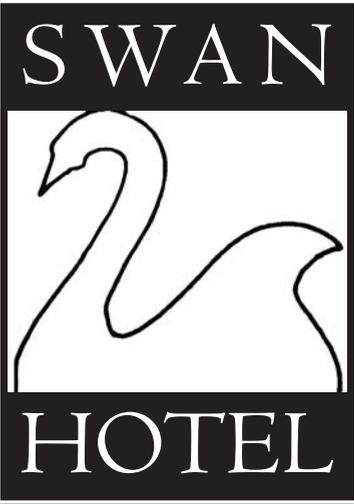


sprig & vine
PURE VEGETARIAN

sprig & vine
450 Union Square Drive
New Hope, PA
215.693.1427
www.sprigandvine.com

BRUNCH
S M A L L P L A T E S

WE ARE BYOB



SWAN
HOTEL

MODERN CUISINE

CLASSIC COMFORT

CORNER OF SWAN & MAIN
LAMBERTVILLE, NJ
609-397-3552

Dining

ROBERT GORDON

AGRICOLA

I WASN'T VETTING A candidate for review on my first visit to Agricola. After cheering Lehigh to victory over Princeton one rainy evening last fall, I was simply heeding some enthusiastic advice from Princeton locals and Lehigh friends to eat at Agricola. It was late Saturday evening. We weren't expecting the kitchen to be on its A Game. But it was. I was impressed.

Agricola occupies an attractive niche on Witherspoon Street, a thoroughfare reeling with small-town charm. Agrico-



la commands curb appeal thanks to a big window where passersby take in some entertaining performance art watching cooks in blue aprons go about their kitchen chores.

Inside are six separate dining areas. Agricola is committed to the farm-to-table supply chain, which fuels not only the food operation, but also a winning, communal atmosphere. Dining here is fun—a vibe some overly-self-indulged food establishments should adopt.

The bar area is cheery. Servers whisk about the dining rooms checking in frequently at their tables. A truly eclectic crowd—young, old, locals, visitors, and foodie trekkers—explore an ambitious menu that changes fluidly each season. But Chef Josh Thomsen's knack for crafting intriguing dishes from a brimming pantry of fresh ingredients abides year-round.

Some items bridge all the seasons, like the Pickled & Fermented Vegetable Plate and the Local Artisan Cheeseboard—although the components in each ensembles reflect seasonal harvests.

The menu is not overly expansive. The unwavering focus is on fresh, nicely balanced creations. Some notable winter dishes that have been replaced as seasons turned are Crispy

Pig Ears and Shibumi Farm's Mushroom Fritters. In the former, long, lightly-fried curls of meat weave in and out of a vegetable cocktail of julienned carrots, raw spinach, cabbage radish, radicchio and lemon-caper vinaigrette. Mushroom Fritters—oyster mushrooms, lightly breaded and succulently sweet—are lip-smacking good. The kitchen succeeds in infusing rare, subtle delicacy into this traditional belly filler.

The spring menu offered Wood Oven Roasted Duck Meatballs and Veal Sweetbreads. Lusciously tender duck in earthy butternut squash purée gets punch from pickled cranberries, while sweetbreads gain character from Meyer lemon. The summer menu has Crispy Duck Rillettes sided with sweet potato purée and pickled red onion.

Coach Farm Goat Cheese Potato Terrine spans all seasons. A streak of balsamic vinegar encircles sweet roasted beets with micro arugula and a hefty tile of goat cheese capped with a browned, thin layer of crisped potatoes.

Several noteworthy entrées are currently in hibernation. Pappardelle is braised veal on a nest of pasta ribbons with carrots and greens. Kimchee Noodles mate braised pork belly with Udon noodles in a ginger broth stocked with shitake mushrooms. A vegetarian rave is Roasted King Trumpet Mushrooms, which harmonizes parsnips, carrots, braised leeks, and mushrooms in a truffle broth.

On summer's entrée menu, North Slope Farm Stinging Nettle Fettuccine (\$19) is a well-priced meld of spring onions, asparagus, mushrooms, carrots, and Swiss chard, with Parmigiano-Reggiano. Asparagus, leeks, and sunchoke add local summer flavors to Cape May Day Boat Scallops.

The entrée list is comprised of mostly meat dishes—Lancaster County fried chicken, Creekstone Farms boneless ribeye, and Elysian Fields Farm Leg of Lamb. However, North Carolina Rainbow Trout, with medjool dates and toasted almonds, is a delicious seafood choice, as are the Cape May Scallops.

Flatbreads emerge from the woodstove with crunchy texture and smoky undercurrent, an ideal platform for the fresh ingredients on top. The balsamic reduction on last winter's Duck Confit Flatbread added the perfect accent to duck with ricotta, arugula, and turnip purée. This summer's Lamb Sausage places a well-balanced dinner atop the bread: red bliss and fingerling potatoes, Jersey fresh tomatoes, feta, and sausage. As for dessert, Warm Terhune Orchards Apple Fritters, covered in cinnamon sugar and slathered in salted caramel sauce is a playful, tasty callback to simpler times, as was last winter's Gingerbread Ice Cream Sandwich, an eye-catching tower of gingerbread and butter pecan ice cream.

My first dinner at Agricola at 11 PM on a busy Saturday was no fluke. Agricola is consistently good. And not only does Agricola give Princeton the upscale, foodie-friendly eatery it lacked, it also gives me a spot to celebrate all the upcoming Lehigh victories over Princeton. ■

Agricola, 11 Witherspoon Street, Princeton, NJ (609) 921-2798 www.agricolaeatery.com

Email comments and suggestions to r.gordon33@verizon.net