



Hide, winner of the 2017 Crook's Corner Book Prize, and its two fellow finalists: *Mulberry* by Paulette Boudreaux and *Over the Plain Houses* by Julia Franks.

BOOKS

Cooking Up a Good Story

An iconic restaurant celebrates Southern literature with an annual book prize.

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On the shelves behind the bar at Crook's Corner in Chapel Hill, you'll see not only the expected bottles of beer, wine, and spirits, but also some wonderful new novels: the winners and finalists of the Crook's Corner Book Prize.

Crook's Corner has long been known for great Southern cooking. Now, as home to the only restaurant-sponsored book prize in the country, it's also become inspired literary ground, fusing twin traditions of Southern food and story.

The prize's own story unfolded several years ago, when its president and endower, Anna Hayes, an attorney from Raleigh, was surprised to see a photo of North Carolina author Allan Gurganus in a Parisian café. He'd won a literary

prize there, and Hayes wondered, *How can we honor our own authors here at home?* She began talking with her friend, cookbook author Moreton Neal, formerly married to the late Bill Neal, Crook's Corner's first chef.

From there, the book prize began. For a small fee, U.S.-based publishers and self-published authors may submit debut novels set in the South for consideration for the \$5,000 prize. Plus, of course, the prestige of having their book displayed in a place of honor behind the bar.

Set in post-World War II North Carolina, this year's winning novel, *Hide*, by Matthew Griffin, stood out among the more than 50 submissions.

"The others were excellent, but *Hide* was unlike anything I'd ever read," says

judge Tom Franklin, a novelist and professor in the University of Mississippi MFA program. "The language was gorgeous and lyrical without ever sounding written, without losing its first-person voice. Where a lot of other writers might've veered toward sentimentalism, this one never did, not once."

Although Griffin is now based in Louisiana, his parents live in Greensboro, meaning that he'll be able to take advantage of another of the prize's perks whenever he finds himself back in his home state: Each time he visits Crook's Corner this year, he'll be treated to a free glass of wine. **Os**

Quinn Dalton is the author of six novels and story collections.