

AUTHENTIC



CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT A sampling of the fresh produce picked from the garden. • Farmer Jeffrey Herbig (left) and Chef James Porter stroll through the 8-acre garden that's the centerpiece of Terra Farm + Manor. • The glass-enclosed two-story dining room is a focal point of the lodge.

A LOCAVORE'S LAIR

A RUSTIC CULINARY RETREAT IN PRESCOTT NATIONAL FOREST OFFERS A FIRST-CLASS, UNIQUELY ARIZONAN EXPERIENCE.

BY REBECCA L. RHOADES

THE SUV ROLLS DOWN A DIRT ACCESS ROAD in the middle of Prescott National Forest, rumbling over bumps and around sharp curves, when Chef James Porter suddenly pulls to a stop and points over the treeline toward a small clearing in the distance. "This is one of the best views of the property," he says, his voice filled with awe. "You can see that it goes down into the valley. It's stunning."

His eyes gleam with excitement as he surveys the landscape. "This drive never gets old," he exclaims.

At the end of the road, the trees give way to an open patch of farmland surrounded by forest-covered hills. Rustic buildings dot the landscape—a barn, a small house and a large welcoming lodge crafted of stone, wood beams and glass. A metal sign embedded in a rock wall is the first indication of the secluded destination. It reads "Terra Farm + Manor."

The culmination of four years of dreams and hard work for Porter, Terra Farm is a serene luxury retreat that combines an inn, farm and cooking school. Porter hopes to turn it into a culinary destination that will rival such celebrated foodie favorites as Blackberry Farm in Tennessee or Stone Barns Center in Westchester County, New York. After welcoming some corporate clients in June for a trial run, the resort will open for the fall season at the end of August.



ABOVE LEFT Porter makes fettuccine in the demonstration kitchen. **ABOVE RIGHT** Guests will enjoy farm-to-table meals featuring poultry and produce raised on the property.

A BOLD VISION

Terra Farm is a venture that Porter does not take lightly. The Page-born chef is best known in the Valley for his restaurants, Tapino and Petite Maison. But it was a stint at the historic 1778 Greenbrier Resort in West Virginia that allowed him to hone his skills. Porter was one of a select few to participate in the resort's Culinary Apprenticeship Program, a rigorous hands-on training course. "It's pretty much like getting your masters and Ph.D. in cooking," he says of the experience.

The culinarian then cooked his way across the country, developing menus in hotels and restaurants in places such as Wyoming, California, Florida and even Arizona, where he worked at the Biltmore hotel in the mid-'90s. Following the closings of his Scottsdale eateries, the chef took a position helping restore and reopen a historic hotel in Wisconsin.

Prior to leaving, he was approached by a friend who owned property northwest of Prescott and was exploring turning it into a vacation destination. "He said, 'Hey, you could make this something that's unique to Arizona,'" says Porter. "Oddly enough, I had always wanted to create something that



Wagyu cattle are just a few of the many specialty animals that can be found on the farm.

was truly Arizona-driven, that represents the best of the state." When the chef's Midwest commitment ended, he jumped at the chance to develop the project.

DEEP ROOTS

Located on just under 100 acres in a small valley, the land that is now Terra Farm has a long history. The area was originally inhabited by the pre-Hopi people. Artifacts can still be found in the surrounding forest. "If you rustle through the ground, you can find little shards of pottery," says Porter.

In the early 1900s, the site was homesteaded. The original homestead house still

stands and is now the residence of farmer Jeffrey Herbig. Although the cabin is newly rebuilt, the old stone chimney that runs along the outside remains. Ruins of another settlement building rest near the entry gates. The farm also sits at the head of one of the largest aquifers in the state, "so the water on the property is among the most pristine in Arizona," notes Porter. A hand-dug well from 1910 still exists next to a towering cottonwood tree in the center of the gardens.

To get to Terra Farm, guests must travel down a dirt Forest Service road, which cuts through one of the largest working cattle ranches in the country. "This was also one of



TOP LEFT A trio of jars hold cream, butter solids and fresh homemade butter. **BOTTOM LEFT** The master suite, or Sycamore room, features plenty of comfortable furnishings and a plush bed complete with locally made linens.



the original trade routes into Prescott," says Porter. A small, unmarked access road then leads visitors through the forest and into the clearing below.

Because of its remote location, the entire farm is off the grid. Solar panels power the electricity, propane tanks offer fuel for cooking, and seven wells supported by numerous storage tanks provide water for all of the accommodations as well as the farm. There are neither TVs nor telephones.

STATE PRIDE

"The entire property revolves around the five C's of Arizona," says Porter. "Copper, cattle, cotton, citrus and climate: They all play a part in everything we're doing." From the products used throughout the buildings, to the plants and animals on the farm, to the moderate temperatures of the high-desert locale, each pillar of the state can be found here.

The local experience begins in the lodge, which was built onsite by the landowner and Porter's business partner. It's held together with large iron brackets that were designed and crafted by a former caretaker of the farm. He also created the showstopping iron chandelier in the dining room—which hangs above a massive mesquite table made by *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner John Taber—as well as other metal fixtures throughout. Western-themed art and antique furnishings fill the large communal spaces.

In the kitchen, custom cabinetry crafted in Flagstaff is stocked with dishware by Phoenix potter Christiane Barbato. "I always wanted handmade pottery for a project that I worked on, but I knew it would never last in a restaurant that saw a lot of people," notes Porter. Ceramics by Jillian Schimmel of Phoenix mix with locally made lavender bath products in the



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT A massive stone fireplace dominates the main room of the lodge, which is decorated with leather furnishings, cowhides and a buffalo head. • It takes many hands to keep the farm running. • The stone and wood barn features well-appointed staff rooms on its upper level.

eight guest rooms. The comfy quarters are named after indigenous trees and accessed with keys held by handcrafted leather tags. Even the bed linens are made in state.

GASTRONOMIC MECCA

While Terra Farm sounds like an ideal escape from the bustle of everyday life, a visit here is designed to be a culinary phenomenon. Guests commit to a five-day, four-night sojourn that includes daily cooking classes in a state-of-the-art demonstration kitchen, cocktail and hors d'oeuvres parties, multicourse meals, storyteller hours and more.

Each all-inclusive stay is focused around a theme, whether it's wood-fired cooking, the art of baking bread or Arizona wines, with classes taught by experts in each field.

"There aren't too many cooking classes elsewhere that are hands-on like these are," says Masters of the Southwest award-

winning chef Christopher Gross, who will be presenting a course on French cuisine in September. "You'll get to enjoy the food you make, and you can hang out with the chef and ask them questions and hear funny stories.

"I think people are really looking for that type of environment," Gross adds. Between the classes, the garden and the livestock, "It's truly backyard-to-table."

Wagyu cattle, Iberian pigs, Icelandic sheep, Rouen ducks and French black copper maran chickens were chosen for the quality and flavor profile of their meat, milk and eggs.

At the heart of the property are 8 acres of farmland, on which Porter and his staff will grow a variety of local herbs and vegetables. Native wheat will be used for breadmaking as well as for retaining moisture in the ground. Orchards provide a variety of fresh fruit. Class participants will harvest their own produce and be able to talk with the farmers.

A terraced plot to the north of the lodge is being developed into a vineyard. Porter hopes to one day make wine that will be available exclusively for guests; he also plans to make liqueur from the black walnuts that grow onsite.

"It's hyper farm-to-table, or whatever moniker you want to use," he explains. "Those vegetables were just growing out there 24 hours ago, or 10 hours ago or three hours ago, and now you're eating them. Those eggs were laid this morning. That's what we want to highlight and showcase."

"I don't boast that we're a Five Diamond luxury experience," Porter continues. "It's raw, rustic elegance. This is what this property looked like 100 years ago. It's untouched. That's what makes it unique. That's what makes it historically cool. That's what makes it Arizona."

For more information, see Sources on Page 126.