

Woodberry Kitchen offers farm-to-table excellence

By Father Leo Patalinghug

“Farm to table” describes a movement and an attitude that relies on local, seasonal, fresh and the best quality of ingredients. Connected to the “slow-food” movement and even my own apostolate, GraceBeforeMeals.com, this methodological culinary approach encourages people to eat according to nature – seasonally and timely.

For five years, Woodberry Kitchen, an upscale farm-to-table restaurant, has given gourmands well-deserved excitement.

Locating the restaurant in a recently gentrified area near Television Hill demonstrates the owner’s determination to make Woodberry Kitchen relevant to Baltimore’s history. The former grain barn has been transformed into a chic restaurant retaining a cozy farmhouse-feel. An eclectic décor features exposed brick, hardwood and poured concrete flooring, wall divides from lumber piles, modern splashes of stainless steel, and a large impressive window with Romanesque pillars that looks onto a patio area. Diners can choose from two floors in the main dining area closest to the kitchen or a quieter backroom.

The service is impeccable. Efficient, highly educated foodie hipsters, dressed in jeans and flannel, serve with elegance, sophistication and enthusiasm. It combines the homey comfort of “Little House on the Prairie” and the sophistication of “Downton Abbey.”

Top-notch local ingredients well prepared remind diners of what it means to eat fresher and more flavorfully. Ingredients come from local farms, vineyards or the Chesapeake. Diners can taste the difference.

The fresh-fried pork rinds, dusted with spicy paprika, reminded me of the farm-to-

table fiestas of a Filipino pig roast. Restaurant-made cheeses can compete with village restaurants in Southern France. Pork and beef meatballs offer savory flavors with natural juices complementing crusty bread smeared with roasted parsnip puree for sweetness.

The swordfish flatbread was briny fresh and balanced with texture and the fresh burst of bitter greens. Main courses, such as the homemade beef and pork sausages, pork belly, and the oven roasted chicken and biscuit give meat lovers exquisite flavors and perfect cooking technique. Complementary sides show the chef's knowledge of balance in terms of seasoning, portion control and an overall experience of the farm-to-table theme.

The changing menu's surf-and-turf variety, garden fresh options, and kid- friendly food items make this place worth revisiting, even if it's more expensive than a country diner.

Woodberry offers some of Maryland's freshest seafood, prepared unadulterated, giving the best of the bay experience. The not-to-miss dessert menu is decadent and homey. The wine selections alone make this an award-winning restaurant.

The excellent use of rustic and modern cooking techniques and the fantastic service makes me reflect on how our churches are called to the same standard. We celebrate our ancient faith in a new way. We serve our parishioners with humble, homey sophistication and knowledge. Seasonal farm-to-table eating offers a culinary paraphrase of the Scriptures, "to everything there is a season and purpose under the heavens" (Eccl 3). Woodberry Kitchen offers an opportunity to reflect humbly on celebrating great food, a "resurrection" of a once-abandoned area, and best offerings from our local farm and waters.



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