

Sustainable Style

Hotels are learning how to incorporate farm-to-table elements into their F&B operations.

BY MARLA CIMINI

The sustainable food movement is growing fast—literally. Today, more hotels are introducing fresh farm-to-table elements into their restaurants and incorporating organic foods into their everyday business practice. Enthusiastic chefs and knowledgeable hotel staff are spreading the word about the importance of food sustainability. Naturally, that extends to food and beverage enhancements.

Food sustainability encompasses organic agricultural practices, such as fruits and vegetables, as well as animal products that are raised without artificial fertilizers, synthetic pesticides, hormones, antibiotics, or genetic modification. Hotels

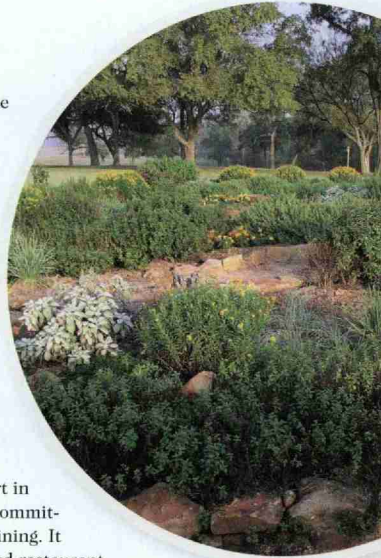
large and small have become more aware of the health benefits of organic diets, and each property has its own style and level of sustainability, depending on its size, locale, staff, and of course, budget.

However, organic produce can turn up in unexpected places, too. In the hospitality industry, vast farmland does not have the monopoly on fresh, organic produce.

The Inn at Dos Brisas is a 300-acre luxury ranch resort in Washington, Texas, that is committed to fresh, farm-to-table dining. It features a Forbes 5-Star rated restaurant, with a menu that integrates produce grown on the property's certified organic farm. Most of the naturally raised ingredients are picked daily from their fruit, vegetable, and herb gardens, including heirloom varieties of hundreds of seasonal vegetables as well as a berry patch and orchard. Recently, a 7,000-square-foot greenhouse was constructed that allows vegetables to thrive throughout the winter months, as well as a shadehouse that offers refuge in the hot Texas summers.

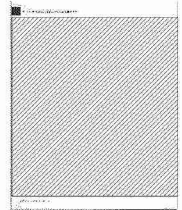
Owner Doug Bosch founded the resort in 2004. Due to the expansive acreage, Bosch immediately brought in a professional commercial farmer to manage the agricultural aspect of the property.

"Our typical guest is fascinated by the quality of food we sell in our restaurant, and they quickly understand the reason why it's so good is that it's incredibly fresh." Bosch says. "Overall, the



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public is much more educated about cuisine, and really beginning to place pressure on both food suppliers and political leaders so that we can trust the foods we eat are safe. Our guests who are aware of sustainability really appreciate the hard work we put into our farm and restaurant.”

On the topic of food safety, Bosch says, “Food safety is paramount. There is a tremendous risk in food safety, and hotels and restaurants who are becoming involved in organic farming and sustainability must be aware of the proper procedures in keeping food safe—from vegetables to meat products.”

About 900 miles northwest in Colorado sits a seven-room historic farmhouse, Fresh and Wyld Inn. It is situated

on four acres in the sleepy town of Paonia—considered the heart of the state’s agricultural community. The cozy inn opened in 2008, and maintains its own vegetable gardens, chickens, berry patch and heirloom apple trees—on a much smaller scale than Dos Brisas. Additional produce and meat are sourced from surrounding organic ranches and farms.

Owner and chef Dava Parr opened Fresh and Wyld because she was disillusioned with over-priced restaurants, and wanted to create an establishment that serves guests local and organically sourced foods in an authentic farm environment. Together with her small experienced staff, she personally manages the gardens as well as the inn.

She encourages hotel pro-

professionals to move toward sustainability, and advises other inn owners to do their homework before jumping into agro-tourism. Parr explains, “Start small, with a ‘kitchen’ garden and focus on networking with others who are like-minded. Work with your community and do your best to promote the local growers and vintners. Don’t try to source your entire menu from your garden. Learn how to work seasonally.”

Parr emphasizes that hotels should embrace their local neighborhoods. As a rural getaway that encourages relaxation and sustainable education, Fresh and Wyld’s “Farm School” offers organic cooking classes, canning, biodynamic farming courses, and walking tours (often taught by local chefs, farm-

ers, ranchers, and artisans).

“This enables guests to learn something valuable while vacationing, and bring some organic farming ideas back to their own home,” Parr says.

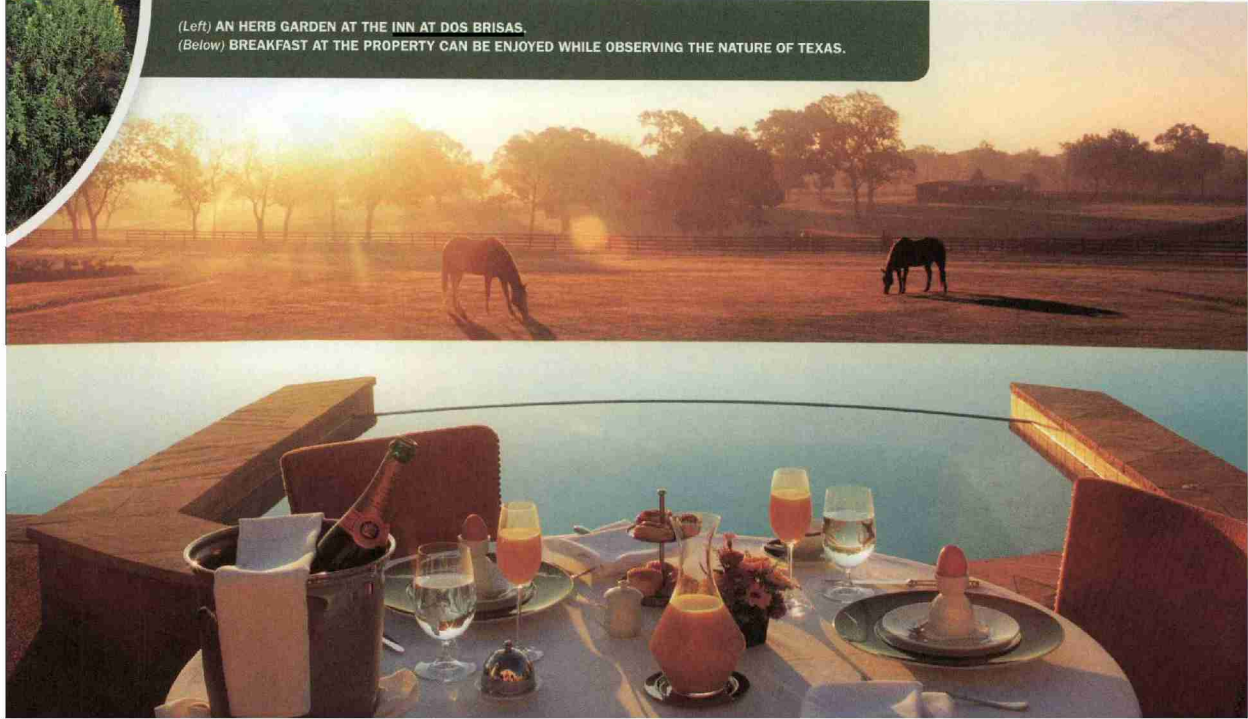
URBAN OASIS

Who says thousands of acres are required to offer guests fresh produce?

On the East Coast, Kimp-ton’s Hotel Monaco in Washington, D.C., has an urban garden adjacent to the hotel’s restaurant, Poste Moderne Brasserie. Initially launched in 2005, this courtyard garden that started with a few herbs now has over 60 varieties of fruits and vegetables including: dill, fennel, strawberries, raspberries, asparagus, lettuce, wild arugula, and several kinds of tomatoes. In addition to providing food



(Left) AN HERB GARDEN AT THE INN AT DOS BRISAS.
 (Below) BREAKFAST AT THE PROPERTY CAN BE ENJOYED WHILE OBSERVING THE NATURE OF TEXAS.



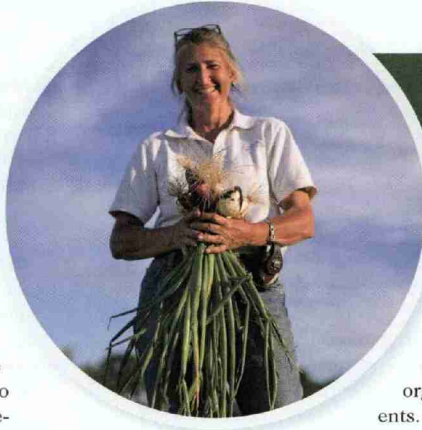
for the restaurant, Poste's garden has given the community a unique gathering place, creating a tranquil setting for dining events. For example, its Market to Market dinner is a chef-led tour of a local farmer's market followed by a meal prepared with purchased ingredients. Their casual Poste Roast features spit-roasted, locally sourced meat from a supplier of humanely-raised, pasture-fed animals.

Poste Moderne Brasserie's Executive Chef Rob Weland says that it was a bit of a challenge to set up a garden in the middle of a city. "Early on, not everyone was convinced that this was a good idea, but I was persistent in building a case and was finally successful in starting a small plot. It

has grown significantly over the years and is a focal point here at the restaurant. With Kimpton's Earth Care program, support for our garden and everything we do as a sustainable restaurant has expanded year over year."

Weland notes how the garden adds substance to the hotel. "Today, we frequently give tours to guests and clients who are planning an event at the hotel or restaurant. I think it reinforces our values as a restaurant and makes the client's decision easier."

Taking sustainability even further, Poste, along with Alexandria, Va.-based Kimpton



THESE DAYS, CHEFS ARE HARVESTING THEIR OWN INGREDIENTS FOR F&B SERVICE, SOME FROM FARMS RIGHT ON PROPERTY.

restaurants Jackson 20 (in the Hotel Monaco) and The Grille at Morrison House (in the Morrison House Hotel) all participate in composting food scraps and organic waste. On average, the properties compost thousands of pounds annually. Weland says of food and

beverage sustainability, "Within the hospitality industry, I think most chefs have long looked for ways to offer more sustainable food and organic and fresh ingredients. I personally think it is important for chefs to single out what their region of the country does well and exploit it, for example, by growing specific vegetables and fruits, smoking ham, using artisanal cheeses from their region, etc. Hopefully this is not just a trend, but something that will become a habit over time." ■

