

Farm to Table

FINE DINING IN SANTA FE

by Suzanne O'Leary

"A significant part of the pleasure of eating is in one's accurate consciousness of the lives and the world from which the food comes." - Wendell Berry

I grew up on a farm, a *real* farm in Iowa with thousands of acres of perfectly aligned rows of soybeans, corn, and wheat. We lived off the land. Our acreage with the house had several barns and machine sheds with hog houses, cow pastures, and a huge vegetable garden. We would slaughter a pig and a cow every year. My father—Farmer John—who was friends with the local butcher, carefully oversaw the process, ensuring each cut of meat was the right thickness and cured the correct way. My brother and I buried potatoes deep in the earth and dug them out when they were ready. We planted packets of seeds, and marveled at how they grew into edible shapes bursting with flavors intermingled with the taste of the rich soil. I remember running barefoot to the garden every afternoon in the summer, skipping over the little rocks in the grove until my little callused farm girl feet hit the grassy path to break into a run. Carrying a bowl with instructions from my mother, I would gather fresh spring onions, radishes, the leafy combination of greens and

carrots (those were my favorite, pulling the tops and not knowing what would come up, sometimes they came out of the earth with ease, other times it was a struggle). A special surprise from Mother Nature had wild mulberries growing in our groves, of which the juices stained our fingers and faces and left impossible purple marks my mother would scrub off until my face stung raw. We had sweet corn so tender that you could eat it right off the cob, and cucumbers, fresh herbs, eggplants, pumpkins, and squash. The tomatoes were always in abundance. I would pop warm cherry tomatoes in my mouth as I gathered our dinner, a fresh sweet appetizer of sorts. My mother canned whatever was left over. We had a shelved root cellar lined with mason jars with marked tops, filled with creamed corn, tomato juice and sauce, fresh preserves and...well...I could go on. It's one of the most prominent memories I have, and to this day, my kids and I return each year, anticipating harvesting and eating the fresh produce from my family's garden. Food is the focus of our visit, and what fascinates me now is

that was something I completely took for granted.

Food is tied to our childhood experiences. Every chef has his or her own memories of growing up with their grandparent's, father's, or mother's cooking, and of kitchen gardens which have inspired them to not only choose this profession, but to honor those that have fed them, nourished them, and make them feel loved. Food evokes emotions, and these incredibly talented Santa Fe-based chefs all pour their emotions and passion into their dishes. They each have their own style and training, and their food is a manifestation of everything combined, coupled with the love of pleasing those who taste it.

Santa Fe hosts some of the most extraordinary chefs in the Southwest. While the desert landscape may prohibit farming large quantities of produce, nevertheless many chefs here are committed to supporting local farmers and sourcing fresh ingredients. They are creating not just simple peasant food. They are transforming the freshest organic ingredients into artful dishes, applying a fusion of flavors from a variety of cultural influences to create a cuisine like no other. French, Asian, New Mexican, Puerto Rican, American, Italian, Mexican, and many, many more international flavors are folded into the ingredients to create dishes that are unmatched in flavor, beauty, freshness, and creativity. Farm-to-table meets fine dining in Santa Fe.

This isn't a new trend. Eating local was made famous in the 1970s by "slow food" legend Alice Waters of Chez Panisse, her legendary California restaurant

where she promoted the idea of fresh, local, seasonal cuisine. This inspired jaunts to locavore destinations around the States. Now eating local is fully in fashion and nearly every major city in the U.S. has jumped on the bandwagon.

This allows a few bold chefs and proprietors to take the concept a step further. "It's incredibly easy to market 'farm-to-table' to potential diners," says Chris Harvey, general manager and owner of Geronimo Restaurant, on Santa Fe's Canyon Road. "But the important part is that it makes the food taste better, no matter what you're trying to do."

Fine dining chefs are very specific about where they source their ingredients. They are not going to just get it off the back of a random truck. They want fresh, organic produce and meats. But this takes a lot of time, preparation, and money. Some even go to the extreme of creating their own gardens on their restaurant properties

Many high-end restaurants source their produce through farmers' markets. Many buy directly from farmers such as Matt Romero of Romero Farms.

Romero owns and farms ten acres in Alcalde and Dixon, New Mexico. Founded in 2000, Romero, one of the largest vegetable vendors in the area, prides himself on being certified organic. Romero raises leeks, bok choy, melons, cauliflower, chiles, tomatoes, potatoes, eggplants, cucumbers, squash, and cabbages, along with a variety of herbs year-round through a 24-hour irrigation system supported by the local acequia.

A former executive chef, he understands the



Cloud Cake Italian Meringue Cake, Caramel Sauce, Fresh Tarragon Grapefruit Supreme at Joseph's

importance of flavor and quality. Sourcing to several fine dining establishments including Geronimo, 315, Osteria, Il Piatto, Taberna, La Boca, and Georgia, he splits his time between his preferred clients and selling at The Farmer's Market in the Santa Fe Railyard. "Matt Yohalem from Il Piatto really supported me initially in my farm-to-table business," said Romero, "He is a big advocate of locally sourced ingredients. We even cure our own meat together."

Here are a few of the city's fine dining eateries that feature plates straight from the farm.

GERONIMO RESTAURANT

Chef Eric DiStefano: The Virtuoso

Chef Eric DiStefano, one of the most celebrated chefs in Santa Fe, sprang into Santa Fe from Hershey, Pennsylvania. He was the chef de cuisine at the Hotel Hershey when renowned chef Daniel Boulud lured him with an opportunity in Santa Fe. Twenty-five years later and still going strong, if not stronger, he and business partner Chris Harvey have created arguably one of the finest dining establishments in the region, Geronimo, which touts "eclectic international cuisine with a French base."

Geronimo preceded the farm-to-table movement. DiStefano's specials are derived from seasonal bounty, but he keeps the menu staples consistent. Geronimo's menu remains as enticing as when DiStefano first arrived, and several of those early staples are still current favorites, from the Tellicherry-rubbed elk tenderloin with apple wood-smoked bacon and creamy brandied-mushroom sauce to the mesquite-grilled Maine lobster



Kitty Leaken

tails with a rich garlic chile sauce.

"I want the freshest organically certified ingredients for my food", says DiStefano. "I have always been focused on the quality, so farm-to-table makes perfect sense. It's a lot more time consuming, but food is my trademark, my passion, and I respect every ingredient I place in my dishes and I want to know exactly where it came from." Chef DiStefano sources his produce from Matt Romero and Robert Chavez, and his organic and grass fed meats from the Four Daughters Land and Cattle Company.

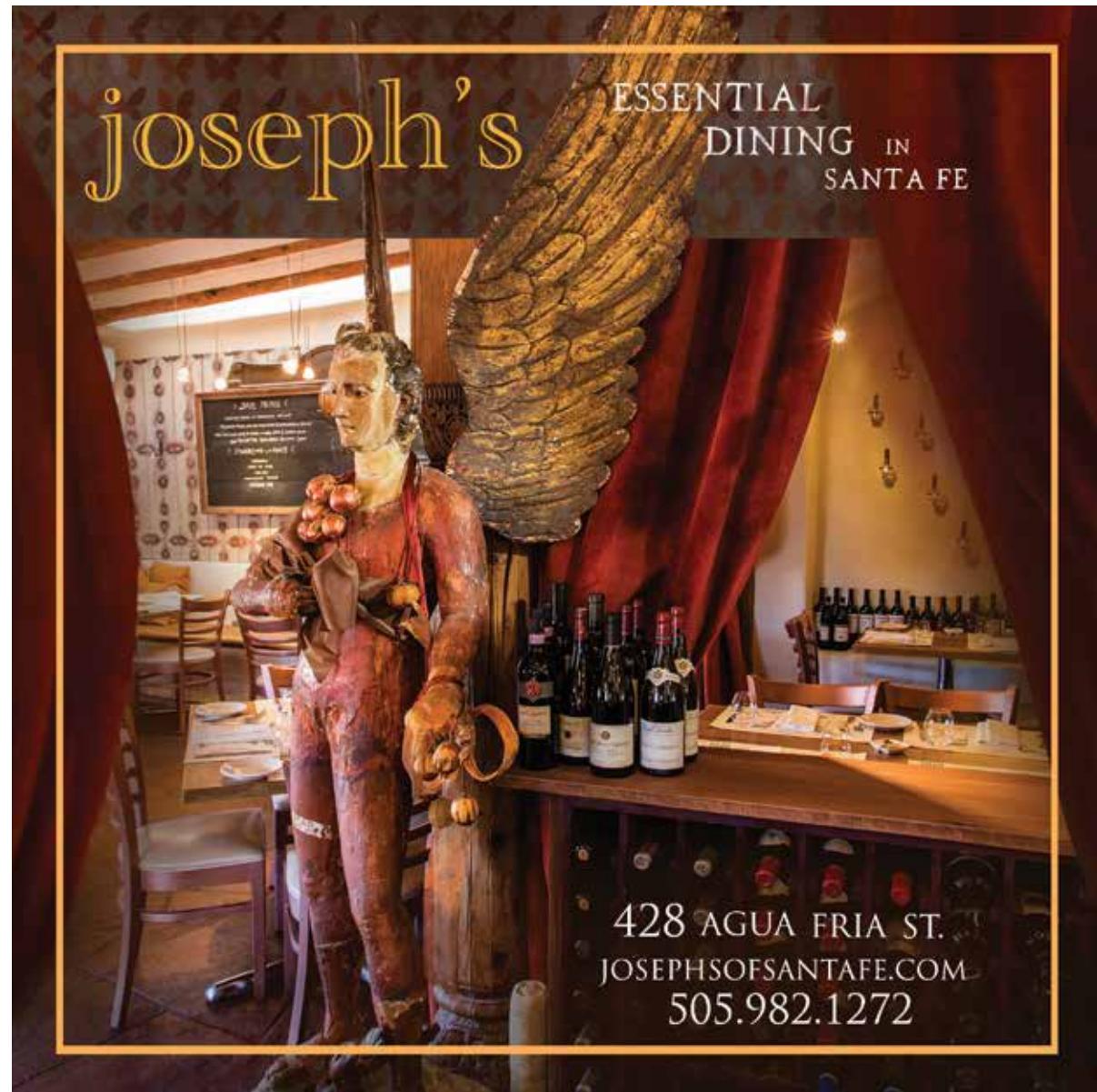
When it comes to fine dining in Santa Fe it's hard to compete with Chef DiStefano. His indelible reputation has fashioned a high standard for local chefs looking to achieve his level of recognition. "Chef Eric is who I admire the most in this town," said Luminaria executive Chef Marc Quinones, "Not only is the guy a talented chef, he is an inspiration, he's like the culinary Godfather."

OSTERIA

Chef Cristian Pontiggia: The Aphrodisiac

Born in Lake Como, Italy, and inspired by his grandfather Adolfo, a local northern Italian chef and bar owner, Chef Pontiggia left home at the young age of 14 to pursue his vocation as a chef. Hailing from one of the most beautiful and romantic settings in the world, he is one of the few chefs in Santa Fe who has cooked in a Michelin Star restaurant.

Naturally farm-to-table is the basis of his cuisine, creating seasonal combinations and specials from only the freshest local produce. He sources from The



The Compound Restaurant's Patio is one of the nicest places in Santa Fe to spend a summer evening.

Farmers' Market, the Romero Farm, and Espanola Valley Farm, and makes everything from scratch. Never short-cutting any of the processes, he delves in personally and actively within the flames of the kitchen.

Osteria's menu is full of the main staples of northern Italian cuisine, delicious and consistently well prepared. I am reminded of the many meals I consumed in rustic, family-run trattorias in northern Italy, the homemade pastas, pizzas, and gelatos. But it's when one delves into the nightly specials that one gets to see the master chef at his best, dishes from a pan-seared pear topped with scamorza, wrapped in prosciutto, to handmade burrata, fresh cherry tomatoes, basil, drizzled in olive oil, and pork belly and oyster mushroom drizzled with a black truffle demi-glace in a red wine reduction. The elegant food inspires adoration, an aphrodisiac of sorts, which will keep you yearning for more pleasures from the hands of this master.

JOSEPH'S

Chef Joseph Wrede: The Genius

Set in a beautiful old adobe with dim, sensual lighting, Joseph's has an energy that evokes the anticipation of a dining experience of the highest standards. Named one of Food & Wine's Best New Chefs for his work in Taos at Joseph's Table over 14 years ago, Chef Joseph Wrede is still at it and going strong in Santa Fe. "I like

to use common ingredients like organic vegetables and surprise and exceed dining expectations every time someone tastes my food," he says.

Chef Wrede takes "eclectic" to a whole new level with his cuisine. It's so unique, it would be almost impossible to replicate and a sin to try. He has mastered the technique of keeping his locally-sourced produce and meats cooked to perfection, while leaving a bit of mystery on how the pork belly ended up crunchy on the outside and juicy and tender inside. It's never had that type of consistency in my experience—and I grew up on a pork farm—I should know.

Chef Wrede is decorated with more accolades than most chefs in New Mexico, not to mention the country. His signature starters include pressed pork belly with apple demi-glace, preserved lemon, pickled ginger and Brussels sprout slaw, and the savory trifle with lobster panna cotta, foie gras ganache, mango fluid gel and lemon thyme foam. His salads are not your typical salad; they are infused with so much deliciousness that the other patrons sitting next to me had to order the warm mixed greens, local goat cheese, and dried cherries in warm date bacon vinaigrette as well. (Apparently the involuntary sounds of pleasure I was making when I savored each bite convinced them they should try it.) The dish is a favorite of Wrede's daughter Fallon, and should always be a staple on the menu; she obviously

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Savory Spice Shop also offers classes taught by Kate Wheeler, a trained chef from Johnson & Wales University. She loves all types of cuisine and she loves to make food accessible to everyone. Classes are on average \$40 and students learn everything from authentic Thai cuisine to quick and easy meals to vegan cuisine. Private classes are also available. Check their website for the class schedule and sign up for their monthly newsletter at savoryspiceshop.com, or call Kate at (505) 819-5659.

has inherited her father's taste buds and appreciation for his eclectic fusion of flavors. Main courses such as the orange, star anise, and red pequin-glazed duck breast medallions on a bed of Arab-style lentils, with rice, crisp onions and toasted dry spices, left me craving the combination of flavors and booking a reservation for the following week to have it again. I will be honest, it's not just for the duck, or the salad, which are addictive enough; he hooked me with the butterscotch pudding topped with caramel sauce and sea salt. So much for watching my waistline; I always skip the dessert course, but at Joseph's, it's the headliner for me.

Apparently I am not alone in the sentiment. A risk-taker with precise technique, Wrede tries to source many of his ingredients locally. "Food is my main form of self-expression," he says. "I think of the world as a flavor palate to choose from; I source everything I can locally and incorporate local spice and flavor into my dishes." One of his main local sources for organic produce is Trey Naylor, who has a large farm in Pojoaque, New Mexico. When it is the season, he forages for mushrooms in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. "I hope foraging mushrooms in Santa Fe becomes more sophisticated," he says enthusiastically.

LUMINARIA INN OF THE SPA AT THE LORETTO

Chef Marc Quinones: The Artiste

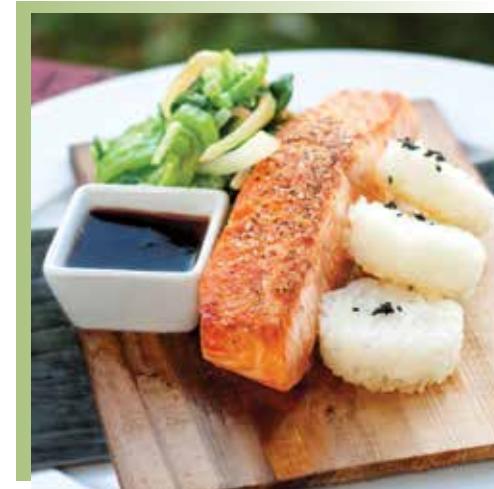
Born in the Bronx, New York in a Puerto Rican

neighborhood, Chef Quinones' dishes incorporate many different influences, from sophisticated Japanese to Santa Fe fusion, combining local chiles with fresh meats and greens. He draws inspiration from the food of his childhood, recalling the flavors of his mama's and grandma's delicious home-cooked meals, and transforming them into a gourmet expression of fine dining, such as duck confit eggrolls and Asian noodles to sous vide young rabbit with vanilla bean-miso gnocchi, pickled radish, and green chile ponzu.

At Luminaria, the restaurant of the Inn of the Spa

at Loretto, Chef Quinones creates delicious and daring modern food: pork belly with a "rice-less" tuna sushi roll, wrapped in cucumber, accompanied with fresh greens and a fresh ginger lime olive oil dressing. A culinary artiste, his plates paint a clean, beautiful backdrop to his marvelous food. Dishes are adorned artistically with exotic sauces to the likeness of a Jackson Pollock painting. The fact that he sources his ingredients from The Farmers' Market and gets much of his inspiration from talking to the farmers becomes relevant

only when you try to construe why his pork belly is so delicious. "We don't really need to talk about the farm unless someone asks," Quinones says. "Its impact shows up on the plate." Hands down, Chef Quinones and his impeccable Luminaria staff bring the full, fine dining experience together like an orchestra. He is upping the ante in Santa Fe for chefs. Coupled with his humility and kindness, he stands out as an anomaly, and is quickly forging a name for himself in this town.



Ojo Caliente Artesian Restaurant's Cedar Plank Salmon is prepared with sticky rice cakes, sautéed bok choy and sweet soy sake sauce. When available, the bok choy comes from their farm.

**THE ARTESIAN RESTAURANT & WINE BAR AT
OJO CALIENTE MINERAL SPRINGS RESORT & SPA**

Chef Paul Novak: The Authentic

In the spring of 2014, Ojo Caliente Mineral Springs Resort & Spa began offering organic farm-to-table dishes in the Artesian Restaurant, with meals consisting of a wide variety of root vegetables, leafy greens, herbs, edible flowers, all harvested from Ojo's on-site one-acre farm. Ojo brings the food-is-medicine concept to their restaurant through indigenous agricultural traditions practiced on the high desert land adjacent to Ojo's cliffs and to the Rio Caliente.

"We're creating community through food. That's what drew me here, and respecting the food is important and it has been rewarding." Chef Novak lets the harvest be his guide, incorporating local meats, cheeses, with vegetables and greens from the farm's bounty to produce signature seasonal dishes that celebrate what's growing now.

A hoop house is used for starting plants and tending seedlings, and a small field has been created by a "back-hoe gardening" method. Ojo's gardens manager, Jane McKay and farm manager, Mark DeRespinis, have already successfully grown arugula, spinach, cilantro, lovage, mint, chives, green garlic, and rainbow chard, plus heirloom tomatoes, carrots, onions, peppers, and other vegetables that are harvested and then incorporated into seasonal specials, spring through fall. With the help of local praying mantis and ladybugs, the back-hoe method of gardening is similar to what the Native Americans used



to do: dig out the earth and add layers of organic matter.

Some of Chef Novak's delicious signature dishes include the Ojo Artesian Salad, which includes fresh, organic mesclun greens from Ojo's farm, apple, piñon nuts, feta cheese, and homemade prickly pear vinaigrette dressing. For dessert the New Mexico red chile chocolate and cinnamon truffles include local red chile from Chimayó, homemade chocolate ganache, and cinnamon. Formerly the sous chef for Eric DiStefano at Geronimo, Chef Novak is now the master of his own domain. The food is fresh, beautifully presented, healthy and delicious. What more could you ask for?

315

**Chef Louis Moskow:
The Refined**

Chef Moskow became one of the early protagonists of Santa Fe's farm-to-table scene when he opened his French portal-lined downtown eatery back in 1994. Nearly twenty years later, he's still turning the freshest local, organic ingredients into classic Northwest-centric dishes like Dungeness crab and pan-seared scallops. Louis' real

feat, however, has been keeping the menu feeling new, thanks to daily inspiration from the local farm delivery and in-season vegetables. Look for seasonal wonders like the squash blossom beignets, which are undeniably one of the most delicious dishes ever. Lightly battered zucchini flowers, fried quick and crisp served with melted Old Windmill Dairy goat cheese and tomatoes, and finished with fresh herbs, it is definitely one of Santa Fe's special treats.

"The seasonality of the farmer's market gives

One of Chef Quinones' artistic creations at Luminaria at the Inn and Spa at Loretto



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me structure to write menus with the appropriate ingredients for the season," says Moskow. "It all adds up and makes sense. I cannot deny the success I have experienced so far."

"I like to spend more time on preparing my chefs for success with quality of ingredients than technical preparation and presentation," says Moskow. "My mantra is to buy great ingredients, prepare them well and present them simply. Take the time to create a dish with a unique composition that can be made well with consistency."

All of 315's ingredients are bought with respect to their customers' taste and health, and the belief that great ingredients will simply taste better. The weight of the menu is dictated by the season and the weather: lighter in the warmer months heavier in the cooler months. The food at 315 is classic and always inspiring.

VINAIGRETTE Chef Erin Wade: The Epicurean

Vinaigrette is one of the most popular eateries in Santa Fe for those who lunch and love healthy eating, and Chef Wade has taken farm-to-table to a level beyond most restaurants. A well-educated entrepreneur, she has an understanding of what food is and how fresh ingredients parlay into the artful cuisine. From her hands to the restaurant, a beautifully designed, organic oasis unfolds. She sources the bulk of her food from her own ten-acre farm on the historic Cano Acequia in Nambé, three acres of which are cultivated and yield more than 300 pounds of seasonal produce each week. Wade grows in the "French Intensive Raised

Bed Gardening" method, a technique originally used in urban gardens to maximize productivity in small areas. Because it's not a large farm, this method allows them to grow more produce in less square footage than traditional row cropping.

She also has truly free-range chickens, a form of natural pest control, running all around the property. She just added forty new heritage breed chicks to the mix, including Araucanas and Buff Orpingtons.

According to Wade, "the conventional food model is not sustainable and is sort of doomed, but the local/organic model poses problems for many kind of restaurants, as much from a logistical as an economic perspective. I am interested in how we can smooth out some of the difficulties that remain in sourcing locally for restaurants that are not fine dining."

Vinaigrette's menu consists of an array of salads with recommendations for proteins such as trout, scallops, flank steak, and chicken. The seasonal salads currently include a burrata and heirloom tomato salad with pickled shallots, warm

anchovy-rosemary vinaigrette and crostini. The "Off the Cob" includes fire-roasted sweet corn, cherry and grape tomatoes, diced red onion, cilantro, feta, and a chile lime vinaigrette, topped with the "Vinny Pick": grilled flank steak. Eat it and you will feel perfectly satiated and guilt-free.

Wade has a positive, loving approach towards food, health, farming, and sustainability. "I really believe that lasting change must come from a place of positivity and joy." ■



Narrative Media

Even Erin Wade treats herself to an occasional indulgence: kolaches at her new venture Modern General.