

A menu that reflects Shaker simplicity

By Patricia Harris
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

HARRODSBURG, Ky. — Patrick Kelly has just completed his first year as executive chef at Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill. This spring, he initiated a seed-to-table dining program that transformed what had been a display garden for historical interpretation into a working garden to serve the kitchen. “It’s a chef’s dream to have a huge garden outside the kitchen window,” he says.

Located about 25 miles southwest of Lexington along the palisades of the Kentucky River,

Kitchen garden, seasonal menu preserve the style

Pleasant Hill was once the third largest Shaker community in the United States. At its peak in the 1820s, the village had nearly 500 members. The village closed as a religious community in 1910, and the last Pleasant Hill Shaker, Sister Mary Settles, died in 1923. Although only 34 of the original 260 buildings remain, Pleasant Hill is the largest restored Shaker community in the country and has offered lodging to visitors

ever since it opened as a living history museum in 1968. With 70 guest rooms, suites, and cottages distributed among 13 buildings, Pleasant Hill always feels like a living village, rather than a stage set that empties out once the sun goes down.

A Shaker order still dominates the landscape, divided by the rhythmic play of white board fences and long pathways lined by plump shade trees. Many of the village buildings, including the old dormitory neatly divided for men and women, are constructed of great blocks of gray Kentucky limestone. The compound is surrounded by 3,000 acres of preserved farmland, now mostly hayfields and pasture. Guests explore the buildings, watch demonstrations of Shaker crafts, take summer boat cruises, and hike, bike, or ride horses on 40 miles of trails. And, of course, they eat. For most of the year, meals are served in the Trustees’ Office Dining Room, where straight-back Shaker chairs are pulled up to hand-made wooden tables lighted by candles in hand-blown hurricane glasses.

“The Shaker way of eating was very simple,” says Kelly. “They tried to eat as fresh and local as possible. Ideally, that’s the way we should all eat.” Among other crops, Kelly grows heirloom tomatoes, cabbage, lettuce, greens, onions, zucchini, cucumbers, herbs, arugula, and fennel. The restaurant serves three meals a day, so he has to buy additional vegetables from local farms, along with meat, poultry, and dairy products.

Certain rural Kentucky dishes — including tomato-celery soup, coleslaw, and corn sticks — have earned permanent spots on the menu. Beyond those standards, Kelly, who comes from Lexington, serves contemporary, regional Kentucky cuisine. Which is to say, he draws inspiration from old Shaker recipes, but hews more closely to the spirit than to the letter. He pairs red onions and fennel to create a marmalade for pork tenderloin. “The idea for it came straight out of my foodie head,” says the chef. “Red onions are plentiful and have a great flavor. I’m a huge fan of fennel. When the two cook down together, there’s just a hint of licorice in the fennel.”

He serves the pork and marmalade with a warm salad of



SHAKER VILLAGE OF PLEASANT HILL

In Harrodsburg, Ky., chef Patrick Kelly made a working garden of what was a historical interpretation. All the restaurant settings at Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill reflect Shaker style.



SHAKER VILLAGE OF PLEASANT HILL

Red onion and fennel marmalade

Serves 4

A mandoline makes quick work of slicing the onions and fennel 1/16-inch thick. The resulting marmalade has a texture similar to sauerkraut but with an entirely different flavor. Chef Patrick Kelly serves it on grilled pork tenderloin over a warm bean salad.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- Grated rind and juice of 1 lemon
- 2 large red onions, thinly sliced
- 1 large fennel bulb, trimmed, cored, and thinly sliced across the grain
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 1/4 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons white wine vinegar
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh thyme
- 1 tablespoon butter

1. In a large skillet, heat the oil over

medium heat. When it is hot, add the lemon rind, onions, fennel, salt, and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes.
2. Add the sugar, wine, and vinegar. Turn up the heat and continue cooking, stirring often, for 15 minutes or until the liquid evaporates and the onion and fennel have almost melted into a marmalade.
3. Add the thyme, butter, and lemon juice. Stir well, taste for seasoning, and add more salt and pepper, if you like. *Patricia Harris. Adapted from Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill*



baby green beans sauteed with shallots and red, white, black, and lima beans. “Pork and beans are traditional Southern food,” he says.

Kelly changes his menu four times a year to reflect the seasons. Although he’s in the midst of summer bounty, he’s already thinking ahead. “We should be harvesting celery root, parsnips, and sweet potatoes into Novem-

ber. My winter menu will be as if we are eating from the root cellar.”

Shaker Village of Pleasant Hill, 3501 Lexington Road, Harrodsburg, Ky. 800-734-5611 or 859-734-5411, www.shakervillageky.org.

Patricia Harris can be reached at harris.lyon@verizon.net