

FSR

Beers for 2018

Cold-Brew
Cocktails

111 Ideas for
Innovation

Surprising
Sides

Urban Cowboy

Kimbal Musk sits down with *FSR* and explains his strategy to disrupt the casual-dining segment with urban casual.



LOLAGRACE PHOTOGRAPHY

Cornman Farms kicked off its seasonal tasting menu series this September.

Bounty of the Season

BY NICOLE DUNCAN

Just outside of Ann Arbor, Cornman Farms marries fine dining with bucolic charm.

LIKE MANY CHEFS, KIERON HALES takes inspiration from the changing seasons. But Hales splits with his peers in other aspects of the dining experience—specifically, the location. Instead of turning out dishes in a trendy, urban restaurant, the chef hosts his operation at a 42-acre farm and special events venue about 20 minutes northwest of downtown Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Since opening in 2014, Zingerman's Cornman Farms has played host to corporate gatherings, supper club-style dinners, and a number of weddings (the retreat was recently named one of the top garden wedding venues by *Harper's Bazaar*). The property encompasses working pastures, a chef's garden, a restored barn, and a farmhouse.

Hales, who grew up in the English

countryside, brings that rustic mindset to the menus. To further highlight the ever-changing bounty of its gardens, Cornman Farms launched a new dinner series to coincide with each passing season. In late September, the venue hosted its Fall Harvest Dinner with a multi-course meal showcasing the flavors and produce of autumn. These dinners have the double benefit of reaching out to the greater community and drumming up business for Cornman Farms' private events.

"When we finalized our seasonal menus for the upcoming year, we thought, what better way to celebrate each season than with a special dinner that not only offers a sneak peek at what we are creating in the kitchen each season, but is also a great way to promote our private dining offerings," Hales says.

The offerings marry Hales' international background and Michelin-star tutelage (he worked at Restaurant Paul Bocuse in France and Dal Pescatore in Italy) with Michigan flavors and culinary traditions. Think: an amuse bouche of Welsh rarebit and house-cured pork belly, a hearty whole-hog cassoulet, and an "intermezzo" granita that includes foraged Michigan gooseberries and local honey.

Although the next dinner in the seasonal series will not debut until January, Cornman Farms is opening its doors to the public with another special event before year's end. Later this month, Chef Hales will teach a three-day Thanksgiving cooking class in which each of the half-dozen participants will create and then take home a complete holiday meal for eight to 12 dinner guests.

The menu includes upscale iterations of classics (roasted turkey, sweet potato mash, and Brussels sprout and parmesan gratin), as well as less conventional—but seasonally appropriate—creations like Bacon Steak topped with pickled beets and pimento cheese, winter kale and pine nut salad, and wild mushroom and cheese roulade.

DRINK UP

THE BOOM IN BOOZE

The rise of so-called grocerants (supermarkets with fresh foodservice) and finer convenience-store fare has traditional restaurants battling to keep consumer dollars. But as fierce as the competition is, restaurants are still leading with alcoholic beverages.

According to data from Nielsen, alcohol purchases (including spirits, wine, and beer) at restaurants and bars **grew a whopping 12.4 percent** in terms of dollar sales between July 2016 and July 2017, to a total of **\$1.6 billion**.

Off-premises, retail purchases still outnumber on-premises orders at restaurants in terms of volume—10.8 million versus 2.9 million—within that same time frame (volume being measured in 9-liter units). Nevertheless, off-premises purchases only grew 4.7 percent, compared with a 7.6 percent growth in on-premises purchases.

How can restaurants hold that advantage? Danny Brager, Nielsen's senior vice president of beverage, alcohol, says it's key to deliver a unique experience.

"Looking for something that cannot be replicated at home, on-premises visitors are seeking out new experiences and outlet styles, with brewpubs, tasting rooms, and tiki bars especially popular among younger millennials," Brager says.

