

Review: Farm House lives up to name with seasonal fare

[Tanya Henry](#)

Posted: 10/14/2009 12:26:05 AM PDT



Executive chef Scott Dammann talks with diners Colin Lafrenz (left), Jette Jarl (in red) and Cornelia Peuckert at the Farm House restaurant in Olema. Dammann has put a more local and seasonal stamp on the restaurant since taking over seven months ago. (IJ photo/Frankie Frost) I'M EMBARRASSED to admit that the Farm House Restaurant in Olema has never been on my radar. Sure I've known about the deli and bar, but somehow I was entirely unaware of the restaurant's existence.

It turns out the place has a bit of a storied past. Not only do longtime locals bemoan the loss of what was once their beloved Jerry's Farm House, but the site including the historic bar (circa 1865) also served as the location for the 1980s horror flick starring Jamie Lee Curtis and Adrienne Barbeau, "The Fog." Who knew?

Along with the Point Reyes Seashore Lodge and Farm House Restaurant, Jeff Harriman also owns Tomales Bay Resort in Inverness and McNears in Petaluma.

Harriman has been busily upgrading the restaurant and trying to brand together the deli, bar and lodge. A refurbished dining room now sports a 13-foot high peaked ceiling and lots of windows. But it's the charming custard yellow walls and stained glass details throughout the various dining areas and bar that I found most charming. And there is also enough kitsch to keep it interesting, namely the collection of porcelain whiskey bottles formed in the likeness of Pancho Villa and Davy Crockett among others.

And then there is the food.

Executive chef Scott Dammann was hired seven months ago with the task of taking the menu in a more local, seasonal direction. And he has. The CIA-trained chef and owner of the Cow Hollow eatery Eastside West in San Francisco has worked for the Real Restaurants group (Buckeye, Bungalow 44, Picco) and counts chefs Gordon Drysdale and Cindy Pawlcyn as mentors. "The first thing I did was to go out and meet local farmers and purveyors, who are literally just down the road," says Dammann, who is clearly excited about his new post. His enthusiasm seems to have spilled over to other staff members, including a very cheery server who appeared genuinely proud to serve us at a recent lunch visit.

The first item that caught my eye was a local cheese plate (\$12.95) featuring

Dungeness crab cakes with lemon and sweet pepper puree. (Frankie Frost)
three artisan cheeses, fig jam, fresh fruit and baked crostinis. I knew from that item alone I was going to enjoy this meal.

But the cheese would have to wait as I couldn't resist ordering the Pacific Oysters Decadence (\$16). Six Drakes Bay oysters slathered in Asiago cheese, bacon, spinach and peppers. For anyone who doesn't like oysters, this dish is the creamy, salty answer, but I love the briny, fresh-from-the-bay raw experience. A surprisingly light and delicious blue cheese garlic bread (\$7) featuring, of course, Point Reyes Farmstead Blue and an arugula (Star Route Farms) and apple salad was addictive.

Our exuberant server steered us toward a Mount Tam Pale Ale (\$5) and a Lagunitas Pilsner (\$5), two of the eight handcrafted and mostly local draft beers and perfect choices to accompany a crab sandwich (\$14) and the signature grass-fed beef burger (\$12). Plump and juicy crabmeat sandwiched between two slices of sourdough is simple and straightforward and showcases the crab without unnecessary filler; it was delicious. No complaints about the burger, either; I especially liked the toothsome rustic roll with its crusty exterior. Handcut french fries accompanied both and I ate far more than I should have.

Dammann's menu features plenty of inventive offerings, including an angel hair shrimp pasta in a fennel pollen goat cheese broth (\$18), venison and apple chili with polenta croutons (\$14) and a roasted chicken salad with a pomegranate vinaigrette (\$13). But more impressive is the restraint he shows in his simple, straightforward dishes that allow the ingredients to positively shine. This is not an ego-driven, show-off menu; it is one that takes full advantage of the spectacular bounty the chef literally has at his very capable finger tips.



A homey peach and berry cobbler (\$7) topped with oats and organic Straus ice cream captured the farm-fresh sensibility taking hold at this roadside eatery. Olema is lucky to have a chef of this caliber crafting accessible, far better than average foods with a local, organic and seasonal sensibility at this made-over West Marin restaurant. Even wine dinners featuring local farmers and wineries are on the menu; the next one is scheduled in November. Be sure to check out the stunning grounds behind the adjoining lodge.

REVIEW

Farm House Restaurant and Bar

Address: 10005 Highway One, Olema

Phone: 663-1264

Web site: www.pointreyes.seashore.com

Cuisine: California

Service: Good

Noise level: Fine

Recommended dishes: Crab sandwich, cheese plate, garlic bread, fruit cobbler

Liquor selection: Full Bar

Corkage: \$10

Heart-healthy and vegetarian selections: salads, portobello veggie burger

Parking: Lot

Wheelchair access: Yes

Hours: 11:30 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays, until 10 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays

Credit cards: All major

Summary: Ingredients take center stage at the refurbished Farm House (part of the Point Reyes Seashore Lodge) in Olema. West Marin is lucky to have newly appointed chef Scott Dammann whose menu features oysters, inventive salads and plenty of seafood offerings.

Tanya Henry, the former senior food editor at cooking.com and a judge at the James Beard Foundation journalism awards, has degrees in culinary arts and nutrition and lives in Marin. Contact her at lifestyles@marinij.com. The IJ invites readers to post their own opinions and experiences about the restaurants featured in Wednesday's dining reviews. Enter your comments at the bottom of this story online at www.marinij.com.