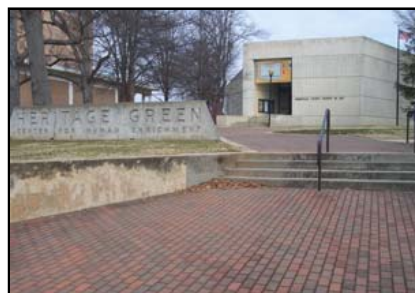
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I noticed the atmosphere change when my sherry-laced She Crab Soup made its way to me. While you can easily get a taste of the South with dishes like the Crispy Fried Ashley Farm Chicken or the moist Soby's Meatloaf with Maple Creole Mustard Glaze, I suggest the fish offerings. The Pecan Crusted Mountain Trout and Hickory Smoked Grilled Salmon are fresh, tasty and light.



The Greenville County Museum of Art is filled with contemporary art including works by artist Andrew Wyeth.

There is room for dessert if you choose one of the seafood offerings. The bread pudding is a Soby's favorite.

#### Great Art in Greenville

Just like my experience at all of Greenville's restaurants, I had to work off my meal. I walked for several blocks over to the **Greenville County Museum of Art**.

This user-friendly museum is home to the Andrew Wyeth collection and a contemporary collection of art including works by legendary artists such as Andy Warhol.

The museum's gift shop is impressive with a vast amount of books including handsome releases about the Charleston Renaissance and renowned South Carolinian artist William Halsey.

The county art museum resides next to the Greenville library and an up and coming children's museum. Even though Greenville is already kid-friendly with the **Reedy River Falls Park**, this museum which is set to open soon will really attract more families.

#### High-class Dining

If you're going to splurge on dining in Greenville, then I recommend **High Cotton** restaurant. A few years back, I experienced the High Cotton in Charleston which is excellent in its own right.

The Greenville High Cotton is modern, spacious and lively. As we made our way through the crowded bar, we were treated to a welcoming staff, bubbly patrons and live music that emanated from the front of the restaurant.

Appetizers including their Butcher Plate which contains a variety of cured meats and Buttermilk Fried Oysters get the evening off to a great start.

The entrée selection offers an array of unique dishes including a Pan Roasted Grouper Filet with sweet potato puree and an outstanding Black Pepper and Espresso Rubbed Carved Venison Medallions.



Reedy River Falls is a sight to behold with its grace and beauty.

With top-notch food, wine and music comes great scenery at High Cotton. The restaurant is located in an attractive, sprawling building that overlooks the Reedy River.

#### Another Revitalized Southern City

Greenville has followed in the footsteps of other Southern cities that were able to turn around their image by refurbishing its older structures and creating architecturally pleasing new ones.

Sure there are tacky buildings from the 1960s and 70s, but the storefront brick facades and tree-lined streets drown out the drab exteriors to buildings like the structure that houses the town's newspaper.



Greenville is making its downtown easy to get around with its own trolley system.

Whether you're driving, walking or taking the town's trolley, getting around town is easy. Even for the "navigationally-challenged," it's tough to get lost in Greenville.

Another advantage to making a visit here is that it is affordable. You don't have to visit eateries like High Cotton everyday. There are plenty of places to dine for a low price.

I had a cheap, delicious meal at Soby's on the Side. Located behind the main Soby's restaurant, Soby's on the Side offers affordable breakfast, lunch and brunch dishes.

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Restaurants including Soby's, Mary's and High Cotton, hotels like the **Westin Poinsett** and thoroughfares like Main Street and McBee Avenue are examples of how Greenville came alive in the past decade.

The Westin Poinsett was named after Joel Robert Poinsett, a statesman, diplomat and naturalist. He was the United States' First Minister to Mexico and served as Secretary of War and as Congressman.

While serving as Minister to Mexico in 1825, Poinsett introduced to America a species of the Euphorbia pulcherrima plant later named Poinsettia in his honor. There is a statue of him next to the hotel on South Main Street.



Joel Robert Poinsett

So the next time you're thinking about going to Asheville, think about cutting in your drive nearly in half and stay for a while in Greenville. I was glad that I visited.

#### Helpful Links:

[Mary's at Falls Cottage](#)

[Soby's Restaurant](#)

[High Cotton Restaurant](#)

[Soby's on the Side](#)

[Reedy River Falls Historic Park](#)

[Westin Poinsett Hotel](#)

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The Westin Poinsett Hotel is a Greenville landmark that is steeped in history.



**Robert J. Nebel** is a journalist whose works have appeared in several newspapers and magazines. Visit his [website](#).

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