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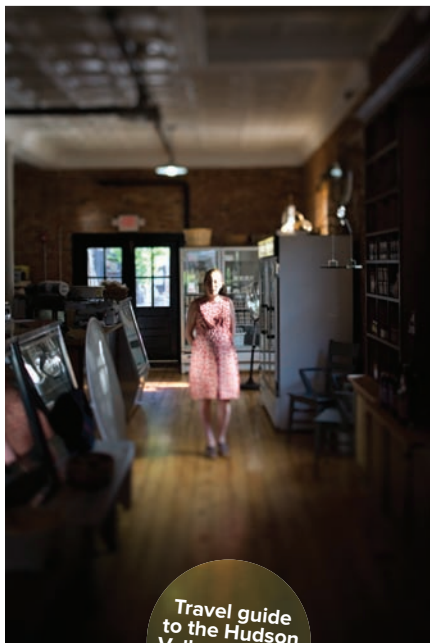
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Garden of Eating

The Hudson Valley is one of the preeminent food regions in the world

BY LIZ JOHNSON

PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEVEN VOTE



Travel guide to the Hudson Valley at arrive magazine.com

I pull up a wooden bar stool. We order a duck confit terrine with dried cherries, a watercress salad with a locally made artisanal blue cheese, grilled leeks with smoked tongue and local fingerling potato chips, and two delicious entrees: steak made from locally raised Angus beef and duck with the first-of-the-spring artichokes.

We drink a simple local red wine and finish with a plate of cheese.

This wasn't some fancy-pants Manhattan-chic restaurant. Nor was it a humble hillside café in Europe. I was eating at Swoon Kitchenbar, a neighborhood restaurant in the Hudson Valley of upstate New York.

The owners—Jeffrey Gimmel and Nina Bachinsky-Gimmel—make it a point to use local, seasonal ingredients. On the back of the menu you'll find the provenance of everything from the beef (North Wind Farm in Tivoli) to the flowers on the table (Artworks in Saugerties).

It's almost a given these days that chefs will cite their sources. But when chef Peter X. Kelly opened his first Hudson Valley restaurant in 1983, the only way he could get fresh local produce was to buy it out of the back of a farmer's station wagon.

"They used to drive down," he says. "They had apples, squashes, herbs. The fishermen used to bring me shad roe."

By cooking locally in season, Kelly—who now owns four restaurants—began to build his reputation as a Hudson Valley chef. He didn't know it at

the time, but he was quietly playing a role that would help give the region a new identity.

Today in the Hudson Valley, you'll find the most prestigious cooking school in the country; a culinary and agricultural policy center; nationally celebrated artisanal cheese makers and bread bakers; world-class distilleries and wineries; organic farms that supply produce and meat to the best restaurants in New York City; and some of the best chefs in America.

And, more and more, there are farmers markets, local wine shops and neighborhood places like Swoon bringing delicious food to everyone. Even early food pioneers are making changes to keep up with the new demand. The Hudson Valley is no longer a region known just for apples and antiques. It has become a culinary destination.

A Long Time Coming

It hasn't happened overnight. Farmers have been working the land since before the American Revolution. Chefs have been towing the natural-organic line since its nascent days in the hippie 1960s. In the '90s, boutique farms and food artisans started setting up shop.

But think of a thermometer, and put Manhattan at the bulb: The Hudson Valley food scene is reaching its boiling point. Some would say it's bubbling over.

"I'm so glad that it's finally percolated up," says Janet Crawshaw, the publisher of *The Valley Table*, a magazine that features the food, farms and restaurants



Opposite page:
Jessica Applestone
of Fleisher's Grass-Fed
and Organic Meats.
This page: Joshua
Applestone in their
modern country-
inspired store.

of the region. She and her partner, Jerry Novesky, started the magazine 10 years ago as a modest 32-page black-and-white quarterly. Now they publish five full-color issues a year, 96-plus pages each. “Over the past 10 years, we’ve seen [the region] grow and mature into a food destination,” she says.

Take the Hudson Valley Wine & Food Fest, for example. It was held in a field on a farm its first year (2001), and barely 2,000 people showed up, says Jennifer Cristaldi, an organizer. This year, the festival—Sept. 6 and 7—is taking over the 168-acre Dutchess County Fairgrounds and 12,000 people are expected

in Poughkeepsie. The food-obsessed tourist could organize a week’s worth of activities, from a cooking course at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park to a tour of the region’s farms, restaurants and shops.

Why not start with Fleisher’s?

The Ultimate Destination

Fleisher’s Grass-Fed and Organic Meats, a modern country butcher shop with outposts in Rhinebeck and Kingston, is like a microcosm of the Hudson Valley itself. Since it opened four years ago it has exploded in popularity because of its great-tasting, local food.



Left to right: John Novi, chef at Dupuy Canal House; Dupuy Canal House; Jeffrey Gimmel, Swoon Kitchenbar; fare at Swoon.

to attend. *Gourmet* magazine is a sponsor. The Hudson Valley Garlic Festival in Saugerties (Sept. 27 and 28), is expected to draw more than 50,000 people.

“The food aspect really has come of age,” says Cristaldi.

That sentiment is echoed throughout the valley—no matter what aspect of the food scene people are exploring. The casual gourmet might grab a picnic lunch from Mint, the eclectic gourmet shop in Tarrytown, and kick back on the grassy hills of Brotherhood Winery for a concert. The curious adventurer could spend the morning foraging for wild mushrooms in the forested parks of Westchester, and the afternoon learning to make cheese at Sprout Creek Farm

Joshua and Jessica Applestone—he a former vegan, she a former vegetarian—opened the Kingston shop because Jessica wanted to venture off her vegetarian diet, but the couple couldn’t find a way to buy raised-right meat without ordering a whole animal.

“Since we couldn’t find that, we figured there must be other people like me in the world,” she says.

Now they source pork, beef, lamb and poultry from “open pastures of small farms in New York,” including Sir William Farm in Craryville and Meiller Farm in Pine Plains, and sell it retail and to restaurants such as Mario Batali’s Casa Mono in Manhattan, and Dan Barber’s Blue Hill in Manhattan

The Tavern in Garrison.
Inset: Joe Seranto,
sous chef at Tavern in
Garrison.



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Left to right:
Chef Kenneth Breiman,
executive chef at X20 Xaviars;
appetizer of lobster crepe with
mascarpone and chives

and Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills.

"People come from all over because nobody does what we do," says Jessica. "Everything in our shop comes from no more than three hours away—cheese, eggs, milk, beef, lamb, pork. People who are trying to eat local, organic, sustainable—we are the ultimate destination."

Even four years ago, however, it was a struggle to explain the concept.

"We were ahead of our time," she says. "People were getting it, but they weren't getting it the way they get it now. [Author] Michael Pollan, the mad cow scares, [nutrition expert] Marion Nestle have made a real difference in the way people are thinking about their food."

When it comes to Hudson Valley food, there are heroes, too. Certainly the Manhattan chefs who have been shopping at the Union Square Greenmarket give Hudson Valley farmers a reason to stay small. Larry Forgione, a Culinary Institute of America graduate, sourced from the Hudson Valley much of his food for An American Place, a Manhattan restaurant that celebrated regional cooking. He even opened his own chicken farm in Warwick and is said to have coined the phrase "free range."

But John Novi may have planted the seed. When he opened his Dupuy Canal House in the late '60s he was turning to the seasonal food of the valley for his inspiration. In 1970, the late Craig Claiborne gave the restaurant four stars in *The New York Times*, calling it "one of the most interesting and best suburban restaurants in America."

Chef Waldy Malouf, who has been around the Hudson Valley food scene since he graduated from the Culinary Institute of America in 1975, followed Novi's lead. From 1982 to 1989, he was cooking with local products at La Cremaillere restaurant in rural northern



Westchester. In 1989, he became the chef at the Hudson River Club in lower Manhattan and insisted on using Hudson Valley meats and produce—a radical move at a time when people wanted their food to come via airplane from exotic locations so they could have raspberries in January.

In 1994, Malouf published *The Hudson River Valley Cookbook* with Molly Finn. Malouf thinks he and a few other chefs—like Forgione, Novi, Ric Orlando of New World Home Cooking in Saugerties, and Peter Kelly, whose newest restaurant is X20 Xaviars on the Hudson in Yonkers—helped to create a platform that has become a launching pad for high-quality restaurants.

"Now you'll see [the Hudson Valley] really become a world-class region," he says.

Moving On Up

World-class cooking is already easy to find. Manhattan chefs are moving up-river or opening second restaurants. Neil Ferguson of Allen & Delancey in Manhattan, a former Gordon Ramsay protégé, also brings his light touch with ingredients to Monteverde at Oldstone Manor



in Cortlandt Manor. Eric Gabrynowicz, a Hudson Valley native, recently moved from sous chef at Union Square Cafe in Manhattan to chef at Tavern in Garrison, where he serves gutsy comfort food. David Wurth, formerly chef de cuisine at Savoy, a farm-to-table pioneer in Manhattan, now cooks simple, rustic dishes at Local 111 in Philmont.

But perhaps the best-known chef—and an outspoken proponent of farm-to-fork eating—is Dan Barber, who with his brother and sister-in-law owns Blue Hill at Stone Barns. He gets many of his ingredients from Stone Barns Center for Food & Agriculture, and his deceptively simple cooking can both surprise you (e.g., radishes on a fence is a dish of just radishes and salt, served on double-pronged tines on a board) and make your heart skip a beat (e.g., a soft farm egg over delicate greens with pork belly).

Stone Barns Center is an organic farm and education center that celebrates local food and farms and teaches visitors the advantages of learning where your food comes from. Three stately stone barns—formerly the Rockefeller—

the restaurant. Both the provenance of the land and the talent of the chef have been drawing national attention since the center's opening in 2004. A trip to explore Stone Barns led *The Washington Post* to call the Hudson Valley “the salad bowl of New York.” And the restaurant and farm have been featured in every glossy food and lifestyle magazine, from *Martha Stewart Living* to *Town & Country*. Since then, Barber has become a hero to the locavore movement, sharing his knowledge through his pots and pans and his pen. (He writes on everything from how to cook cauliflower to op-ed pieces on the politics of food.)

“This region was carved out by farmers,” Barber says, “the open space preserved through animal husbandry and agriculture. Which means the places that have grown out of the landscape—farms, vineyards, restaurants—also support the landscape. Great gastronomy, entertainment and responsibility are all intertwined. What’s tastier than that?”

But the big and flashy institutions aren’t the only reason to celebrate the Hudson Valley as a food destination. Up and down the river, mom-and-pop cafés serve terrific local food, and my meal at Swoon could have been mistaken for a Michelin one-star in France. A bartender in a chambray shirt and red suspenders cheerfully served my meal, offering the same kind of laid-back and satisfying experience you might discover at a table for two in the window at Cafe Tamayo in Saugerties, or chatting with owner Michael Gross about dessert wines at Relish in Sparkill.

“I think it’s the number of choices we have now ... the number of restaurants and markets,” says Crawshaw of *The Valley Table*. “We’ve reached critical mass.”

Farmers markets have grown exponentially, too. (There are now more than 70 in the region.) Distilleries like Tuthilltown Spirits, known for its bourbon and rum, and American Fruits from Warwick Valley Winery, known for its eau de vie, are taking their place on cocktail menus throughout the country.

And early pioneers are keeping up with the change in tastes. Artisanal

ASK LENNY



AJ Maxwell’s proprietor Lenny Passerelli was told when he was a young boy to not go into the family business of restaurant ownership. His father wanted him to be a doctor, a lawyer or an accountant. Lenny feels he knows more than any established professional when it comes to life’s unimportant facets, so he decided to steer clear of his dad’s advice and become a restaurateur. Visit him at AJ Maxwell’s Steakhouse, where the proprietor is happily solving guest’s problems while spewing his daily sermon on the little things in life that matter most.

Q: I am celebrating my 20th wedding anniversary and will be planning a party at my house. Is there a special dish that I can cook my wife for breakfast the next morning?

John, Philadelphia, Pa

Lenny: John, AJ Maxwell’s has a dish on their new breakfast menu called “The Hangover”. It’s designed to be enjoyed after getting too toasted the prior evening! You take 2 eggs per person, separate the yolks and whites, and fry the whites in a pan. Cook some home fries and make sure they are piping hot so you can pile them on the whites when they are finished cooking. Then, smear the raw yolks into the hash browns. Top it off with bacon, sausage or roast beef hash, then a side of toast. If you want, you can view the video on our website, which will show you exactly how to make this hangover cure. Just visit ajmaxwells.com.

Q: Lenny- What do you like to do on a day off?

Maggie, New York, NY

L: That’s easy - hang out with my kids on the couch, relax and tell them not to be a restaurateur!

Q: Len, my wife has been nagging me to junk my boxers and get briefs. I won’t do a thing until I ask Lenny! Thanks.

Jim, Baltimore, MD

L: Jim, this depends on the situation. Why don’t you add briefs to your repertoire while keeping the boxers? Call it a compromise. Wear the boxers for black tie affairs and save the briefs for casual nights.

Have a question for Lenny?

Send them to asklenny@ajmaxwells.com

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Baby lambs at Old Chatham Shepherding Company in Chatham

bread baker Dan Leader of Bread Alone, which opened in 1983, just expanded his Rhinebeck bakery into a full-fledged bistro and recently published a book, *Panini*. Tom and Nancy Clark, who since 1997 have been making award-winning farmstead Camembert at Old Chatham Shepherding Company in Chatham, using milk from the sheep that graze their 600-acre farm, went national with their yogurt last year and are now working on a blue cheese. Guy Jones, who for 28 years has been raising organic produce on his Blooming Hill Farm in Blooming Grove, is bringing people together with farm dinners under the stars, served at long tables in his fields.

"We are so diverse," says Eve Felder, associate dean for culinary arts at the Culinary Institute of America. According to Felder, it's not just grapes, as found in Napa Valley. There are farmers with both fruit trees and fields of produce. Cheese makers who raise goats, cows and sheep.

And we no longer have to rely on chefs to buy the products out of the back of a truck. You have your choice: Browse in a local gourmet shop like Random Harvest in Craryville, or just walk up to Sir William farm and slide your cash in the honor box. You'll have the same cheese and meat that are served at the best restaurants in Manhattan.

Or, the next time you're in the area, pull up a bar stool at the nearest neighborhood restaurant and order the duck terrine. Then raise your glass and propose a toast: The Hudson Valley has arrived. ☞




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