

Southern Vermont's Culinary World Is...Fresh & Local



Festival and Vermont Life Wine & Harvest Festival and the myriad Pumpkin festivals...it seems that almost every vegetable has a festival! It's also about our proximity to 80 million people who live within a 500-mile radius of Southern Vermont — New York City, Fairfield County, The Gold Coast, Boston, and Albany.

In many ways, Vermont's historic villages and rural communities echo what people love most about the European countryside — it is a warm, rustic yet sophisticated lifestyle based on old family traditions and great places to find local and authentic food experiences. In fact Vermont is a fusion of flavors. Much of it is pure tradition, steeped in the comforting home baked aromas of Yankee farm kitchens and church suppers. But, it's not all milk and cream. It's not all maple sugar, and not all ham and beans, either. It's a taste of real food that is grown, produced and cooked by people who — no surprise here — love to “eat in”... Eat in ...Southern Vermont, that is.

A culinary tour of Dover, Vermont, home of Mount Snow Ski Resort, offers a taste of real food that is grown, produced and prepared by chefs who love the land and have a passion for the “Good Life.”



Chef Brill Williams, proprietor at the Inn at Sawmill Farm on Crosstown Road in West Dover Village has enjoyed a lifelong romance with fresh ingredients, fine wines and intriguing menus during his 40 years at his family's renowned inn. (The Inn is quite famous in fact—Oprah's Book Club met there!)

Guests at the Inn delight in finding that the dishes and desserts in Chef Brill's repertoire include recipes handed down to him from his grandmother and mother — both of whom had a hand in shaping his culinary talent. What would an afternoon luncheon be, after all, without a slice of traditional coconut layer cake with hand-grated, snow-white flakes so refreshing on the palate? Or a serving of homemade ice cream made from fresh Vermont cream topped with the Chef's signature Chocolate Butternut Sauce? Worth noting, Chef Brill sells jars of this creamy sugary darkness in the Inn's lobby.

Chef Brill trusts that his patrons come with well-bred taste buds and artfully treats his guests to remarkable combinations. A Squab entrée, for example, is served with two harmonizing preparations side-by-side on the same plate. The legs of these fresh (never frozen) poultry are first marinated, and then grilled, while the succulent breast meat is sautéed with his foie gras and tender apple slices. Even with a seemingly simple summer appetizer, he does more than most: he pairs Scottish Smoked Salmon with American Spoonbill Caviar and serves it with his fresh-baked Onion Brioche and a Quail Egg.



One of the Inn's most notable gastronomic events is the one patrons create themselves by arranging in advance with Chef Brill for a dinner and wine list tailored to the preferences of the guests. Imagine how mouthwatering this is: all your favorite foods on a six-course tasting menu with wine selections specifically paired to enhance each plate.

Chef Brill's local organic fruit and vegetable vendors include the best nearby farm stands and his guests always enjoy his selections of Vermont artisanal cheeses. Whatever specialty foods Chef Brill cannot buy from local growers and producers, such as fresh-caught Maine seafood, are flown in to him daily. The Inn's multiple wine cellars are exceptionally well inventoried by Chef Brill. The dining room and tavern at the Inn at Sawmill Farm, rooms that were formerly a working Vermont barn, are open to the public.

Chef Josh Tomson at The Hermitage on Handle Road in West Dover, just minutes from the Village center, has something that chefs elsewhere can only dream of: a huge vegetable and herb garden just steps away from his kitchen door. Tilled and planted in the spring, the plot provides him with the fresh ingredients that shape his menus. What a luxury: organic food that goes from garden to table with no one but himself as the middleman. Even Alice Waters, California's Chez Panisse goddess of fresh food, would be impressed.

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When guests meet Chef Josh (and they certainly will, if they are regulars at The Hermitage), he shares the secret of his straightforward culinary mantra: ingredients should be fresh, local, and seasonal. His inspired menu combinations are new favorites, such as his paring of pan-seared Wild Salmon with an Apple, Celery and Fennel slaw. Must try: Chef Josh's Guacamole Martini. No, not to sip, but to nibble on; it is one of his sensational appetizers. The dining room and tavern at The Hermitage, an historic homestead, are open to the public.

Chef Bob Jarvis at the West Dover Inn & Restaurant on Route 100 in West Dover Village creates menus that offer his diners the best of both culinary worlds. Guests can count on him to always have their stand-by favorites on the menu, such as his creamy Tomato and Artichoke Soup with aged Asiago Cheese and peppery Basil Chiffonade or his grilled-to-perfection certified Black Angus burgers. However, his menus always have seasonal inspirations as well. Come summer, many hungry patrons swap out the beef and bun for Chef Bob's open-faced grilled sandwiches made with Artisanal Breads, Portabella Mushrooms and Roasted Peppers.

Chef Bob does not have to go far to "shop" for his fresh ingredients. Kathy Gilpin, co-owner of the property with her husband Phil Gilpin, is an avid organic gardener. Based on Chef Bob's ideas for the summer menu, this year's plot, which is literally in the Inn's backyard, includes an abundance of herbs along with multiple varieties of tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers and squash.

Summer guests often head around the back of the historic building to look for a seat at one of the restaurant's umbrella-tables. The patio is near one of the property's picturesque and prolific apple trees—another one of Chef Bob's "secret" sources. Come late summer and fall, he harvests bushels of ripe apples for his fresh-baked desserts, including cobblers, crisps and of course, pies. In strawberry season, local growers bring him fresh berries, which he uses in his Strawberry Peach Pudding Cake or serves as a topping for morning pancakes. The dining room and tavern at The West Dover Inn and Restaurant, originally established as a mid-19th century stagecoach stop, are open to the public.

By **Lynn Barrett**

Date: 2010-01-25

Article link:

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