



CHEF JACKSON CLARK AND THE FARMHOUSE INN

| BY TRACY ELLEN BEARD

Joe and Catherine Bartolomei, owners of The Farmhouse Inn, asked Jackson Clark to be the new executive chef after a remodel in the spring of 2022. Before this time, Chef Jackson spent more than three years in the kitchen at The Farmhouse Inn with Michelin-star Executive Chef Steve Litke. Now at the helm, Chef Jackson is putting his spin on the menu and works closely with Wine Director/Sommelier Jared Hooper. The two have assembled a talented wait staff and kitchen crew, and the team works in sync to create tasty and memorable experiences.

Chef Jackson has acquired his culinary finesse by working in numerous California kitchens in Fort Bragg, Mendocino, Healdsburg, and Forestville. His appreciation, knowledge, and respect for local products came from his mentors and personal experience.

A VISIT TO THE FARMHOUSE INN

In the fall of 2022, I ventured to Sonoma County and booked a reservation at The Farmhouse Inn for my friend Bernadette and me. Sitting on the restaurant's back patio before dinner, I enjoyed a fun and relaxed discussion with Chef Jackson.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT THE FARMHOUSE INN?

I think the caliber of our people and the quality of ingredients available to us in this area is a big plus. The dining room was made slightly smaller during the remodel and now accommodates about 36 diners. With fewer diners we can be meticulous about our service and ensure everything is just right.



The Farmhouse Inn had a Michelin-star for years up to 2019. Is there pressure for you to earn one?

The restaurant had a Michelin-star for 13 or 14 years and kept it. We had to let go of many staff during Covid, and we lost the star in 2021. There is more ambition than pressure for me to earn it back. Every plate should come out with the expectation that an inspector could arrive at any time. I am familiar with the psyche of working toward perfection. A star is something to strive for but not to stress over.

How have you changed the cuisine?

I have put my spin on it. I am a bit more modern than the previous chef. I know the foods he served that did well, and I am trying to elevate those dishes and add my own modern twist.

Can you give me an example?

I am making a basil gel and basil powder for the tomato salad. It is still tomato, basil, and burrata but in different forms.

How often do you change the menu?

I change it seasonally, but with all the micro-climates around here, I enjoy making tweaks when something comes into season. When ramps became available, I was excited to use them in a tart dish with roasted vegetables because they are only in season here for about three weeks.

What is your culinary style?

I am very eclectic. I love to take ingredients and create dishes with spices and seasonings from all over the world. I have used flavors

from Peru, Mexico, Morocco, California, the Caribbean, and more.

How do you work on the tasting menus with your sommelier, Jared Hooper?

Working with someone who knows their craft has been fun. We sit down together, discuss my thought process in designing the menu, and then taste the dishes with wines Jared is excited about that showcase the profiles he loves.

Time to Dine

After a lovely conversation with Chef Jackson, Bernadette and I went to the dining room for dinner. We decided to get different items and chose dishes from both tasting menus, Land and Sea and From the Garden.

Something Savory from the Kitchen

Every dish was flavorful, well-constructed, and artfully presented. One particular savory dish was the ricotta gnocchi and roasted Brentwood corn with Australian truffles. The gnocchi were al dente, the corn was sweet, and the shaved truffles raised the dish to another level. Wine Director/Sommelier Jared Hooper selected a delicious 2019 Pascal Clement, Meursault, Bourgogne from France to pair with this dish.

The 2021 Vietti, Roero Arneis from Piemonte, Italy, complemented the Marinated Heirloom Tomatoes with Italian Burrata and Chef Jackson's variations on basil.

Other special tasty courses included Poached Wild King Salmon and Roasted Pork Loin, but my favorite dish was the Seared Hokkaido Scallop with Gravenstein apple and fennel salad. Our server, Akram, poured delectable white

chocolate and caviar sauce over the perfectly seared scallop that was tender and moist inside. The tartness of the apple melded fabulously with the fennel and sweet notes in the chocolate sauce. The caviar added a touch of salt.

Chef Jackson and his staff presented Bernadette and me with a scrumptious and artistically presented dinner. The dining room is chic yet comfortable, and the staff was professional yet warm and fun. Wine Director/Sommelier Jared Hooper brought entertainment to the table with his vast wine knowledge and witty personality. I expect The Farmhouse Inn will be back in line for a Michelin-star soon. ♦

