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Current Issue

EDIBLE ROAD TRIP



PETALUMA

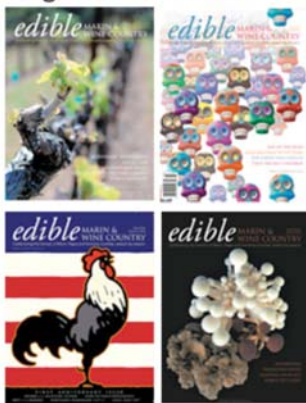
BY BRENNALANGABEER SCHLAGENHAUF

After a summer in Seattle bearing the rain and grey skies, a good friend emails to say she's booked herself a ticket to San Francisco for a long weekend of relaxation and, hopefully, a bit of sun. But it's mid-fall going on winter and there is an unforgiving blanket of steel grey draping itself over the city by the bay. "Let's do Petaluma," I say, coyly drawing her into a weekend touring my new community and home.

Holly arrives on Friday, midday, perfect timing for us to unwind from a week of work and get our fun on. We kick off our weekend with a tour and tasting at Lagunitas Brewing Co.'s TapRoom and Beer Sanctuary. Ironically, I was introduced to the Lagunitas brewery just over a year ago when another good friend from Seattle, an avid beer enthusiast, was visiting and wanted to check it out. "Really?" I thought. "That place stuck back in the industrial parks? What's the fun in that?" Little did I know that an unassuming path leads past the industrial buildings to an arched Willy Wonka-esque wrought iron gate, through which you enter a mecca of pure, unabashed beer imagination. Tours are offered weekdays at 3pm and their TapRoom is open Wednesday-Sunday, serving appetizers, salads, panini, a cappuccino stout ice cream float for dessert (yes, really) and special release beers you can't taste or buy anywhere else, and often featuring live music. We catch up on life over a few Firkins—a newly casked beer available only at the brewery (tapped each day at 4:20pm). Life is good. www.lagunitas.com

We then make our way to Della Fattoria Bakery on Petaluma Boulevard for their Friday-night-only dinner. Della Fattoria has carved its name into the ranks of Bay Area breadophiles by producing some of our region's best wood-fired, rustic, artisan loaves. Their storefront bakery on the Boulevard is one of Petaluma's most loved locations for coffee, breakfast and lunch—and for good reason. Offering seasonal, organic ingredients, perfectly drawn espressos and an atmosphere that almost transports you to the streets of Europe, it's a great place to start the day or to break for lunch. Their Friday night dinner, however, is my personal draw. After dark, a cozy living-room atmosphere prevails, transporting me back to the home of my favorite aunt. Dishes clatter in the kitchen, aromas of tomato and garlic waft in the air, and lively laughter and conversations ensue while Etta James softly croons in the background. Della's dinner menu changes each Friday depending on what is in season. Homemade pastas and savory comfort dishes usually star and are complemented with light starters, fresh salads and local beer and wine. We begin with the Bellwether Farms Crescenza salad—a Petaluma-made, farm style cheese that oozes from its skin, almost melting into the plate, surrounded by a warm mixture of sautéed garlic, Kalamata olives and Calabrian chiles

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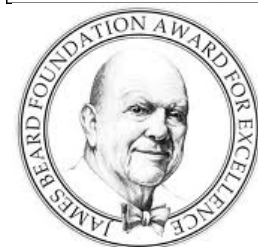
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—served with house-made crostini. Then, I dive deep into the homemade chicken potpie: late summer vegetables and tender, organic chicken simmering in a velvety, rich gravy and topped with layers of fork-flaky crust. Holly moves on to her dish: pork, beef and Bellwether Ricotta meatballs served over Yukon Gold mashed potatoes. As she takes her first bite, steam swirling from her fork, I see her shoulders soften and the rest of her body relax, and I know that this was the perfect wrap-up to a long week. We cap off the evening with a hearty slice of the bakery's three-tier chocolate cake and espresso and head home to rest up for the weekend's activities. www.dellafattoria.com

DAY TWO

I surprise Holly by booking a little adventure for us: renting kayaks from Clavey Paddlesports (www.clavey.com) and paddling the Petaluma River. Our mission is to head down river to Papa's Taverna (www.papastaverna.com) for an authentic Greek lunch (round trip: eight miles). Fall and winter, considered the "off seasons," are a perfect time to paddle the river; the sun is bright but temperatures are cool, summer winds have died down and the winter bird migrations bring an amazing array of wildlife to the estuary. Clavey Paddlesports rents kayaks and stand-up paddleboards for solo adventures, in addition to offering workshops and paddling classes on the Petaluma River estuary and Tomales Bay. Holly is a bit weary since neither of us is an experienced kayaker, but I assure her that technically the Petaluma River is actually a slough—we can't get into too much trouble. After a few practice paddles we are off, heading south toward our destination like a couple of pros. Stealthily gliding past river marshes and oxbows, we come upon a pair of snowy egrets fishing the river. Quickly grabbing for my camera, I almost flip myself into the slough. The egrets fly away, annoyed, but at least Holly is amused. After a great lunch at Papa's we successfully return to Petaluma—no cameras, or people, overboard—with enough afternoon left for a little window-shopping and wine tasting in downtown.

The "Seed Bank," Baker Creek Heirloom Seed Company's local store, located in the historic Sonoma County National Bank building, is our first stop (www.rareseeds.com). Baker Creek is a veritable library of organic gardening with over 1,400 varieties of heirloom seeds, catalogs, books and hand tools. I longingly contemplate the endless selections of heirloom tomatoes (dreaming already of next spring and summer) but settle instead on some winter crops: Bloomsdale spinach, Little Gems lettuce and two varieties of radish: Long Scarlet, a pre-1870s heirloom, and Japanese Minowase daikon. I have a crush on daikons, and I am eager to try something new in my garden. Mild winter weather in Petaluma does not force a tough "compromise."

I could spend hours here, but Holly is getting antsy, so we break away and continue down Petaluma Boulevard. From antique shops to consignment clothing to designer chocolates—each shop downtown being unique and independently owned—it feels great knowing that wherever we choose to spend our dollars, we are supporting the local community. We stop at Vine and Barrel to pick up a bottle of wine for dinner. Owner and local wine enthusiast Jason Jenkins helps us select a bottle of 2005 Ridgeway Two Pisces Vineyard Sonoma Coast Pinot Noir grown in the Petaluma Gap. Distinguished by cool coastal winds and fog and hot summer days, "The Gap" is a distinct region known for producing premium Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Syrah grapes. www.vineandbarrel.com

The afternoon is beginning to fade as we head back outside and there is one last stop I want to make. Picking up our pace, we head south along the riverfront to the Foundry Wharf. This district of town, with its rustic industrial warehouses, has a distinct bohemian flare and is home to an array of interesting artists, craftsmen and artisan food purveyors including Cowgirl Creamery (www.cowgirlcreamery.com) and Three Twins Organic Ice Cream (www.threetwinsicecream.com). Our destination is Sonoma Valley Portworks, where we enjoy a casual yet informative tasting of their award-winning ports and locally made grappas (www.portworks.com). After the port and grappa, it's time for a late afternoon cappuccino at Aquas Café—the community watering hole and art café. www.aquuscafe.com

Finishing our coffees and reflecting on the days' events, Holly comments on how much "the Luma" has to offer. Little does she know that I am saving the best for last (almost)—dinner at Central Market (www.centralmarketpetaluma.com). The combination of honest, good food served in a genuine and unpretentious atmosphere makes Central Market shine as my favorite restaurant in Petaluma—perhaps my favorite restaurant, period. I am hungry with anticipation.

We enter Central Market and Tony Najiola, the chef-owner, warmly greets us at the door, taking our jackets, offering a hug in friendship and sincerely welcoming Holly to his restaurant. Seated at a high duet, we have a great view of the room—the open kitchen and the wood-fired oven cranking out pizzetas and savory baked pastas. The restaurant is glowing with low lighting and candles; tables are filled with friends, families and couples out for a nice evening. All around us lively conversation and contented smiles spill forth.



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I order our starters—I have my favorites that I am eager for Holly to try. From the raw bar, we begin with Kona Kampachi *Crudo*—hand-selected and cut into thin sashimi slices by Tony—lightly dressed with lemon-infused olive oil and served with a side of fresh Serrano guacamole. Next, we share House Smoked Salmon over Crispy Potato Latke. The salmon is smooth and silky, providing a nice contrast to the crispy bite of potato, the two elegantly tied together with a dab of fresh horseradish cream. Then, we warm up with my personal favorite: the warm, spicy lamb cabbage rolls served in a bath of tomato broth and preserved lemon. I've been known to drink the tomato broth right from the bowl, but I am on my best behavior, and I let Holly share it with me. Together, we mop the bowl with our bread to capture every savory drop of the exquisite broth.



For entrées I order the Honey Glazed Liberty Farms Duck Breast (raised in west Petaluma on Two Rock Road, www.libertyducks.com) served over a bed of Tuscan kale. A crispy, sweet glaze ensconces juicy, tender, delicate rare duck breast—a superb execution. Holly tackles the seared Angus hanger steak with twice-baked potato. Both of our meals pair perfectly with the Ridgeway Pinot and we fall uncharacteristically quiet ... savoring the bounty in front of us.

After dinner, in a satiated glow of good food, we cross the street to the Mystic Theatre, Petaluma's historic Vaudeville Theater that is now the center of the music scene downtown. On the stage, long-legged men in short frocks pick out twisted versions of Pink Floyd on their banjos. They jam, and the fun entertainment helps us digest a great meal.

www.mystictheatre.com

DAY THREE

Sunday's dawn is clear and bright, a perfect day for touring Petaluma's bucolic countryside. We gear up for a short bike ride out to one of my favorite new farms, Tara Firma. Begun in 2009, Tara Firma is a newcomer to the growing movement of organic, community-direct farming, and they are taking this movement by storm. After reading Michael Pollen's *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, Tara Smith and her husband, Craig, became inspired to learn about where their food came from. What they learned made them disheartened with our nation's reliance on factory farms. But it was their then 9-year-old son Joey who lit the proverbial fire under his parents' pants with his call to action. "Stop complaining and do something. Grow your own food!" he challenged. And they did. Leaving behind 30+ year careers in the insurance industry, Tara and Craig purchased a farm on the outskirts of Petaluma where they now produce healthy, happy, pasture-raised beef, pork, chicken and organic produce. Tara Firma Farms offers free tours on Sundays, every hour, beginning at 10am. We sign up for a tour to pet the pork chops, *I mean pigs*, visit the happy pasture-raised chickens and hike to the top of the farms' ridge for one of the best views of the Petaluma Valley. We take a little breather at the top and watch the Petaluma River meander out to San Pablo Bay.

www.tarafirmafarms.com

Next it's off to McClelland's Dairy, to taste some wonderful European-style organic butter and milk a prize-winning cow. This third-generation family dairy founded by Robert McClelland, an Irish emigrant, is now operated by his son George, George's wife, Dora, and their daughter Jana. The family raises over 800 cows on 600 acres in the Two Rock Valley just west of Petaluma. George transitioned the family dairy, founded in 1938, to organic farming in 2000. Now, daughter Jana is at the helm introducing value-added products for the dairy, such as their smooth, European-style organic artisan butter. Group tours are offered on weekends, spring through fall, and we happen to catch the last one of the season. I am enchanted with petting the soft-nosed, gentle day-old Brown Swiss calf. Holly tries her hand at milking Ellie, the queen of the dairy and a multi-year, multiprize-winning grand champion of the Sonoma State Fair. Holly tugs and squeezes, squeezes and tugs, but the milk bucket

remains empty and Ellie somberly chews her cud—apparently even grand champions have their off days. www.mcclellandsdairy.com.

We wrap up our great day in the countryside of Petaluma with a dinner at SEA Modern Thai Cuisine, voted best Thai restaurant in Sonoma County by the *North Bay Bohemian*. The Zen soup with fresh portabella mushrooms, ginger, shallots and cilantro and the red pumpkin curry are a cozy end to the day. www.seathabistro.com.

DAY FOUR

Holly departs late on Monday afternoon, giving me the chance to squeeze in one final hurrah: the Hog Island oyster farm. Twenty miles west of Petaluma, the farm is situated on picturesque Tomales Bay. The farm itself is open daily 9am–5pm, and “The Boat,” the recently renovated oyster bar at the farm, is open Friday through Monday 11am–5pm. The Boat serves fresh oysters on the half shell, barbecued oysters, Cowgirl Creamery cheese plates, Fatted Calf charcuterie and local beer and wine. We treat ourselves to a lunch of fresh oysters and a festive glass of sparkling wine as a final toast to good friends and good communities. www.hogislandoysters.com

After lunch we meander down the coast, slowly extracting ourselves from the peaceful pace of the weekend and it's off to the airport, and Seattle, for Holly, and back to work for me. *Sigh. Brenna Langabeer Schlagenhaut wears multiple, colorful hats in communications, public relations and marketing and event coordination for local businesses that grow and produce delicious, thoughtful food that supports our communities and our planet.*

PROFITEROLES FILLED WITH STRAUS EGGNOG ICE CREAM AND TOPPED WITH WARM RUM CHOCOLATE SAUCE

Recipe by Tina Borrone

Tina Borrone began her baking career at a young age through perfecting the Bisquick coffee cake. She sharpened her skills in the kitchen at her family's cafe, Cafe Borrone (Menlo Park), and has wielded her spatula in San Francisco restaurants Globe and Postrio, as well as in her own custom wedding and specialty cake business. Currently, her husband, three children and 12 chickens keep her very busy, in the kitchen and otherwise.

Profiteroles make a perfect dessert, for the holidays or anytime. In this recipe, the warm rum chocolate sauce highlights the flavor of nutmeg in the rich, delicious, organic Straus Eggnog Ice Cream. Enjoy this easy to make and beautiful holiday treat!

Serves 8.

Profiteroles

Yield: 24 puffs

INGREDIENTS

2 large eggs, plus 1 egg white

5 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 10 pieces

2 tablespoons whole milk

6 tablespoons water

1½ teaspoons sugar

¼ teaspoon salt

½ cup unbleached all-purpose flour

TO PREPARE

Place oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 425°. Line a large baking sheet with parchment paper.

Beat the eggs and egg white together, and measure out ½ cup and set aside. Discard the excess.

Bring the butter, milk, water, sugar and salt to a boil in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring once or twice. When the mixture reaches a full boil, immediately remove the saucepan from the heat and stir in the flour with a wooden spoon until combined and the mixture clears the sides of the pan. Return the saucepan to low heat and cook, stirring constantly until the mixture is slightly shiny, about 3 minutes.

Immediately transfer the mixture to a food processor and process with the feed tube open for 10 seconds to cool slightly. With the machine running, gradually add the eggs in a steady stream. When all the eggs have been added, scrape down the sides of the bowl, then process for 30

seconds until a smooth, thick paste, commonly referred to as a "choux paste," forms.

Using a large pastry bag fitted with a plain ½-inch round tip, pipe the choux paste into mounds 1½ inches high on the prepared baking sheet, at least 1 inch apart. You should be able to make 24 puffs. Use the back of a teaspoon dipped in cold water and smooth out the top of the mounds.

Bake 15 minutes without opening the oven door. Then, reduce the oven temperature to 375°, and continue to bake until golden brown and fairly firm, about 8 minutes longer. Remove the baking sheet from the oven. With a paring knife, slice a slit into the side of each puff to release steam, and then return the puffs to the oven. Turn off the oven, and prop the oven door open. Dry the puffs in the oven for about 30 minutes, then transfer to a wire rack to cool. These will last for several days in a tightly sealed container at room temperature.

When ready to serve, split each puff in half. Place 3 bottom halves on each plate and place a scoop of Straus Eggnog Ice Cream on each bottom. Replace the tops, and spoon warm chocolate rum sauce over the profiteroles.

Chocolate Rum Sauce

Yield: About 2 cups

INGREDIENTS

9 ounces bittersweet 70% chocolate, finely chopped

¾ cup heavy cream

¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar

3 tablespoons corn syrup

2 tablespoons dark rum

TO PREPARE

Combine all of the ingredients in the top of a double boiler over barely simmering water. Stir frequently until all the chocolate has melted. Then, stir occasionally until the sauce is thick and glossy, about 10–15 minutes. Remove from heat. Serve immediately, or keep refrigerated until needed and reheat in a double boiler.

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