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# Blind Pig Kitchen Provides Intimate Farm-to-Table Dining

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HUNTINGTON MILLS, Pa. — For husband and wife team Toby Diltz and Sarah Walzer, of Blind Pig Kitchen, it's all about intention and collaboration. He is a self-described "grumpy introvert" and she, a "bubbly extrovert" — an ideal yin-yang duo to welcome guests at their local food businesses. One of their locations is a Bloomsburg-based restaurant, and the other is their 6-acre homestead in Huntington Mills, which hosts on-farm dining experiences.

The unconventional couple met through the dating website FarmerOnly.com.

"Neither of us were farmers at that time, but we had both checked the box 'other nature lover,'" Sarah said with a smile.

Sarah recalled that she was living in New York City at the time, working in the art world.



A dish of charred carrots, frontage blanc, spicy honey and crispy garlic thyme at a meal in 2022.

"I had been doing that for about 10 years and was looking for a more grounded, surrounded-by-nature existence," she said.

Before meeting Sarah, Toby was

a co-owner of the Eagles Mere Inn in Sullivan County, Pennsylvania. He also worked as the head chef at Orlando's, an authentic Italian-American restaurant in Muncy.

"We went on a few dates in the city," Sarah said. "I came out here (to Pennsylvania) a couple of times at the end of February. By July, I quit my job and moved here, and the rest is history."

That was 10 years ago.

"The struggle at that time was, Sarah was overqualified and under-qualified for every job around here," Toby said. "We also wanted to go out to eat, but there was nowhere that we would be happy. We both recognized that we're not good at working for other people, so we said, 'let's start our own restaurant.'"

The couple's first endeavor together was a small-scale restaurant, which opened in May 2015.

"I remember I was helping butcher chickens at Forks Farm, and Sarah was working in the office that day," Toby said. "The (then)-owner of Forks Farm told me that the people who had the building (that we were interested in) were looking to retire from their restaurant in Bloomsburg. Sarah drove down there and told them that we wanted to lease it and they were super-excited. We leased it from them for three years, with the idea of eventually buying it."

Sarah and Toby did an online Kickstarter campaign to get money for the down payment. They bought the Bloomsburg restaurant in 2019.

Together, the two plan all aspects of their business with care — including the way crops are planted, how the garden beds are created, soil amendments, and how their animals are raised and treated. It also includes how they craft menus and design a diner's plate presentation.

Their business goal is simple and straightforward, stated as: "To prepare the most flavorful, nutrient-dense dishes we possibly can, while being environmentally conscious. We believe that in order to achieve these goals, it is important to source as many ingredients as possible from local farms."

They admit that much of their "business plan" has been an experiment to see if a sustainable restaurant could be financially sustained.

After several years of offering a la carte menus five days a week, they decided that it was not in their best interest to continue with that approach. Instead, they shifted to a \$75 per person, fixed-price menu and seat reservations only on Friday and Saturday evenings. Seasonal, on-farm dining experiences for 4-8 people are \$150 per person and include seven courses. Those private experiences are even more intimate, ending with a farm tour.

Toby said they are both opinionated and have a vision, so they don't always agree, but they have learned to disagree in a productive way.

When he asks for Sarah's feedback on a new soup, for example, she will tell him if it's too salty, which is helpful and constructive.

## Hyper-Local and Hyper-Seasonal Offerings

At both locations, guests can expect a menu featuring locally sourced ingredients, including proteins ranging from chicken to pork to salmon and trout.

In the early years of the business, the pair recalled traveling for days upon days, visiting every farm on their list of purveyors.

They source ingredients from local farms that use organic farming methods. These farms do not use pesticides or chemical fertilizers, and raise meat animals humanely outdoors and without the use of antibiotics or added hormones.

Sarah and Toby are committed to working only with farmers who share their goals of sustainability. That list currently includes Forks Farm in Orangeville, Dancing Hen Farm in Stillwater, Lilac Hill Farm in Muncy, Wild For Salmon in Blooms-



Submitted photos

The couple's homestead in Huntington Mills, Pa., has a private dining garden experience where they have a seven-course menu and farm tour.



Sarah Walzer, of Blind Pig Kitchen, pulls wild ramps from the woodland to use in a menu.



Pastured pigs at the couple's homestead.



Toby Diltz makes sauerkraut to serve at Blind Pig Kitchen.



The interior of the Blind Pig Kitchen restaurant in Bloomsburg, Pa.



Home-grown brined smoked hams prepared for Blind Pig Kitchen.

More DINING, B8



# Dining

Continued from B7

burg, Gib's Farm in Catawissa, Old Tioga Farm in Stillwater, Primordia Mushroom Farm in Lenhartsville, Columbia County Bread & Granola in Bloomsburg, Springcress Trout Farm in Mifflinburg, Valley Milkhouse in Oley, Nut Creek Farm in Danville, Bad Fish Farm in Stillwater and Small Valley Milling in Halifax. They also use Anson Mills in Columbia, South Carolina.

Their menus feature foods that are hyper-seasonal, hyper-local and always changing.

For instance, a recent spring menu featured a sweet pea and potato latke with chive crème fraiche and spicy honey, mustard greens with Feta, roasted garlic emulsion, lardon and candied black walnuts, duck tortellini with lemon preserve, pastured chicken breast with shiitake mushroom, leek oil and tatsoi, and a peach tart to end the meal.

Another meal featured braised pork belly with ginger-tamari and a carrot slaw, French onion soup, salmon crudo with spicy lime aioli, mixed

mushroom stroganoff fettuccine and horseradish cream, and a wild grape sorbet.

Toby said that he and Sarah plan the menus together. Sarah grew up in Los Angeles, and Toby said she will sometimes suggest using local ingredients but adding an Asian or Mexican flair to them for an interesting twist.

"My thing is to keep things simple and let the ingredients speak for themselves," Toby said. "My brother went to culinary school, has a restaurant in Philly and is classically trained. I bought all his (school) books and read through them and practiced. I've always been one to make the mistakes and learn, so I'm self-taught."

On their homestead — where they also offer dining — the couple created raised beds for gardening vegetables and herbs, a greenhouse that also doubles as a dining space, and a woodland area for berries, mushrooms and meat birds. They also have laying hens in a mobile chicken shed, as well as turkeys. There are heritage breed hogs — Duroc, Old Spot, Tamworth and Large Blacks. And, in addition to their six hogs,

they butcher another 12-14 hogs annually for the restaurant's needs.

In 2016 and 2017, Toby and Sarah planted an orchard of more than 40 different berry bushes and 60 fruit trees. These include apples, nectarines, plums, pawpaws, peaches, persimmons and quince, plus two almond trees and chestnuts. It's evident that they are carefully crafting biodiversity on their homestead and working toward self-sustainability.

"When we built our chicken house, we could support ourselves with just two chickens, but we built a chicken house so it can support 30 chickens so we can provide eggs for a restaurant. We started with the chicken house and the hoop house, and then added different garden beds," Toby recalled.

### Catering Keeps Business Afloat

In addition to the restaurant and on-farm dining experiences, Blind Pig Kitchen also offers off-site catering for 50-500 people.

To find catering work, such as weddings, the couple advertises in well-known and targeted outlets like The Knot and Wedding Wire.

While the advertising costs are high, Sarah said, "If we get one wedding, it pays for itself."

Toby said, "I think the best advertising is having great products and letting people talk about it. We have also developed great relationships with our farmers, so they often send us customers (and vice versa)."

For more information, visit [BlindPigKitchen.com](http://BlindPigKitchen.com) or search for the business on Facebook or Instagram.

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Toby Diltz, of Blind Pig Kitchen, waters seed starts, which will eventually grow and be used in the restaurant's menu.



Pastured poultry pens provide humanely raised protein to the Blind Pig Kitchen menu.



The Blind Pig Kitchen's front door in Bloomsburg, Pa.