



Erin Wade grows lettuce to share.

Verdant Works

By: [A Qasimi](#) 10/01/2008

Erin Wade is charmingly self-deprecating and idealistic.

Her restaurant, **Vinaigrette**, Santa Fe's greenest sprout, is set to open on Oct. 18, but it is winding up the night to sleep amid the farm animals at her property near the Rio Nambe that is Wade's act of love. It is also not something for which her Harvard pedigree prepared her.

"I have serious boundary issues with animals," the Bellingham, Wash. native laughs. "I had just finished college and was working in fashion design in Milan, but all I really wanted was to live in the country and have a dog."

Wade is a former environmental science and public policy wonk who now waxes breezily about seeding, feeding and breeding as though she were the love child of Old McDonald and Anna Wintour. A self-described fashionista, she appreciates Wendell Berry, Diane Von Fürstenberg and the glory of an excellent steak. Through Vinaigrette, Wade brings together the garden and the lardon, finessing her passions for food, farming and fashion into a collaborative pursuit.

In a flurry of beguiling meta-narratives, Wade's vision grows palpable. She confesses to being too reclusive to stay informed of the ebb and flow of local restaurant movements, but was happy to speak with SFR and share stories about her own project.

On her farm:

EW: The property is 10 acres and the garden is an acre. The idea is to supply Vinaigrette with my own produce as much as I can. I have about 50 chickens; they run free and have little posses; different breeds tend to stay together and the phoenixes randomly buddy up. The chickens take care of the terrible grasshopper problem. I really love pigs; right now I have six and will probably butcher two. I call myself a Google farmer because I'm completely self-taught. I also like a natural way of doing things; I use my hands and never wear gloves. I have all raised beds.

We're kind of a funny farm out there—I like to say we're trying to mimic the organized chaos of dinner. It's difficult, though, and requires so much love and hard work.

On her inspiration:

I grew up with an amazing mom who created a wonderful space and loves to cook. I knew that I always loved that; how the elements of space and light bring a glow to the food. This idea I have is about tapping into what America needs and, by that, I mean building strengths and not exploiting weaknesses. It's about making the decision to be good to yourself—not just eating health food that happens to be palatable.

On the name Vinaigrette:

I was trying to rename from my working title, Salad Shack, because its name preceded the concept. I was actively trying to come up with another name, and nothing was sticking. Then I came up with Vinaigrette; it's such a pretty, trochaic word. It alludes to what it is without actually saying it, and it has a beautiful cadence to it. Also, we have really good vinaigrettes.

On the decor:

I kind of hate the word 'hip' but that's what it is. It's whimsical modern rustic meets industrial barn. There's a stainless-steel bar top with a lime-green glass-tile bar base. I think that many casual restaurants end up looking dowdy, and I wanted Vinaigrette to be casual and chic. Of course, the concept is produce and the colors reflect that. The space looks amazing.

On the menu:

I want to emphasize that although we have plenty of vegetarian options, we're not a strictly vegetarian restaurant. The menu, which my sister designed, is separated into 10 classic salads and 12 signature salads, such as our Cherry Tart with dried cherries, feta, baby arugula and toasted pecans with lemon vinaigrette (**\$8.95**) and my personal favorite, Eat Your Peas (**\$8.95**) with baby lettuce, green peas, bacon, sauteed mushrooms, Asiago cheese and a goat cheese vinaigrette. We also have almost a dozen proteins that can be added to any salad.

On why she decided to open a restaurant:

I didn't want to start something that couldn't eventually be expanded. I have this whole philosophy, and if the concept succeeds, I'd like to eventually open others. I had considered different ideas. I bought a catering van and retooled my business plan. I didn't know exactly what I wanted; I just had this vision and a love for cooking, but I knew I wanted to run my own place. It took three years for the idea to evolve into what it is now.

On desserts:

I like tart, fresh flavors. We'll have homemade ice creams and sorbets, and as strange as this may sound, cupcakes. I love cupcakes.

On her concerns:

People keep telling me that I can't expect my staff to be as passionate about my place as I am. I'm not sure that's true. I'm more scared of being someone who has ideas and doesn't take risks. This feels right. It's just so exciting to see it come to life.

[Vinaigrette](#)

Opens Saturday, Oct. 18
Monday-Saturday 11 am-9 pm
709 Don Cubero Alley
505-820-9205