

The Farmer and the Herb

Written by Written by Karen Loftus

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If you're eating in Seattle, stop off at the award winning Herbfarm in the Woodinville wine country where the evening is as decadent as it is theatrical.



The Herbfarm started as simple tale with a simple sale over thirty years ago. Bill and Lola Zimmerman found they had a few extra herbs and sold them on the side of the road in a rural town just 30 miles east of Seattle. This led to local requests, the building of a greenhouse and a son who remodeled the garage into a restaurant. Their herb driven 6-course meal had an educational element and an immediate feverish following and never an empty seat. The son Ron Zimmerman once the chef and his wife Carrie Van Dyck, the host, remain the proprietors today.



This herb driven, nine-course meal, now paired with six wines is a culinary masterpiece. Global gourmands put this once in a lifetime experience on their life's wish list. An event saved for honeymoons, proposals or for a few fortuitous locals, it's a mad meal each time the menu changes, which is bimonthly. No two meals are exactly alike as the day's sourced ingredients can create subtle culinary differences daily. The Herbfarm believes in supporting the local farmers, foragers, cheese makers, wineries and fisherman. So do we.

The four and a half hour extravaganza starts with an informal 30-minute intro and history of the farm and restaurant by Carrie and a wee teaser of what is to come. Once the doors are opened, the full theatrics kick in. Bill takes over introducing Executive chef Keith Luce, an award winning James Beard chef and once sous chef in Clinton's kitchen in The White House. He, like Ron and Carrie was incredibly unassuming considering his accomplishments. You want to blame it on the Seattle landscape, but his international credentials and resume would dictate otherwise.



The chef explains the dinner, course-by-course, scene-by-scene, and how it came about. One of our evening's courses was influenced by his own Thanksgiving's history with an oyster, which was woven beautifully in to our chowder. His intro is dotted with the witty banter of sommelier Michael Kaminski, his comedic sidekick who interjects his bit of business concerning the wines.

Once the games and the show begin with wines poured, Carrie zips around the tables chatting, serving and encouraging an exchange of our first foodie experiences. I didn't play in to the table games as I found the meal festive and playful enough for my taste.

You can opt for a private table or go Euro style where you are seated with strangers. I took my best friend's Mom, a 65-year-old newlywed, anxious to show off her new fresh tattoo, her first. We sat with a witty British couple, a local Washington couple, an angular architect and tech exec and another duo, a lovely Aussie, an ex singer-dancer who met and married her military man overseas. We were a spirited crew, but the star by far, was the meal, which took nine well-deserved bows.

The evening and each course have a theme. Our evening's theme was American Harvest. Our first course, Saying Thanks in Small Ways, a trio of Dungeness Crab Cakes and Trout Roe, Poached Foie Gras with Vanilla Bean Gastrique and Sunchoke Panna Cotta with Montana Paddlefish Caviar paired with a Willamette Valley Argyle Brut was just the beginning. Sound Oyster & Salsify Chowder with an Okanagan Valley Sauvignon Blanc and Applewood –Roasted Black Cod with a Dundee Hills Pinot Gris (OR) were the performances that followed.



The wines were free flowing and if you got attached to one, you could hold on to it demanding an encore. Your cup and your joy will runneth

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over with continued requests, which I was guilty of, more than once. Michael the sommelier was busy bragging between pours that he has the best job in the world. One can't argue, as he is privy to obscure wines in a cellar containing over 26,000 bottles.

The American Bronze Heritage Turkey with an Oregon Brick House Gamay Noir and The Running of the Deer, Venison Loin on Braised Shank Pave with Columbia Valley Baer Ursa was by far a table fave, the tour de force and culinary climax. A Pilgrimage of Desserts and the finale, a Selection of Small Treats, followed the Cheese to Please and Cranberry Sorbet, another showstopper. If you want to take it higher or merely advantage of the worldly wines, dip in to the sommelier's Special Wines by the Glass or the Discovery Flights he prepares for the evening's feast for an extra charge.



This whole experience was European in style and feel with an elegant unraveling of each dish, scene and the evening. Time seemed to stand still as the hours slipped by. It was pure and simple, rippled with the sublime. Its no wonder USA Today touted it the #1 restaurant in the country and National Geographic # 1 in the world.

Like any great performance, you didn't want it to end. As the culinary curtain closed, I was already left wishing for a revisit, hoping that perhaps, I can experience this once in a lifetime experience, just one more time. www.theherbfarm.com