

Wines down South

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PARISH PATCH PARADISE

A Tennessee Gourmet Sanctuary

By Doc Lawrence

The journey to find peace is illusive with many detours and I welcome reliable directions. A friend in Nashville insisted that I visit Tennessee's Parish Patch Farm, a destination, I was told, for travelers who prefer the bed and breakfast experience or something closely akin. I found a sanctuary where nature and humankind live in harmony, an experience usually found in the pages of great books, the kind written by the likes of Ernest Hemingway or Mark Twain.

My journey to Parish Patch was part of my annual service as a judge for the Jack Daniel's International Barbeque Competition in nearby Lynchburg. Parish Patch is near the Tennessee towns of Tullahoma and Manchester, and soon after arrival became my Balm in Gilead.

First impressions, according to author Malcolm Gladwell in his New York Times best seller Blink, are powerful. When I met innkeeper David Hazelwood, who along with wife Claudia maintains the buildings, grounds, animals, wine cellar and kitchen at Parish Patch, I encountered a kindred spirit. Hazelwood, a dead ringer for the late singer songwriter Roger Miller (Big River), is a gifted storyteller with a penchant for cerebral conversation about myriad subjects. After an initial handshake we were engaged in a lively chat about wines, family, buffalo and cattle, plus the great dish he imported from Kentucky, Burgoo, a distant relative of Brunswick Stew.

The accommodations at Parish Patch offer choices of sleeping in the magnificent lodge with luxury amenities or the cottages which are just a short invigorating walk to each morning's country breakfast. Starting out with coffee, eggs, country ham, homemade sausage, hot biscuits and fresh pastries kickstarts a day of promise.

The fields below the lodge and cottages were once a Confederate army



The Hazelwood's

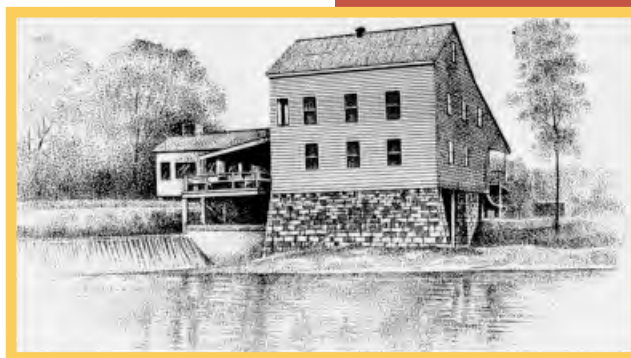
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encampment and sitting before the spectacular bonfire at night singing songs ranging from gospel to country, folk and popular, I felt the comforting spiritual presence of young men destined to suffer wounds and death at the nearby Civil War battles of Stone's River and Franklin.

FINE COUNTRY DINING

In addition to the comforts of Parish Patch, there is nearby gourmet dining at Cortner's Mill, another of the Hazelwood's enterprises. This well-preserved former gristmill sits perched alongside the mighty Duck River. The roar of water over the dam adds to the romantic ambience. Going back to 1825, Cortner's Mill has been part of feeding the community in this part of the Volunteer state. Where corn was once ground, fresh bread, homemade desserts, fabulous entrées are served to guests including honeymooners and occasional old salty dog journalists. This is the area headquarters for elegant country dining complete with a distinguished wine cellar.



The menu is what I call Deep South gourmet. The wine list is superior to many highly rated restaurants in Fort Lauderdale, Charleston and Atlanta. One wine caught my attention, the Pouilly Fuisse from Laboure Roi, the great French wine merchant in Burgundy where my old friend Armand Cottin serves as president. It was a perfect fit: a noble French wine in a restaurant that serves fresh local grown food, has a gifted chef and provides gracious table service.

The menu is extensive and the variety reflects planning and care. Choices include slow cooked dry rub seasoned ribs, Duck Riverbank frog legs, perfectly prepared grilled rack of lamb and baked Tennessee Rainbow trout. Everything is finished with flaming Banana's Foster made tableside, the first time I've enjoyed this dessert since dining at Brennan's on Royal Street in New Orleans.



The extensive wine list includes Hess Select Chardonnay, Leflaive Puligny Montrachet, Michel Picard Syrah, Michel Picard Chateauneuf du Pape,

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Chateau Moulin de Duhart, Ironstone Cabernet Sauvignon and Veuve Cliquot Brut Champagne, wines not commonly offered in remote country inns. Having these for consideration is exciting. Drinking them to accompany the wonderful food combined for a memorable dinner that inspires a return visit.

Normandy is a quintessential rural Tennessee village with all the charm and friendliness of the Irish countryside. An eloquent lady is the minister at the historic Presbyterian church. We gave thanks for all life's blessings, receiving reminders that there is always more work to do in the quest for peace and elimination of suffering.

Normandy is also close to the George A. Dickel distillery. With its proximity to Jack Daniel's-about 20 miles away-this is the unofficial headquarters of good Tennessee whiskey, a product that embodies the rich soil, pure water and clean air of the area.

Leaving Parish Patch Farm was tinged with regret. I miss the wit and wisdom that permeates David Hazelwood's easy going conversation. The smell of burning oak from the outdoor pit lingers alongside the taste recollections of good country ham. The antidote is a return visit. Until then, I'll be content with enjoying a glass of wine while reflecting on this glorious experience, never wondering why the old hymn, Precious Memories is playing somewhere on the backroads of my mind.

For more information, www.parishpatch.com.

