

Handy & Hot is serving home-cooked memories on the go with their curated menu of sweet and savory hand pies, biscuit sandwiches and treats.

“I cook from memories,” says Owner and Chef Vivian Howard. “So if I can articulate a memory on a plate or through a biscuit I feel I’ve found success. If you can tell a story around the thing you made – if it means something to you – I think it resonates with people.”

What’s On The Handy & Hot Menu?

The menu is centered around food reminiscent of Vivian’s hometown. “Today, we’re all talking about cooking the food that is of our people,”



Hand Pies and Proper Coffee |
Image @handyandhot

says Vivian. “So that’s at the root of everything I do.”

Hand pies are a concept she’s wanted to serve for a long time. A cultural dish in Eastern North Carolina, hand pies are the most convenient on-the-go food. Yet, there’s something about them that demands you slow down and savor the moment – even as you run to your next errand.

“It’s all about the crust and it being thin and flakey and rolled out by hand rather than cutting corners and getting a thick chewy crust where there’s not a lot of filling,” says Vivian. “It’s all about proportions.”

The Handy & Hot Apple Jax hand pie in particular is something Vivian has always wanted to master. “I grew up on Saturdays going to a little barbecue joint, BNS Cafe. They did barbecue all week long and on Saturdays they made these apple jax hand pies. They were a weekend treat made extra special because they were only done once a week,” she recalls.

Now they’re available daily at Handy & Hot, along with Tomato Pie In A Pocket and Broccoli hand pies.

It’s All About The Biscuit At Handy & Hot

You won't find fried chicken and biscuits at Handy & Hot.

"I'm really passionate about biscuits in general and what belongs on them," says Vivian. "I believe that everything on a biscuit is meant to

highlight the biscuit and not take away from it."

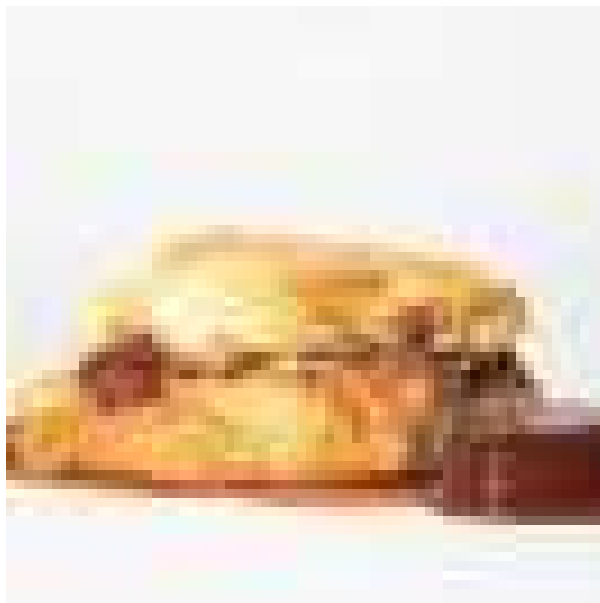
One bite and you'll understand exactly what she means.

With each biscuit Vivian looks for a sweet and salty component, which is why several of hers are complimented by homemade preserves – another passion of Vivian's that led to her latest cookbook *This Will Make It Taste Good*.

"The biscuit I love the most represents what my family eats every Christmas morning – sausage and grape jelly. It's near and dear to my heart," says Vivian.

If it were any other restaurant, you would fully expect the sausage to take center stage. While it is unique to Eastern North Carolina, and often driven to Charleston by Vivian herself – at Handy & Hot it's more of a condiment than a focus. The subtle flavors of the sausage mingle with a delicious grape jelly mustard, but it's the biscuit you taste and savor the most.

Complete your order with a proper coffee. "I'm really into coffee producers and roasters that do it right and honor the person who brewed the coffee, and are passionate about coffee," says Vivian. "With Black and White Coffee [our coffee partner]...I found all those things. They're all about having relationships with the coffee producers and developing flavors within coffee that speaks to the origin of the bean. Most people don't think about that when they're sipping their morning cup."



Strawberry + Parm Biscuit | Image @handyandhot

Save Your Sweet Tooth with Life Raft Treats

An old friend of Vivian's, Cynthia Wong of Life Raft Treats developed 3 recipes for Handy & Hot. Each speaks directly to Eastern North Carolina flavors, as well as some of Vivian's own recipes.

The Pepsi Sherbet bar was inspired by and recreates a snack that's popular in Vivian's home state.



Life Raft Treats at Handy & Hot. Image @handyandhot

Not a fan of peanuts? Try one of Vivian's recipes reimaged in the Banana Pudding Bar. Featuring banana ice cream with a meringue ribbon, it is coated in a dark chocolate shell and a sesame wafer crumble.

Last but not least, the Blondie bar captures a flavor that Vivian has loved forever, combining buttermilk sherbet and peach sorbet.

Each menu item clearly speaks to a series of memories while supporting local businesses and farmers in any way possible.

Telling Stories Through Food

As someone who cooks from memories, it's no surprise that Vivian initially pursued a career in writing. Each new venture speaks to another chapter in her mission to celebrate food and the fond memories each dish can create.

Her second restaurant in Downtown Charleston, Lenoir, is scheduled to open in November. Within the same hotel as Handy & Hot, Lenoir tells the story of the frugal farmer. The menu was designed around the concept of meat as a condiment.

"That's the way that rural southerners have eaten for forever, stretching a hamhock across collards to make them more filling," says Vivian. "A little bit of meat can make grains and vegetables exciting."

"Both [Lenoir and Handy & Hot] represent me as a cook and a story teller, but speak to different times of the day," says Vivian. "I cook a lot with fruit and that's probably one of the threads you'll find through all of my restaurants. The seasonal nature through all of our menus is another common thread."

While we wait for Lenoir to open, stop in at Handy & Hot for a treat guaranteed to make your day.

"Our menu is small, purposely. I would get the Air Dried Sausage biscuit because that's what I love. But I'd also get the Country Ham with the white cheddar. And certainly a hand pie like the Apple Jax or the Tomato Pie In A Pocket. You have to have one of those two things."

By Samantha Paternoster | October 20th, 2020