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How Austin's Farm-to-Table Pioneer Barley Swine Keeps It Fresh



By Chris LaMorte

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Opening in 2010, Barley Swine has become synonymous with Austin's farm-to-table movement. Today, the restaurant continues to push its culinary vision forward in exciting ways. We spoke to general manager Stefan Davis to find out what's on the new fall menu, his picks for a



Tell me about the current tasting menu. What ingredients are you most excited about serving this season? Any returning favorites?

Davis: Our current tasting menu is just beginning to dip into fall produce. We're very excited to work with persimmons, sweet potatoes, and apples again. My personal favorite is beets of all things. Beets tend to filter into every aspect of the menu including our cocktails and desserts.

Texas is known for spice, but when it comes to peppers, the menu takes a more nuanced approach. Can you tell me about that?

Davis: Surprisingly enough, there are a lot of guests who are sensitive to spice these days. They don't want the heat to take over the dish and make the flavor less enjoyable. That's why we always utilize peppers with little to no spice but that have tons of flavor. I often discuss with guests that a pepper should stop being rated by its capsaicin level and more for its flavor components.



Pecan dashi over butter-poached halibut.



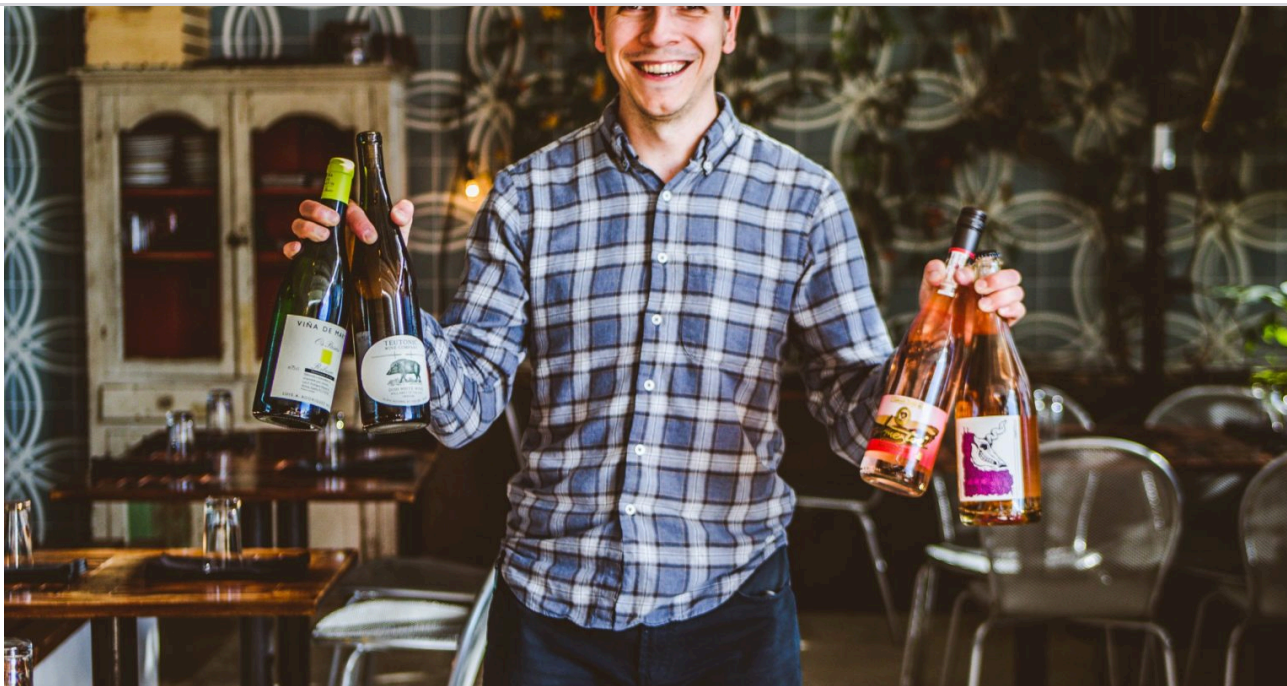
Davis: One of my favorite pairings is our butter-poached halibut, green bean, and pecan dashi dish paired with a furmint sec from [Királyudvar](#) out of the Tokaj wine region in Hungary.

The wine contains high acid, medium body, and perfect minerality to pair with white fish. There is a massive array of fruit characters starting at lemon and kumquat and moving to yellow apple. The wine contains a subtle toasted almond character with citrus flower and honeysuckle. The body of the wine lines up perfectly with the texture of the fish, the acid and citrus work well with the bright basil herbs, and the toasty almond melds with the pecan dashi.

The Tokaji region is famous for making sweet wine from the furmint varietal. Over the years there has been a larger demand for dry wines from the region, and for good reason. The best dry furmint reminds me of sauvignon blanc, chenin blanc, and chardonnay all rolled into one.

Is it challenging to pair wines against a menu that changes so frequently?

Davis: It is challenging and, at the same time, thrilling. There is nothing better than exposing our guests to wines that they have never heard of and then seeing their faces light up after tasting the wine and food together. The wine pairing menu gives Barley Swine's exemplary food a new dimension.



Stefan Davis of Barley Swine.

Barley Swine opened in 2010. How has Barley Swine evolved through the years?

Davis: We started as a tiny hole-in-the-wall gastropub in South Austin serving a limited à la carte menu. In the same space, we converted to a tasting-menu-only restaurant serving only beer and wine. In 2016, we relocated to North Austin, leaving behind a legion of fans for more square footage and more importantly, a bigger kitchen. We then ran à la carte *and* tasting menus simultaneously in the same dining room. We also expanded the drinks program to start to include cocktails.



Duck breast with nixtamalized sweet potatoes, field pea salsa macha and fermented bok choy stems.

Have guests' expectations and tastes changed over this period?

Davis: Absolutely. Farm-to-table is not a new concept anymore. Most guests come to expect this as the standard when they go out to eat, which is wonderful. Our guests are also much more exposed to high-level cooking be it through TV or social media. This has happened in tandem with the booming evolution of the Austin culinary scene, which keeps us busy trying to find new ways to stay relevant in the market.

You're partnering with Zero Foodprint. Why is that important?

Davis: The Zero Foodprint program is amazing. It's a simple operation to ensure that we are doing our part to offset our carbon footprint by practicing low-carbon purchasing ethics while monitoring and maintaining low energy usage and cutting back on garbage and food waste. I think all restaurants should consider looking into the program. It forces us to look analytically at what we are wasting, and how what we order can negatively impact our carbon footprint.

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