

# Cthe Crunkleton



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*The 50 Best Southern Bars*

BY DANIEL WALLACE



## The Crunkleton

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

by DANIEL WALLACE



**A good bar feels like a secret only you know.**

It doesn't matter what kind of bar it is or how crowded it gets on Friday night, this is your place; nobody knows it, or loves it, like you.

The Crunkleton is the best secret I have. The building is longer than it is wide, with crossbeams spanning the length of the twelve-foot-high ceiling. While here you feel ensconced in the belly of a whale. The furniture is mission style from the early twentieth century, but it's sparse: There are more bar stools than tables and chairs, and the bar stools go fast. Still, you don't stand at the Crunkleton so much as congregate, which means that—as a group of you gather around a seated friend—you become a congregation. Amen to that.

If I were making up a bar for a book I was writing, I would call it the Crunkleton, because it's a very cool name for a bar that doesn't exist. But Gary Crunkleton—yes, Crunkleton's the name—is real. He built the bar four years ago, designed every detail himself. It's like a dream he made, from the hand-hammered copper door handles to the huge bay window up front that frames Franklin Street, a French restaurant, and a massage parlor.

But Gary Crunkleton provides more than just the name: He's the personality. He's the talent. He makes drinks I've never had or heard of before; already he's famous for his Sazerac. On the wall behind the bar are hundreds of beautiful bottles: well over a hundred kinds of Scotch and whiskey, and at least two of everything else. But more than the river of spirits on the wall, it's this place I love, this space. Sometimes we forget that the best bars are no more about drinking than a bed is about sleeping. They're about both whom you're with when you're in them, and how good you feel when you're there.