



# Wines down South

2009-2010

[www.winesdownsouth.com](http://www.winesdownsouth.com)

## GOURMET THOMASVILLE

*History, Good Living & Fine Dining in the Deep South*

By Doc Lawrence

It's an easy drive to Thomasville from Atlanta down Interstate 75, veering off through Moultrie and Georgia's agricultural heartland. Thomasville is different: many homes are distinctively Victorian, some Antebellum and the Spanish moss-draped Live Oaks are breathtakingly beautiful. Just a few miles north of the Florida line, Thomasville, a Georgia gem, literally sits on top of Tallahassee. With equal parts old and new South, this very livable city is the hometown of popular author, NPR's Bailey White. Like a blossoming rose, Thomasville has quietly emerged as a gourmet center featuring outstanding restaurants with acclaimed chefs and impressive wine cellars.

My headquarters was The Paxton House Bed and Breakfast Inn, ([www.1884paxtonhouseinn.com](http://www.1884paxtonhouseinn.com)), Susie Sherrod's luxuriously furnished Victorian mansion just a short walk from museums and restaurants. As a B & B, it stands alone combining splendor with hospitality and convenience. Miss Wanda is an important part of the Paxton House team and creates Thomasville's finest breakfast served with lighthearted conversation to start each glorious day. It is an honor to enjoy breakfast being addressed as "shuga."



Café Marebella

The Railway depot once welcomed luminaries like U.S. Presidents along with northern industrial and financial giants who sojourned to Thomasville on luxury trains to enjoy hunting and good living on nearby plantations like Pebble Hill and Greenwood. The luxury passenger trains have disappeared but this red brick depot thrives as home to Café Marebella ([www.cafemarebella.com](http://www.cafemarebella.com)), one of the region's great gourmet restaurants.

Propelled by the vision of owners Tony and Mary Ellen Lang, Marebella attracts diners from far away places. On a dreamlike evening, we sat down for dinner where train passengers once strolled for glasses of fine Italian wine perfectly paired with the chef's bountiful dishes. The Lang's have few peers in the art of entertaining conversation and delight in serving platters like the unforgettable baked mushrooms stuffed with mounds of crabmeat. Entrees include natural pork from nearby and heralded Thompson Farms. When the weather is nice-the norm here-dining by the railroad tracks is wonderful. Specialties are Italian and the wine list showcases Tony's expertise as a successful wine merchant.

Ben and Deborah Golden's Savannah Moon Bakery & Café ([www.savannahmoonbakery.com](http://www.savannahmoonbakery.com)) offered some warm handcrafted cinnamon rolls, cookies, pastries and a sample of Ben's pork barbeque cooked over pecan wood. Afterward, it's a short walk on the red brick street (a restoration project) for lunch in the courtyard at Jonah's Fish and Grits ([www.jonahsfish.com](http://www.jonahsfish.com)) where owner Caleb Brown served his delicious original recipe shrimp and grits and a fried oyster sandwich. The dessert menu broadcasts a whole lot of love for locals and hungry strangers.



Thomasville is a city heralded for its numerous beautiful homes.



-continued-



The gifted couple Scott and Rhonda Foster have a solid and growing fan base of gourmet diners attracted by the acclaim earned by their wonderful restaurant, Liam's ([www.liamsofthomasville.com](http://www.liamsofthomasville.com)). Positioned next door to Jonah's suggests an upcoming restaurant row adding even more downtown charm. On one magic evening, we dined on an array of things rare and wonderful including seared duck foie gras, duck cassoulet, tender and brilliantly seasoned pork loin accompanied with ubiquitous glasses of wine, white and red. Liam's wine list is like a work of fine art and comports with the daring creations from the outstanding kitchen.

## PLANTATION HERITAGE TODAY

Thomasville is home to some of the country's most renowned plantations. My first introduction to Pebble Hill, the noted plantation, came from Jack Hadley, a marvelous man whose Jack Hadley Black History Museum, ([www.jackhadleyblackhistorymuseum.com](http://www.jackhadleyblackhistorymuseum.com)), occupies the rooms and halls of a former school. Hadley, an enthusiastic curator and impressively informed tour guide, was born at Pebble Hill, as were his parents and ancestors going as far back to slave days. "I went to school at Pebble Hill," he said, "and our family has reunions there." He pointed to several photos memorializing his relationship with Pebble Hill as we viewed each fascinating exhibition. Hadley's museum is a priority for visitors.

Ann Harrison's expertise made my tour of the Thomas County Museum of History ([www.thomascountyhistory.org](http://www.thomascountyhistory.org)) rewarding. Her knowledge of everything that comprises Thomasville's past and present is remarkable. From her, I learned that after President Kennedy's assassination, Jackie Kennedy sought peace and privacy at Thomasville's Greenwood Plantation. Two days in this lovely city



*Pebble Hill is open for tours and no trip to Thomasville is complete without this experience.*

seemed to confirm the wisdom of her choice. The museum includes the nation's oldest residential bowling alley-and it still functions.

Pebble Hill Plantation ([www.pebblehill.com](http://www.pebblehill.com)) is a stunning assemblage of architectural wonders including mansions, servant quarters and stables bound together on 3,000 landscaped and wooded acres. Guided by the eloquent manager/curator Sue White, I saw the past juxtaposed with the present and everything was good. Huge art collections that included many Audubon prints are close to a spectacular spiral staircase and original furniture is everywhere. Driving around the grounds, I saw the cemetery where Jack Hadley's ancestors are buried and his elementary school. Ms. White, ever gracious and eloquent has a trove of spellbinding stories. Pebble Hill is open for tours and no trip to Thomasville is complete without this experience.

Thomasville is an open, welcoming place, a city that represents the best of the old and new South. There is no detectable urgency to be anything more than a beautiful green and prosperous city, blanketed with flowers, especially roses.

I'll be back soon when I can no longer resist Miss Wanda's baked blueberry breakfast rolls served with sides of good-natured flirting, a pot of fresh coffee and some genuine laughter. Life is good here, way down South in Thomasville.



*Sunsets are perfect for wine and fine dining in Thomasville numerous beautiful homes.*



**Pebble Hill**



*Dinner parties at Thomasville's Pebble Hill Plantation were elegant gourmet events*

