
FISH & GAME
MMXIII - MMXIV

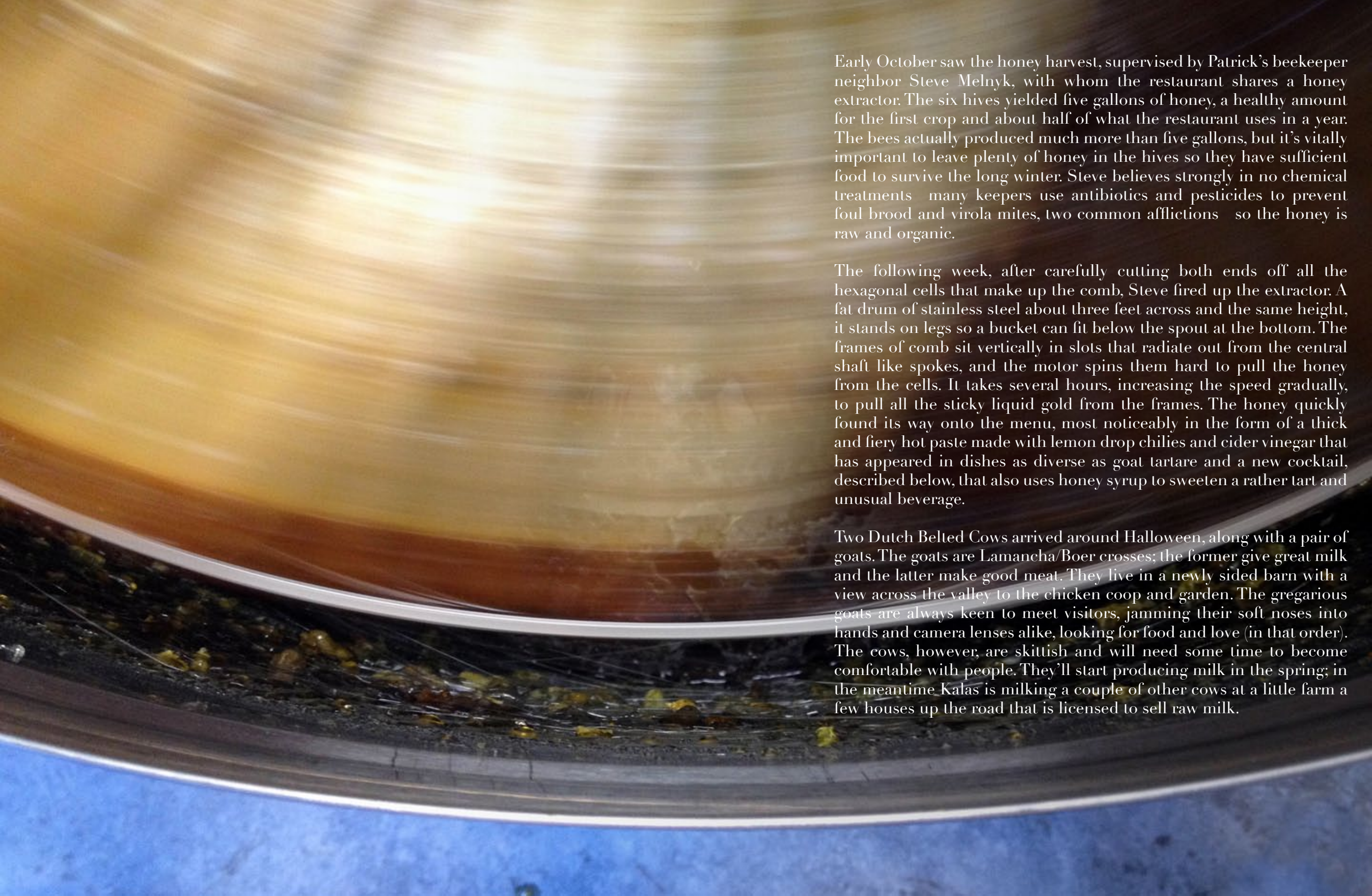
FALL
YEAR TWO



FALL

The Northeastern United States hosts the best autumn on the planet. After Labor Day, summer's languid finale quickens and sharpens, becoming drier and leaner, ushering in seemingly identical days of resplendent clarity. This creates an illusion of timelessness: nature stuck on repeat, offering up day after day of cool, clean brilliance. Tired of summer's sticky heat, we're grateful to add another layer and light fires to push away the evening chill when we sit outside. The food, marrying the bounty of summer's end with the lower temperatures that inspire heartier fare, reaches a pinnacle. Fall is the most culinarily powerful season, with ubiquitous harvest imagery and the only holiday specifically devoted to a meal.





Early October saw the honey harvest, supervised by Patrick's beekeeper neighbor Steve Melnyk, with whom the restaurant shares a honey extractor. The six hives yielded five gallons of honey, a healthy amount for the first crop and about half of what the restaurant uses in a year. The bees actually produced much more than five gallons, but it's vitally important to leave plenty of honey in the hives so they have sufficient food to survive the long winter. Steve believes strongly in no chemical treatments — many keepers use antibiotics and pesticides to prevent foul brood and virolo mites, two common afflictions — so the honey is raw and organic.

The following week, after carefully cutting both ends off all the hexagonal cells that make up the comb, Steve fired up the extractor. A fat drum of stainless steel about three feet across and the same height, it stands on legs so a bucket can fit below the spout at the bottom. The frames of comb sit vertically in slots that radiate out from the central shaft like spokes, and the motor spins them hard to pull the honey from the cells. It takes several hours, increasing the speed gradually, to pull all the sticky liquid gold from the frames. The honey quickly found its way onto the menu, most noticeably in the form of a thick and fiery hot paste made with lemon drop chilies and cider vinegar that has appeared in dishes as diverse as goat tartare and a new cocktail, described below, that also uses honey syrup to sweeten a rather tart and unusual beverage.

Two Dutch Belted Cows arrived around Halloween, along with a pair of goats. The goats are Lamancha/Boer crosses; the former give great milk and the latter make good meat. They live in a newly sided barn with a view across the valley to the chicken coop and garden. The gregarious goats are always keen to meet visitors, jamming their soft noses into hands and camera lenses alike, looking for food and love (in that order). The cows, however, are skittish and will need some time to become comfortable with people. They'll start producing milk in the spring; in the meantime Kafas is milking a couple of other cows at a little farm a few houses up the road that is licensed to sell raw milk.



Zak and Jori hosted a garlic planting party in November at Blue Heron Farm (their place) so the whole crew gathered on an auspiciously gorgeous day to stick a few thousand cloves of garlic into the ground; Kalas had tilled long beds near their garden, which quickly got filled with orderly rows of Red Chesnok, Red Inchelium, and Georgia Fire cloves. The ultimate goal is to produce 500 pounds of garlic for the restaurant plus enough extra to plant for the following year. This year's planting, about 75 pounds, should approach that amount. A jeroboam of Frank Cornelissen's excellent Contadino made the rounds and kept everyone fuelled. The planting finished just as the sun dropped behind the ridge, which subtracted about twenty degrees from what had been a balmy afternoon. The group quickly repaired to Zak and Jori's house and built a big fire in the bespoke steel firepit/grill that saw its first deployment at the Play With Fire event in August.

Thanksgiving brought 50 or so people to the restaurant for a traditional dinner: spit-roasted turkeys, stuffing made with Walter's bread, cranberry sauce, brussels sprouts with lardo, potato purée, and gravy. As a homey respite from the regular set menu format, guests could ask for seconds of anything they wanted more of. Then came Jori's pies: pumpkin (actually made with red hubbard squash, plus her ginger bitters) and pecan, courtesy of a care package from her mother in Texas. Home cooks take note: even professionals suffer holiday stress in the kitchen. The dough for the rooster confit tortellini (an appetizer) was dried out, necessitating another batch on short notice; Zak was folding and pinching the pasta right up until the first customers arrived. Then the rotisserie broke. Though the staff had to scramble, the guests never noticed. Service!

Autumn has a uniquely powerful identity. But like its opposite, spring, it also begins as one season and ends as another. This fall began with an exceptionally long run of glorious weather: bright sun, unusual warmth, and cerulean skies that set off the blazing foliage to great effect. Then there was a blizzard before Thanksgiving, and several more storms followed shortly after. Come December, the leaves are gone, the ground is frozen, and fresh vegetables are limited to sprouts and a few hardy greenhouse crops. It's fully dark before 5:00. Now the pantry raid begins, as the kitchen works its way through Jori's vast arsenal of preserves, pickles, and condiments. Now begins the time of slower, more comforting food—food containing all the enhanced tastes that those ancient processes impart—prepared, and, ideally, eaten a bit more deliberately.







FARMER GROUND

TRUMANSBURG, NY

Walter's extraordinary gifts as a baker make Fish & Game's bread program a highlight of the dining experience, both in the bread basket and featured in various courses during the meal. It should come as no surprise, then, that the flours he uses are grown and milled by passionate New Yorkers in ways that benefit the land and the people who live on it in equal measure. Farmer Ground, based just outside Ithaca, is a collaborative partnership with two sides: a grain-growing operation, focused on producing ripe, organic, high-protein grains ideal for baking, and a milling plant designed to grind these carefully grown grains into flours well-suited for a variety of culinary applications.

Thor Oeschner (pronounced "Tor") is the farmer in Farmer Ground. Besides the 1200 acres he either owns or leases, he contracts with other farmers to grow various grains to his specifications. Many of these farmers, like Oeschner himself, got into grain by growing animal feed. Grain for human consumption, however, especially flour, demands much higher standards of ripeness, moisture levels, and protein content. Bread flour needs gluten, that much-maligned (mostly spuriously) protein, for its elasticity and rising power. Farmer Ground pays a premium for high-protein grain. Sprouting

degrades baking quality, so wheat must be harvested at about 16 percent water and quickly dried down for storage to ensure peak performance. It's a steep learning curve: "While we're figuring out what conditions make for good food-quality grains, they're figuring out their businesses, how to harvest and dry grain quickly. Wheat is not as easy as corn, which dries fast."

Oeschner's farm, about fifteen minutes from the mill over some damn scenic roads, houses the cleaning and drying machines that process the grain for storage and eventual grinding. The principle, the same since agriculture was invented, is simple: clean off any dirt and detritus (careful work with the combine does a good job threshing away the chaff) and then dry the grain so it's shelf stable and won't sprout or grow mold during storage. They still use a cleaner built in 1910, which does a handsome job, especially since diligent harvesting makes for pretty clean grain to begin with, and the basic technology hasn't changed much: a series of screens, from coarser to finer, and a fan to blow lighter matter away. All the chaff, and the hulls from the mill, are sold as animal feed. There's no waste.



After cleaning, the grain travels through a slanted cylinder of two concentric spinning screens that separate out hulls and weed seeds. From there, it's a short trip to the dryer. Drying temperature varies according to each type of grain, and precise control is crucial; buckwheat must be dried below 100° or the groat (seed) darkens and the germ is damaged. Grain saved as seed for the next crop must be dried even more gently. Buckwheat, by the way, is not related to wheat; it's actually a broad-leaf plant that produces a high-protein groat with plenty of flavor but no gluten. The grains, which look like fat black little tetrahedra out of the combine, reveal plump beige groats once hulled. A lot of buckwheat flour's dark color comes from the hull; how much is left in the grind influences the shade, from dark grey to pale dun, in the finished product.

Greg Mol has years of experience as a farmer, including significant time spent at Roxbury Farm in Kinderhook, before moving to the Finger Lakes. He runs the milling half of the business, and it's



a handful. Managing the grain orders requires planning two years in advance: “We’re planting now [October] for harvest next August, which has to last until following August when we grind it.” This long lead time can be an impediment to growth; initially they didn’t contract for enough grain and couldn’t meet the demand. Lining up supply has been the main challenge so far, since there’s not a lot of high protein grain being grown organically in the region. The increasing number of small distilleries also compete for grain, and they can pay more for lower quality. After supply, the main limit is milling capacity; they have more or less hit the ceiling on quantity without an equipment upgrade.

The mill is housed in an anonymous beige metal-sided building with a cluster of shiny silos at one end and surrounded on three sides by fields. When the machines are running, on three floors that open onto the warehouse space, it’s good and loud inside, full of ducts and chutes and shuddering hoppers of grain slowly emptying into hungry milling machines. Dust collectors, like you would see in a woodworker’s shop, keep the air largely free of flying flour, but a film of it still coats every surface. Leading to the bulging canvas bags of one such unit, two lengths of flexible duct are spliced together with heavy wire and a worn piece of old denim cut from a pair of jeans.

Farmer Ground’s mill grinds between a quarter and a half ton of grain per hour, which sounds like a lot until Mol explains that the next larger size mill in the region grinds 4-5 tons per hour, which is still very small in today’s world of industrially grown and processed commodity crops. Above that loom facilities that grind ten tons an hour, 24 hours a day. That’s a tractor-trailer every couple of hours. And there are bigger facilities out in the Midwest. Much bigger. To illustrate the scale of the operation, Bread Alone, a Hudson Valley-based organic bakery, uses a trailer full of flour every week or two. At its current capacity, Farmer Ground could just about supply them, using their entire output, leaving nothing for anyone else.

Their product line includes cornmeal, buckwheat, all purpose, white, whole wheat, half white, and both white and whole wheat pastry flour. The half white ground with the germ intact, thus possessing an appetizing buff color is most interesting, with the flavor and nutrition of whole wheat but the versatility and rise of white. The half white forms the basis for Walter’s sourdough starter and many of his loaves and rolls. It’s also easier for the mill to produce: everybody wins!



Farmer Ground has no trucks of its own. Their not-so-secret weapon, Mol says, without which they may never have gotten off the ground, is Regional Access, a homegrown business specializing in organic products from the Finger Lakes, headquartered only five miles down the road and distributing throughout New York State. “It’s tough to say if this ever would have worked without them. Now we’re big part of their lineup.”

After mentioning plans to install solar panels on the roof, Mol describes their ideal goal as finding a sweet spot where they’re small-scale enough to ensure artisanal quality, but large enough to remain viable in a world dominated by giants. Oeschner too finds himself motivated by more than simple numerical measurements of quantity and quality. Enlisting his fellow farmers to grow organic grain and seeing that they’re paid a fair price for it drives him as much as the ongoing challenge of producing the best grain possible: “If I can make a living, and help others to do the same, then I’ve done my job.”

BREAD & PASTRY

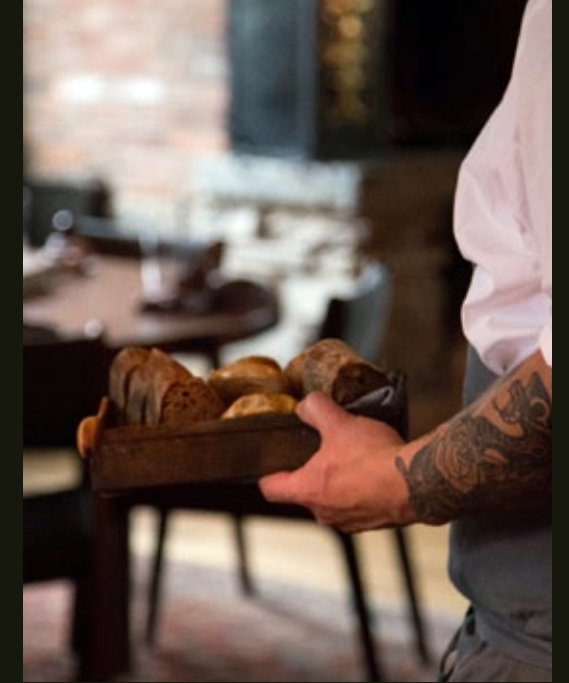


BREAD

The key to baking excellent bread, Walter stresses, is using your senses and staying aware of the ways in which seasonal changes in temperature and humidity affect the outcome. He is always tweaking his recipes to compensate for these variations, and you should too as you develop your own style of baking (and learn the quirks of your oven, and the flours you use, and the feeding schedule that works best for your starter). When working, Walter touches the dough constantly, feeling its texture and elasticity. There's a lot of muscle and sense memory involved in making great bread, and it can't be taught; it must be learned through attentive and regular baking.

Pain au levain is the classic French peasant sourdough. Walter's version possesses all of the chewy, complex, and deeply satisfying character that the loaf is prized for—an addictive reminder that bread and water are in fact sufficient to sustain life for a long time. Schmear on some butter (and swap in a glass of wine for the water) and it's a complete meal. *Levain*, the French word for sourdough starter, derives from the Latin *levare*, to raise, and is the origin of the English word leaven. (Also lever, as in Archimedes' "Give me a lever and a place to stand, and I shall move the earth." Think of your wild yeast pets as millions of tiny levers, raising your loaf together like an Amish barn).

This recipe makes ten pounds of dough, enough for five two-pound loaves. Scale up or down as needed, and remember that all flours and microclimates are not created equal. When making the dough, it's better to err on the side of dryness; it's always easy to add water at the end, but not flour, which can form dry pockets in the dough.





PAIN AU LEVAIN

4.25 LB. HALF WHITE FLOUR

.5 LB. WHOLE WHEAT FLOUR

.25 LB. RYE FLOUR (FOR FLAVOR, BUT ALSO GREAT STARTER FOOD)

4 LBS. WATER (½ GALLON)

1 LB. STARTER (15%-20% RATIO DEPENDING ON SEASON; MORE IN WINTER)

2 OZ. SALT

Mix the flours and water together in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook and turn it on low for about 5 minutes. Let it sit about 30-40 minutes to hydrate, then mix in the starter and let it sit another 30-40 minutes for the “autolyse,” which develops gluten, before adding the salt and mixing it in well.

After salting, ferment the dough in the refrigerator overnight (12-14 hours). Remove the dough, divide and shape, then proof it at room temperature for 2-3 hours before baking.

Preheat oven to 500° an hour before baking. Score the loaves, then bake for 30-35 minutes, lowering heat to 475° after 20 minutes.

Starting a Starter

Combine equal weights (start with 4-6 oz. of each) of flour and unchlorinated water in a bowl, and mix them together thoroughly. If you have an unsprayed apple from a local orchard, add the peel (that pale haze you buff off onto your shirt is wild yeast). Leave it out on your counter, uncovered, and every day add

another couple of ounces each of fresh flour/water mixture, stirring well. (You can remove the apple peel after the first day.) Within 5-7 days, give or take your microclimate and other variables, the mixture should begin to bubble gently and smell appealingly fruity and yeasty. It should not smell like cheese, or feet; if it does you might want to chuck it and start over from the beginning.

Once established, feed your starter a little 50/50 mix every day to keep it happy. If you miss a few days, no worries; be sure to feed it the day before you want to bake and then again the next morning to bring it back to vitality. If, as a result of regular feeding and infrequent baking, you end up with a ton of it, fear not: it makes great pancake batter. It's also a good idea to give excess starter to all your baking friends; besides confirming their assessments of your kindness and generosity, it's also excellent insurance against killing your batch if you're away for an extended time.





PASTRY

Farmer Ground's high protein flour is designed for sturdy peasant loaves like the *pain au levain*. Making airy, tender laminated doughs with it, therefore, requires advanced baking chops, a light touch, and plenty of time. Walter's croissants and Danish, which he's been making on Saturday mornings for sale at Rubiner's in Great Barrington, have all the qualities that the great flour imparts, but conveyed within a flaky matrix of buttery decadence. The trick is to let the dough rest for significant periods at several stages of the process.

This dough is essentially brioche which is then layered with butter and folded to create many thin layers of dough separated by equally thin layers of butter. The yeast in the dough produces carbon dioxide, creating bubbles of gas that make the dough rise, and the water emulsified inside the butter boils, creating steam, which causes the thin layers of flour to expand away from each other.

DOUGH

2 LBS. AP FLOUR
12 OZ. MILK
5 OZ. EGGS
5.5 OZ. SUGAR
1 OZ. SALT
1/2 OZ. YEAST
1 1/4 OZ. BUTTER
22 OZ. SPONGE

SPONGE

13.5 OZ. AP FLOUR
8.5 OZ. UNCHLORINATED WATER
1/16 OZ. YEAST

Dissolve yeast in water, then mix flour in well. Leave out at room temperature, covered, overnight.

Combine all dry ingredients except the salt, and whisk all wet ingredients except the butter together. Add wet to dry and mix well, then add salt and butter and mix again. Turn dough out onto lightly floured work surface and pat it firmly into a rectangle about 1 1/2" thick. Wrap tightly and refrigerate overnight.

LAMINATION

22 OZ. COLD BUTTER

For lamination, the butter's temperature is crucial; it needs to be the consistency of modeling clay. If it's too cold, it will puncture the dough. If it's too warm, it will be an ungovernable disaster. Dough and butter should both be 60°. If you feel any hard

lumps, use your hand to warm the spot with a bit of pressure, smoothing it out.

Between two sheets of parchment, roll butter out into a rectangle the same size as the dough. Place dough on floured surface, put sheet of butter on top, and fold the rectangle in thirds along the short axis like a letter. Roll it back out to the original size and return it to the fridge.

Rest it in the fridge for 30-60 minutes between foldings; too long and it will get too stiff to roll out smoothly and need to sit at room temp for a bit.

Bring it out and fold it two more times, but these folds should be double: again folding along the short axis, fold the top and bottom quarters toward the center so they meet in the middle. Roll the slab back to the original size after each folding, then wrap and refrigerate overnight.

To shape the Danish, roll the dough out into a sheet between 1/8" and 1/4". Cut it into 3" squares and fold the corners in towards the center so you end up with an octagon. For extra credit, and to really let the dough attain maximum coherence, cover the shaped pastries and rest them overnight in the fridge one more time.

Fill the little wells in the center with the fruit, jam, or cheese of your choice, brush the top of the dough with an egg wash, and bake in a preheated oven for 5 minutes at 400°. rotate the baking sheet and lower the heat to 375° for about 10 more minutes. This recipe yields about one dozen 3" x 3" squares.



LITTLE MISS MUFFET

This complex drink began with a simple error. Madison came in early one day, by mistake; she thought she had a meeting. Zak mentioned an idea about combining husk cherries and mezcal. They got to work.

The initial combination needed more body and acidity, so they added ricotta whey from the kitchen; Jori had preserved fennel in it, so that herbal anise note lurked around the edges of the sour, cloudy liquid. To make it a bit thicker, they blended some of the poached fennel into the whey and added a dab of the viscous (and vicious) lemon drop chili purée made with some of the newly harvested honey. (Not realizing that the chilies in question pack serious heat, Madison, upon first seeing the jar enticingly labeled “Lemon Drop,” took a big swipe on her finger and tasted it. Hilarious discomfort ensued.) The drink took shape over a couple of weeks: that first session with Zak, then the following week with Jori, and then final refinements a few days later.

The problem with using the preserved fennel whey was that opening a jar meant the fennel also had to get used somehow, and Kevin didn’t want to run fennel for the whole time the drink was on the menu. To solve this, they began blending fennel fronds in with fresh ricotta whey to achieve the same flavor. As the season progressed, the husk cherries ripened and lost the slightly green, vegetal taste they had at the drink’s inception. To compensate for the fruit’s uncomplicated and slightly flabby sweetness, they added a little bit of tomatillo—a close relative, but avowedly savory—to bring back that tight delineation of flavor. (Husk cherries, also known as ground cherries, are actually nightshades like tomatoes and peppers).

While the ingredient list is mostly different, this drink has much in common with Where There’s Smoke There’s



Fire (featured in last year's winter newsletter). Besides the smoky mezcal (and it's the same one) there's a savory, saline profile with a sharp chili edge that hones one's appetite in an unexpected fashion. This is the green curry to that other cocktail's red, the starboard to its port: a fascinating manifestation of the fundamental flavors that undergird a menu asserting themselves quite handsomely in a glass.

LITTLE MISS MUFFET

1 DAB LEMON DROP CHILI/HONEY PURÉE
(JUST DIP THE END OF A BAR SPOON TO
PICK UP A BIT)

1 BAR SPOON HONEY SYRUP (1:1 HONEY
AND WATER)

3/4 OZ FENNEL WHEY

1 OZ HUSK CHERRY JUICE

1.5 OZ VIDA MEZCAL

2 DASHES FENNEL BITTERS

Combine all and stir with ice. Strain into a rocks glass with a 2x2" ice cube and garnish the top of the cube with fresh calendula petals.

Lemon drop chili paste is easily made by stemming, seeding, and weighing a quantity of chilies. Steam them for half an hour at 212°, then purée in blender with proportionate weights of the other ingredients, using the ratio of 32 oz chilies : 8 oz honey : 16 oz cider vinegar : 1 tablespoon salt. Put in jars and freeze.

Jori's fennel bitters are available from Lady Jayne's Alchemy, www.ladyjaynesalchemy.com



PLUM TART

ZAK DOES NOT LOVE SWEETS. In fact, the entirety of the dessert chapter in his cookbook consists of one sentence: “Eat fresh fruit!” He prefers to have the savory flavors of the meal crossfade with sweeter ones towards the end of the menu, but not disappear. More often than not, the pre-dessert will veer towards the sweet end of the spectrum and the finale will dwell in that half-sweet realm as well, never crossing fully over the line.

Ice creams are probably the most purely sweet desserts, but they will often be made with savory flavors like angelica or chicory. Vegetables appear frequently in desserts (carrot cake, zucchini bread, beet chips) and when chocolate makes its occasional appearances it stays pretty bitter. Kevin and Walter both adore sweets, so they’re always trying to tilt the desserts in that direction. Zak tends to veto those moves, pulling them back towards flavors—earthy, bitter, sour—not traditionally associated with desserts, but which appropriately evoke Kevin’s resentment.

This plum tart begins with a buckwheat crust of Walter’s devising, which gets brushed with unsweetened dark chocolate and then filled with a mousse of egg whites and Jori’s plum jam. The jam uses an old Rus-

sian technique that involves macerating the halved fruit with sugar overnight, then bringing the mixture to a boil and cooling it, over and over for several days, to evaporate the liquid and condense the jam without giving it the cooked flavor that afflicts most fruit preserves. Offering a tangy counterpoint to the tart, a quenelle of fresh ricotta, enlivened with mostarda syrup, a blend of various jars from last year: meyer lemon, tangerine, clementine, strained and reduced to a caramel. (Jori isn’t making the citrus mostardas any more, since the fruit is rather non-local and she has enough on her plate as far as preserving is concerned.)

The dish contains creamy dairy, velvety mousse, crunchy crust, candied citrus, and chocolate, but all those traditional dessert flavors and textures have been subverted, gently and expertly, by reducing the amount of sugar they would normally be prepared with. While outwardly the dish looks every bit a sticky confection, the crust is savory, the chocolate is bitter, and the filling is barely sweet. The ricotta, enhanced with the mostarda syrup, is downright sour. Sounds dreamy, right? But the thing to keep in mind is how carefully modulated these flavors are, and how vibrant and focused the resulting harmonies—dissonant, sometimes, but compelling and beautiful, like Monk—become as they combine and overlap as they’re eaten. And the grains, the cream, the eggs, and the fruit are the best the region has to offer. Every course should celebrate the product above all.

Sugar is the most ubiquitous of culinary crutches. It’s

in mayonnaise, for crying out loud. If there’s one thing that so-called Modernist Cuisine has taught us, it’s that sweet and savory are artificial distinctions: burger with ketchup and a milkshake, anyone? Fish & Game’s desserts (and they’re usually not this austere) embody the notion that concluding courses should be seen as belonging to the meal, helping describe its trajectory, rather than standing apart from it.

BUCKWHEAT CRUST

1 CUP BUCKWHEAT FLOUR

3/4 CUP AP FLOUR

1/2 TEASPOON SALT

4 OZ BUTTER, VERY COLD

2 TEASPOONS CIDER VINEGAR

2-3 TABLESPOONS WATER, VERY COLD

Combine all dry ingredients and the butter; pulse in food processor until butter is about pea-sized. Add wet ingredients and pulse until sandy. Let the dough rest, tightly wrapped, overnight; buckwheat has no gluten, but when fully hydrated it forms a gel that helps hold the dough together. Roll out to about 1/8” thick, cut to desired shape, and push into greased tins with flared sides for easy removal. Blind bake for about 12 min at 350° with weights, then remove.

PLUM TART FILLING

4 EGG WHITES, WHIPPED TO SOFT PEAKS WITH A TEASPOON OF CREAM OF TARTAR

2 LEAVES SILVER GELATIN, BLOOMED IN COLD WATER

2 CUPS JORI'S PLUM JAM, BLENDED SMOOTH

Heat one cup of the jam and dissolve the gelatin in it. Add the other cup of jam, then fold into the egg whites and refrigerate for a few hours.

Brush the cooled shells with melted unsweetened dark chocolate, then pipe in plum mousse and top with a few slivers of mostarda. Serve a quenelle of ricotta alongside and garnish with a sprig of chervil.



GLUTEN

Celiac Disease, a serious and painful intolerance to gluten, is a real and debilitating ailment that affects about one percent of the population: roughly the same percentage of people who stutter. That should provide a good idea of how common it is. The gluten-free diet, however another in the seemingly endless series of elimination diets (remember fat in the 1980s?) represents widespread and unfounded bandwagon-jumping by an awful lot of people, many of whose issues with food are psychological rather than physiological. Celebrities, quacks, and snake-oil salesmen are all getting rich. Nobody is getting healthier.

Fish & Game's breads, made from whole organic grains fermented slowly, are precisely the sort of bread we should all be eating. More specifically, they are the sort of breads our ancestors ate before commercial yeast, white flour, synthetic pesticides and herbicides, chemical additives, and genetically modified grains transformed bread into the appalling simulacrum of food that most people eat today. The domestication of grains made civilization possible, and their fermentation created leavened bread. (And beer and whiskey for those of you keeping score at home). Microbial metabolism makes grains more nutritious, and easier to digest; this is why traditional cuisines around the world include some form of fermented grain (and legume) as a staple. If you want to eliminate something from your diet, start with industrial foods and see how that treats you before you grab hold of the fad du jour.



And don't mind the blood. I'm just using it to thicken your beet soup.

EATING THROUGH IT

ENTRY #3

I've been thinking about working on a new board game (it's an old-timey way of playing with your friends) called "My Unique Diagnosis for your Unique Ailment" (UDUA)¹. This is inspired by the incessant reminders, courtesy of the opportunistic and pompously titled professionals, that we are sick. Sick & Special: yes, my entitled little millennials. Not to worry, though, as throughout the first world we have the technology to cure your chronic illness for the *rest of your life*. For a price, of course. And, perhaps, at the risk of some side effects, for which there is also a cure.

We are already in a galaxy far, far away. Where the distinction between physical and backlit screen realities has blurred and it's imperative that I/we stay busy (read: distracted) or we'll be consumed with an *ennui* that triggers my brassica allergy, causing IBS. But I know, as I neurotically fidget with my smart phone that when dormant is simply a useless, rectangular appendage (which, regardless of its ineffectuality I still rub anticipating genie-like qualities). Anyhow, I know this could be simply resolved if someone would somehow get some fucking wifi up in this joint! Jesus!

So, then, the niche for the game being made uncomfortably clear, perhaps UDUA would start with one player drawing an Ailment card:

UA: I feel lethargic and my left leg is hurting.

Then, the other players — as qualified as anyone else on a WebMD forum — have to diagnose the ailment and prescribe a remedy:

¹ Both the full title of the game and UDUA are copyrighted and patent pending which I executed while writing this and simultaneously emailing with Legal Zoom.

UD: Clearly you need to cut out gluten and obviously you have the onset of gout from excessive wine and meat consumption. You should be taking multi-vitamins, only drink cranberry juice (Ocean Spray is readily available), take 20mgs of Wellbutrin every 4 hours and go to the gym 4 times a week. Eat only avocados, green vegetables, rice and fish. Butter is ok but limit your coffee intake. Beware of cream or whole milk.

Though perhaps entirely inaccurate, that sounds more realistic than the answer I would give. My diagnosis might be more like this:

UD: Have you gone outside or touched a human recently? Try having sex while balancing a fat, grilled slice of acorn fed pork fat on a piece of rye porridge bread. Keep moving and eating, but breathe easy because the more you tremble the more likely the fat will fall off. Don't drop the fat. And don't mind the blood. I'm just using it to thicken your beet soup. You'll be fine.

For years in my youth I thought masturbation, a great power we all share but which too often goes un-discussed, was enough to calm our collective neuroses. Clearly, I was too base and naive as a young man and I vastly underestimated the power of aggressively and deliberately disseminated, distributed, and displayed misinformation. I'm recalling Stripes at this moment: Bill Murray announcing "there is something wrong with us! Something very, very *wrong* with us!"

And no, it's not that we all decided to join the Army. It's something greater, far greater and it's an unhealthy and, let us assume for the sake of skirting an even



greater malaise, unintended symptom of unfettered access to so much goddamned information! Merriam-Webster's definition of "information" includes language about the "communication of knowledge"...also making an appearance more than once in this definition is the word "facts". Well here's a fact: I feel that most people have lost a connection to the earth and therefore to our bodies, which, I believe, slowly destroys self-confidence and awareness. Yup, it's a FACT that I think this. And it's now being disseminated throughout the grand disinformation dystopia. A virtual landscape where fact and fiction are bound by the glue of opinion, well informed or not.

I've spent much of my lifetime thinking about what I'm going to eat next. Below is a very rough timeline of the evolution of this exploration as I've aged and progressed as both an eater and as a chef:

What's Mom cooking and when is it going to be ready?--> What do I crave, based on Mom's repertoire?--> What other flavors are there out there? And of those, what do I crave?--> Back to Mom's home cooked meals--> Please, I'll eat anything: anything but the food in the school cafeteria!--> I can cook better food than the shit served at my college's dining hall--> Hmmm, some people can cook better than I can...--> Some countries have better food than America--> I am going to travel and eat--> I am going to learn to cook--> I am going to travel and eat--> I am going to continue to learn to cook--> WHERE do I want to eat?

I'll break from this rough timeline here, as this is a pleasurable yet poignant evolutionary pause. "Where do I want to eat?" is the point at which I find many of my peers now, whether culinary professionals or foodies with sharp and adventurous palettes. "Where do I want to eat" in this era of the restaurant boom is usually the second desire, other than for my most impetuous and wanton of colleagues, preceded by the first desire: "What *type* of food do I want to eat?"

And yet, for the most part, only those who live in something resembling a city are

really able to allow the *type* of food to inform their choices. I have made my home both in cities with the widest range of eateries and ethnicities, and in rural areas with almost no choice at all. For city folk, ethnicity is often the first question that comes to mind. For those who live elsewhere, the choice most often made is to cook at home, or knowingly risk your postprandial wellbeing for a simulacrum of what most people call a dumpling. It is dispiriting how often we'll delude ourselves, hoping against hope, merely to taste the "exotic."

Access to good food is better than ever. And yet, ironically, commensurate with this unprecedented access our supposed "sensitivities" to such foods have grown increasingly out of whack. The reasons are endless and the number of proposed solutions just as endless.² I had paused charting the evolution of thinking about what I am going to eat next. I had paused because I had found myself stuck in the "where in which restaurant and what type of food do I want to eat" phase of my evolution for some time. Many friends, people I know and respect, many smarter than I, are stuck there still.

I think of one of Modiano's characters, "bathed in that smile that is distant and dreamy, rather than jovial... Searching for settings made for enjoyment and ease but where one could never be happy again." Sentiments such as these seem appropriate for most of us who look to others for direction and assurance or the restaurant in heaven about what we should eat, what to wear and how we should look. I'd rather be a "blissful idiot." I see, however, a more common response, *the* human pathology to clutch at whatever or whoever will play the role of shepherd in a desperate attempt to avoid drowning in individuality or what I refer to as *aloneless*. Aloneless is our modern act of self-reliance. Not necessarily going into the woods to fend for yourself without any modern conveniences, but having the strength of character to make your own decisions, move against the flow and, simply, have an opinion.

2 And I feel lethargic and my left leg is hurting.

I've found it difficult watching some-not all-chefs become media super stars and, as a result, shepherds, specifically those who will whore out to whomever or whatever is paying top dollar. I can't blame them. They have families to care for and well, working as a chef is physically and mentally taxing, requires long hours, and will eventually drain even the strongest, most balanced and healthy individual.

But, after all, they're just chefs. Not the exponents of the kind of expert opinions to which I ever intended to hitch my wagon. They are certainly not to be taken as seriously as my life coach (who once worked as a line cook. But then decided he would try acting. But when that didn't work he went into fashion for a bit. But recently really, really got into these spin classes and now he understands how one can truly empower himself, *and* get six-pack abs, and he'll your measure your calories daily or, wait, a calorie is a unit of measurement already, isn't it? Anyhow, you really shouldn't eat that croissant).

A shepherd, other than one literally watching over the sheep, should invigorate the spirit of his followers so they no longer require sustenance or "maintenance of morale," as E.B. White called it, from external stimuli. Of course, this would put most shepherds out of a job, an action counterintuitive to one's survival instincts. Even the meekest of shepherds may have a hard time with that... unless he has a rent controlled apartment.

But I digress. I'm not interested in shepherds per se (other than that I hope that soon we'll be able to hire one at Fish & Game farm) but I *am* interested in how my question, and the answer, has evolved. How I am thinking about my next meal has evolved. In turn, if you are a customer of Fish & Game, how I think about yours has also evolved. Because I create the menus based on what I want to eat. And I'm thinking about what *I* should eat all the time.

But the question has changed from "what" to "where" to "how." How is this raised? How does it affect my surroundings? Living in the Hudson Valley, in the woods, amongst the trees, rotating through the seasons with the animals and with the plants has accelerated (or, perhaps presaging a bit of Kantian reasoning) *dovetailed with* my evolution. This is particularly true during the crisp and sunny late fall afternoons and the still and silent winter days when the distractions seem to die with the plant life and introspection takes a stronger hold.

What perhaps once was but has long since been lost may be coming around again. I'm talking about where I'm finding my place, alongside Kevin and Jori, in the role of chef as curator. We're the ones who ask *how*. We can't dig deep enough! A few other such chefs are earning the trust of the dining public. Those who work as curators of a balanced experience, who find and cook and serve the most well raised animals of

the finest breeds. Curators who seed and plant and also buy the healthiest vegetables grown in some of the best soil we've seen. Curators of an idea and an understanding of how our bodies respond to food, taking into account the temperature and the season. Evolving into this role has been a process of discovering what my body both needs and craves in step with what nature is offering (I'm still learning to keep time).

In becoming true curators and taking this role very seriously, we are seeking a unity between nature and culture in order to create a "moral whole," which Kant considered the end goal of reason. The idea is not strict, nor is it exclusive. In fact, to work and to be true, it must be inclusive and holistic: from animal to plant, from blood to water. And, for us, it must be delicious.³ This is becoming intuitive, but we're only at the beginning. Curator is a title not easily earned. But this *is* the next step. The next generation of great chefs will be guardians of the healthiest foods, understanding and sensitive to proper land stewardship. This commitment will hopefully inspire a widespread courage among diners to drop the absurd and undeserved taboos placed on simple, natural foods and give themselves up to a real experience. To learn how to eat again. To eat without it being too cerebral. To experience the emotion of pleasure evoked by food.

If there is a place for chef as a political figure, a leader or an advisor, this is how (s) he should use his power. The chef as curator simply provides what is truly good and available at that time and place because (s)he lives it, everyday. Because (s)he has done deep research (and only now, and still only the very few, can be relied upon to have done this research, and to call bullshit when necessary). It is political to promote what is good by growing it, cooking it and eating it. To properly curate for our customers and to build a new trust and relationship between customer and chef, a more personal relationship. To stop appropriating buzzwords which lose their meaning as soon as they are hashtagged and just pay more attention. This is the chef's skill best utilized: to intuit and then cook what is good for your gut based on constant contact with the product, the land, the farmers and the foragers.

Not every chef can do this, nor can every restaurant provide this service. It can only become instinctual through a direct and day-to-day relationship with nature. We should be eating it all, all that grows that is. But from where, at what time and in what ratio are only a few of the questions we have to ask ourselves? That is the purview of the curator. When you find one of these places a thoughtful, considered, curated restaurant you'll know it. And if you're listening to your body without distraction, you'll also know it is time to, as Herbie Hancock said, "hang up your hang ups," and just eat.

3 We might find ourselves in the midst of a philosophical dialectic when introducing deliciousness to the discussion; however, we'll leave that for another time.

FISH & GAME
FALL

YEAR TWO

FALL

FARMER GROUND

BREAD & PASTRY

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PLUM TART

PETER BARRETT

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**STEVE'S EXISTENTIAL
CRISIS CORNER**

I'm really intrigued: these disasters, these decisions that are wrong from the start, these dead ends that constitute the story of my life, are repeated over and over again. A passionate vocation for happiness, always betrayed and misdirected, ends in a need for total defeat; it is completely foreign to what, in my heart of hearts, I've always known could be mine if it weren't for this constant desire to fail. Who could understand it?

Alvaro Mutis.

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