

{ HOT SPOT }

In THE KITCHEN

Move over bikes, beer, and bands—Fort Collins is expanding its repertoire. BY RHEA MAZE



LEMON TART:
Chantilly cream
Sourced:
Made in house daily

QUINOA:
Asparagus, pickled mushrooms, romesco and parsley
Sourced:
Quinoa from Western Slope, pea shoots from Altan Alma, Boulder

BEER:
Sourced:
New Belgium "The Kitchen": Spicy Green Saison, Fort Collins

WISDOM FARM CHICKEN:
Harissa, cumin, yogurt, cous cous & Almond Salad
Sourced:
Chicken from Haxton, micro greens from Altan Alma, Boulder

NATIVE HILL FARM GREEN SALAD:
Broken Shovel Chèvre, candied pecans, lemon and olive oil
Sourced:
Greens from Native Hill Farm, Fort Collins

STICKY TOFFEE PUDDING:
Housemade vanilla gelato
Sourced:
gelato made in house daily

ROASTED ORGANIC BEET SALAD:
Broken Shovel chèvre, hazelnuts, lemon
Sourced:
greens from Native Hill, Fort Collins

CHAR GRILLED COLORADO LAMB BUGER:
Red pepper relish and fries
Sourced:
lamb from Crego Livestock. Toasted cumin yogurt from Noosa Yogurt, Bellvue

WHEN 12-YEAR-OLD KIMBAL MUSK cooked dinner for his busy family, good things happened. They sat down together and laughed. "I became the cook of the family early on because I loved what food did," Musk says. "If I didn't cook, everyone was always on the go."

That spark eventually led to the creation of a wildly successful restaurant and nonprofit concept with a surprisingly simple recipe.

The idea behind The Kitchen, opened in Boulder in 2004 by Musk, Hugo Matheson, and Jen Lewin, was for it to serve as a community hub. They wanted to bring people together over good food, give back to the community, and cultivate

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEVE GLASS

positive relationships. “We just set out to be good citizens,” Musk says.

Ten years later, The Kitchen has grown into a family of seven popular restaurants with more on the way, and a robust nonprofit providing schools around the country with “learning gardens” designed to strengthen communities from the ground up.

Their latest iteration, opened in Old Town’s Avery Building this June, was a long time coming. “Most of the farms we work with are located between Lyons and the northeast corner of Colorado,” Musk says. “Now, we’re closer to our farmers and they can come eat with us.”

Almost every ingredient in The Kitchen comes from a direct relationship with a purveyor the restaurant knows and values. “It’s a ton of work, but it matters,” says general manager Dan Smalheiser. “You can tell who’s doing it right.” The consciously sourced model includes utilizing local farms as much as possible while also supporting producers with good ethics and sustainable business practices.

A reverence for local food is nothing new to Fort Collins. With bustling farmers’ markets, more than 20 local producers providing community supported agriculture (CSA) shares, and more ambitious young people getting into farming, the local food scene is primed and ready for the spotlight.

The Kitchen is meeting a nationwide, consumer-driven demand trend that continues to gain momentum. People everywhere want to know where their food comes from and they want to feel good about connecting with it. It doesn’t hurt that Musk and Matheson are also professionally trained chefs who create straightforward, foodie-approved menu items.



While the airy aesthetics and cheery service standards are similar in all of The Kitchen’s spaces, the menus and culture at each location evolve based on the community’s involvement. Fort Collins’ Kitchen is already bringing a lot of people who care about the community-through-food movement together, from diners and farmers in the restaurant to local teachers and parents in The Kitchen Community.

Musk and Matheson founded The Kitchen Community nonprofit in 2011 to connect kids and families across the nation to real food, and have set up more than 170 Learning Gardens in several states. In May, with the help of the Bohemian Foundation, Bauder Elementary School received Fort Collins’ first Learning Garden. The goal is to have 20 gardens up and running in Poudre School District by next spring. “Teachers aren’t necessarily gardeners,” says Tim Villard, garden educator with The Kitchen Community, “but Bauder’s team is one of the most garden-savvy we’ve worked with—and that’s reflective of the Fort Collins community.”

Chef Joel Ryan feels there’s more work to be done in terms of turning the local food tide. “Farmers’ markets and CSA’s are great, but we bring another element to the table in terms of creating a synergistic relationship with local producers that’s mutually beneficial,” he says. “I would love to see a true culinary scene emerge in this town with every single restaurant supporting local farms.”

The energy is already here and The Kitchen is tapping in. “We serve simple, fresh, high-quality food—it’s not that complicated,” Musk says. “The community that food can create, if it’s done well, is unbelievable.” **FC**

What’s COOKIN’



☛ Check out the daily special, opt for the Taste of The Kitchen, a four course tasting menu made up of whatever’s on hand, or simply order off the classic menu.

☛ Regulars rave about the tomato soup, sticky toffee pudding, and spicy greens mix from Native Hill Farm, simply dressed with a bit of chèvre from Broken Shovels Farm, candied pecans, and lemon vinaigrette. The lamb burger, made with lamb from Crego Livestock, is a mainstay. “We let the ingredients speak for themselves,”

says Ryan. “We’re using amazing lamb that’s grown right here and we don’t have to do much to it.”

☛ Sip on The Kitchen’s own saison, a New Belgium brew dry hopped with arugula.

☛ Pull up a chair at the **community table** on Monday nights for a four-course meal served family style with 20% of proceeds going towards planting gardens in Fort Collins schools.

☛ 100 N. College Ave., 970-568-8869, thekitchen.com, thekitchencommunity.org



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