

NEW HAMPSHIRE'S: Manor at Golden Pond Offers Vegan

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Award Winning Chef, Peter Sheedy, Offers Exceptional Vegan

by Emilie C. Harting

Set on a hill overlooking New Hampshire's Squam Lake and the White Mountains, the Manor at Golden Pond, with its sprawling main house, croquet setups, swimming pool, and surrounding woods, brings to mind an English country house. Books line the lower half of the walls in the spacious and light-filled main lounge. The latest magazines and periodicals are at hand on coffee tables in front of comfortable chairs and couches, the chess games and jigsaw puzzles wait for players to come back and finish, and the all day tea on the sideboard speaks the language of relaxation.



The inn draws a diverse crowd of families, hikers who return each year in summer, skiers who come in winter, couples celebrating milestone events, and those who want to stay put and relax on the grounds. One family had bicycled a hundred miles north from Massachusetts so they could see their favorite ski area when it was green rather than snow covered. A sixty something couple, theater producers from New York, had motorcycled up from Long Island. Other guests talked about how they like to come each year because they love the lake and mountains, and want to spend time on the grounds and in the spa. However, food and wine are the major draw.

Chef Peter Sheedy has won accolades for his cuisine, which he calls New American, a fusion of New England classics with French, Thai and Spanish influences. The inn has also won awards from *Wine Spectator* for its food and wine pairing. Though one of his favorite cooking moments is when the marbling of a roast has reached just the right point, he is equally excited by vegan food. He's developed an exciting vegan tasting menu; but that you must order in advance. Translate: vegan means no animal products whatever. Sheedy is a purist and uses vinegar and lemon juice rather than wine when creating vegan dishes because ox blood, egg whites, or some other kinds of animal protein, are often used in the clarification process. Providing vegan fare, he says, is as important as accommodating diets for guests with allergies, medical conditions, or certain religious practices.

Always alert for new trends, Chef Sheedy began developing vegan recipes as he worked in kitchens across the country—in New England, where he cooked in top restaurants and attended culinary school, in Oregon, where he stirred pots alongside a number of leading chefs, and in Atlanta, where he mentored the staff of a restaurant in the Marriott chain. At each location he noticed a growing core of health conscious eaters who wanted vegan food.

Dishes on both the traditional and vegan menus abound with flavors that one can only get from high quality produce that reaches the table soon after it is picked. On the way to work, Sheedy often stops at local farmers' markets in the surrounding valley. He also rings up nearby growers who deliver. In off seasons the vegetables and fruit come daily from special Boston purveyors.



Organic heirloom tomatoes in my tomato panzanella, a sliced bread and fresh tomato dish native to Tuscany, had their sweetness intact, and in my carrot and parsnip soup, the sweetness of the parsnips balanced out the slightly bitter carrot taste.

However, the highlight for me was the summer squash cannelloni stuffed with legumes and topped with crème sauce. A base of shredded cauliflower mixed with fennel, and a stiff puree of garbanzos and white beans takes the place of the traditional cheese stuffing. Each variety of beans has a subtle taste of its own, and Sheedy says that with several

types of beans, mushrooms or apples, you get more than the sum of the parts. He uses a cauliflower puree enriched with a good bit of extra virgin olive oil to make it as rich and satisfying as a traditional crème sauce. Since cauliflower is mostly water, and oil and water don't generally mix, he uses plant-derived liquid lecithin, a binder which is becoming increasingly common in vegan cooking because it emulsifies the way egg yolks do.

Also the particles of cauliflower help hold the ingredients together in the same way that a little mustard helps keep a vinaigrette smooth, or the way that whipping a bit of cream, along with the butter, into mashed potatoes before they begin to separate makes them seem less greasy.

Sheedy says that the vegan summer squash cannelloni is a variance of a dish that would usually have a lot of animal products in it. The cheese filling of the traditional dish, for example, has a "platform" taste—rich neutral protein that is satisfying to the palate. Pureed beans are an obvious substitute. They're rich in protein, and they readily take on the flavors of whatever seasonings they're cooked with. He says it's fun to create this kind of "costume" dish—vegan food "dressed up" as traditional fare—but he warned me that even though the cannelloni was one of my favorites, he doesn't like to offer more than one or two dishes of this kind on a menu. "Vegan cooking, when it's done well, can stand on its own merits, and doesn't have to pretend to be something it's not," he said emphatically.



When I asked for advice on wine to pair with the cannelloni, Sheedy suggested 2006 Viognier, Callaway, a Coastal Reserve. "Viognier is a white wine varietal that is somewhat uncommon," he said. "It has traditionally been used in blended wines. It is crisp and acidic, though, and has some 'funky' and floral qualities that will complement the cauliflower — which is a member of the cabbage family — and the herbaceous fennel). Being on the richer side— with the cauliflower cream—this is the sort of food that will stand up to a slightly denser wine."

Another favorite on the menu was the sweet corn risotto, which Sheedy said is an example of a vegan entree that does not imitate animal food. He uses corn on the cob that's a day or two out of the garden, high quality rice—carnaroli or aborio—and excellent olive oil such as extra virgin California arbequina, which is buttery and delicately fruity. He also chooses tofu that has been handled and stored properly. When guests object to tofu because they say the flavor is objectionable, Sheedy tells them they have probably been eating tofu that was cooked along with subpar ingredients or was not properly stored.

Charring corn on the grill, he says, adds hints of smoke and bitterness. The process combines the flavors of the rice and tofu, which are slightly floral but essentially neutral, with the corn, which is "flatly sweet." Without the charring of the corn, the dish could be quite "dull and pappy." On the other hand, that char flavor has to be added subtly; if there's too much charring, the more delicate qualities of the other ingredients can be overwhelmed.

He finds that braising bean curd or tofu is a technique that makes it more appealing to those who have avoided it previously. Tofu is virtually taste-neutral, and it absorbs flavors like few other foods. It's important to braise the outside of the curd in medium-hot oil; the process not only adds flavor, but it also gives it a little bit of a crust. The result is a textual contrast between the slightly chewy exterior and the silky inside.

For the sweet corn risotto Sheedy advised a 2007 New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc, Brancott, Reserve, for the sweet corn risotto. "It's is a crisp, dry white and tartly acidic — the sour wine contrasts the sweetness of the dish, and the more subtle qualities of the wine are highlighted by the contrast. Like many New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs the Brancott has wide-ranging tropical fruit and floral notes that fit with the sweetness and floral character of the corn."

Near the end of my stay, I was in heaven while slowing eating Sheedy's sorbet in the Van Horn Dining Room with its dark woodwork, splashes of flowered wallpaper, and mullioned windows. Sorbet has long been the preferred dessert of vegans because it is pure and does not contain any animal fat. The delicacy may date back to the Roman Emperor Nero, and is said to have been brought from Italy to France in the 16th century by Catherine de' Medici. How succulent it is now when the chef uses fresh fruit from a New Hampshire Valley.

For more information visit: www.manorogoldenpond.com

Summer Squash Cannelloni (on Chef Sheedy's tasting menu):

Serves Two

Ingredients:

1 medium-sized zucchini

1 medium-sized fennel bulb, diced fine

1/2 medium-sized onion, diced fine

1/4 cup garbanzo beans, dry

1/2 cup cannelloni (white) beans, dry

2 shallots, peeled and diced fine

1 parsnip, peeled and diced medium

1/2 head cauliflower

1 ml liquid, plant-extracted lecithin

1/2 cup very high quality extra-virgin olive oil

3 drops (2 ml) white truffle oil

2 cloves garlic, slivered

3 sprigs thyme

juice of 1 lemon

neutral vegetable (soy) oil as needed

kosher salt as needed

black pepper as needed

1/8 th cup micro arugula

1/4 cup balsamic vinegar reduced to a thick syrup

For the Zucchini "Pasta"

Cut the ends off the zucchini. Using a mechanical deli slicer or very sharp vegetable slicer, cut the zucchini from end-to-end into 1/8th inch slabs. In a pot of boiling, salted water blanch the slabs of

zucchini for about 20 seconds so that they are flexible enough to roll around the fennel-legume stuffing.

For the Fennel-Legume Stuffing

In a medium-sized, non-reactive pot, combine two sprigs of thyme, the diced onion, 1 of the diced shallots, 1 clove of slivered garlic, the diced fennel and the diced parsnip. Toss with a pinch of kosher salt and a tablespoon of neutral vegetable oil. Set over a medium-low flame. Cover with a parchment paper lid and sweat, stirring occasionally, until very soft and fragrant, about 20 min. Do not allow the vegetables to brown. Once the vegetables are soft, add the dried beans to the pot and enough water to cover by four inches. Bring to a simmer and cook until the beans are soft, about 1 hour. Drain the beans, reserving their cooking liquid. Remove the thyme sprig from the cooked beans and puree. Pass the resulting puree through a fine-meshed sieve to ensure a silky texture. If the puree is too stiff — the texture should be fairly soft, like the texture of the warm ricotta it's intended to mimic — thin it slightly with the reserved cooking liquid. Hold warm.

For the Cauliflower Cream

In a small, non-reactive pot, combine one of the thyme sprigs, one of the diced

shallots, one of the cloves of garlic, and most of the cauliflower (reserve four of the choicest florets for use as a garnish). Toss with a pinch of salt, half of the lemon juice and 2 tablespoons of neutral vegetable oil. Set over a medium-low flame and cover with a parchment paper lid. Sweat until the cauliflower is very soft and fragrant, about 30 minutes.

Once the cauliflower is fully cooked, remove the thyme sprig and puree, thinning to the consistency of heavy cream with the reserved cooking liquid from the beans. After the cauliflower cream has been adjusted to the correct consistency, force it through a chinois to ensure it is silky smooth and homogeneous. Hold warm.

For the Cauliflower Garnish

Slice the cauliflower florets into four, 1/2-inch thick slabs. Season with a pinch of salt and pat dry with absorbent paper towels. In a small saute pan, heat an 1/8th of an inch of neutral vegetable oil until it flows readily around the pan and shimmers slightly. Add the cauliflower to the pan, pressing down gently. When the cauliflower is crisp and well browned on one side, remove with a slotted spatula and place on absorbent paper to blot away any excess oil. Finish with a sprinkle of kosher salt.

To Finish and Plate

Spoon a small quantity of the fennel-legume stuffing onto each of four blanched zucchini ribbons. Roll the zucchini around the filling gently so it doesn't crack or break. Smooth any excess filling off the ends of the zucchini rolls. Arrange two of the zucchini rolls in the center of each of two plates. Flash the plates in a moderate oven briefly to warm the zucchini. Top each with a grind of fresh black pepper from the mill and the remaining lemon juice. Combine the cauliflower cream, truffle oil, liquid lecithin and extra-virgin olive oil in an over-sized bowl. Season to taste with kosher salt. Using an immersion blender submerged only two thirds in the cauliflower cream mixture, blend the ingredients together until they are emulsified and slightly foamy. Use a serving spoon to draw some of the liquid from the beneath the foam. Use until it has the ability to coat the back of a spoon. Top each cannelloni with a crisped slice of cauliflower. Use the foam from the cauliflower

cream to top the browned cauliflower florets, dotting some around the plate. Dress the micro arugula with a few drops of extra virgin olive oil and arrange above the zucchini cannelloni. Drizzle the plate near the cannelloni with some of the balsamic vinegar reduction. Serve immediately.

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