

CSA NEWSLETTER



Farm To Table - The Dizzy Hen

With Chef JC Mersmann

Written by Daniel W. Edwards

VEGGIE LIST

LETTUCE

YELLOW POTATOES

RED ONION

YELLOW ONION

BROCCOLI

ARUGULA

EGGPLANT

CUCUMBERS

COLOR BELL PEPPER

GREEN BEANS

CANTALOUPE

SQUASH

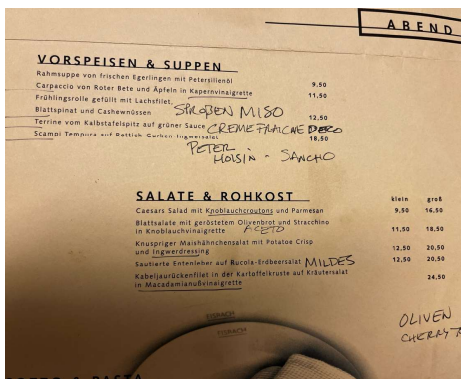
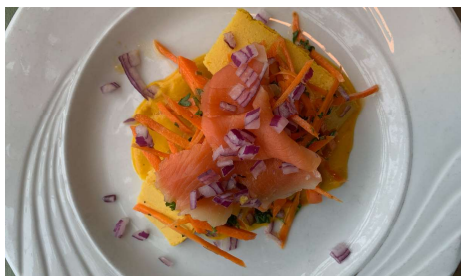
CHERRY TOMATO

On a Sunday morning following a rare August rainstorm, the kitchen at the Dizzy Hen is bustling. It's hot, humid, and relentless. Dough mixers are cranking cantankerously, busy hands open and close ovens to check on fresh morning buns, line cooks shout needs to the back and take no pause to wait for the 'heard' that comes back. Out of the chaos, fantastic plates make their way to the window to be airlifted to excited diners filling the next room. More wait on the sidewalk with cups of coffee to fuel them until they can get seats of their own. The Dizzy Hen is a busy den.

Part Owner and Head Chef, JC Mersman, and I begin talking in the kitchen while he rolls the aforementioned morning buns in cinnamon and sugar. We dodge fast-moving cooks, servers, and mixing bowls while we talk about his roots. Born in Washington DC but raised in Walnut Creek - a suburb of San Francisco - he recounts childhood dinners shared at the table.

His father was an avid gardener and brought freshness to that table regularly. Having "seminal accounts over zucchini" and making himself sick on lamb burgers, JC developed a keen pallet at an early age.

Working dish pits and baking bread through college, JC found himself hungry for more. After meeting a girl from Germany, he found himself inspired to both travel and explore the industry. Spending two 3-year periods in Germany honing his craft. The farm-to-table forward philosophy of European cooking contrasted a more "California reverence" of unique



Photos top to bottom: Sticky Buns, JC taking a slaw break, cured salmon and semolina, chocolate croissant, a menu of the past

and designer produce, JC notes. Before long he found himself running the cold kitchen line in a German restaurant. He pulls out an ancient-looking binder and blows dust off the cover to show me an example of menus he was charged with. Salmon spring rolls, spinach salad with cashews, and a multitude of small starter plates that changed daily gave JC the ability to adapt to constant change and implement new ideas quickly.

Fast Forward to 2007, JC and Hattie Muir – Wife and co-owner of the Dizzy Hen - were living in Oakland, Ca. and seeking a more comfortable and quieter place to raise their family. Gathering Together Farm in Philomath, Oregon was looking to expand their budding restaurant and JC jumped at the opportunity. Working as Head Chef for nearly 10 years, he was able to apply his experience and expand his creativity on the plate. Working with farm-direct produce gave him a sense of reclamation over the slightly elitist food culture in his home of San-Francisco. “People need to eat, right? If you’re trying to get people to eat organic food, don’t shut out almost everybody” JC remarks on the division of food accessibility.

After a decade of leadership at the farm, JC sought out an independent pursuit. Severely lacking in Philomath (and Corvallis as an extension) was good breakfast food. So, The Dizzy Hen was born. Bringing along some key staff from his time at GTF, he built an excellent team and crafted a humble and well-executed menu. With phenomenal omelets, a unique breakfast sando with sweet potato puree, French toast that deserves a chef’s kiss, and truly inspired pastries from Sage the Baker, the Dizzy Hen has established itself as a hallmark to the community. Though more removed from the farm than before, JC and dinner Chef Justin (more on him another week), continue to maintain a mutually beneficial relationship with GTF and incorporate farm produce wherever possible.

JC will never claim that the Dizzy is an “organic restaurant” but the experiences and philosophies gleaned in both his European tour and time at GTF inspire his menu and business practices to this day, and the food speaks for itself. But don't take my word for it! You can find the Dizzy Hen on the NW corner of Main and 13th in Philomath just a few blocks from our farm. Breakfast is served 8am to 1pm Wednesday to Sunday. See you there!

We'd love to see what you're doing with your CSA box! Tag us @GatheringTogetherFarm