

# Blantyre

A cellar in the Berkshires is stocked with passion BY NATHAN WESLEY

At Blantyre guests traditionally begin dinner with cocktails in a Victorian music room where a pianist plays “The Entertainer” and other timeless tunes. The menu and wine list are presented, the order taken, and in one of the many parlor rooms, a table is beautifully set for all a reminder of the country house’s rich history and of an old, genteel approach to food, wine and living.

The Victorian-style manor, set on 117-acres of well-tended land in Lenox, Mass., was built in 1903 as a private residence for the Berkshires region. Current owner Ann Fitzpatrick’s parents, who founded the company Country Curtains, bought the estate in 1980 and appointed her to renovate it and turn it into a hotel. It opened in 1981 as a seasonal summer resort. In 2005, Brown decided to make a full-time commitment and opened Blantyre year-round and began adding modern touches. The 20,000-bottle wine cellar is her crown jewel.

Wine is an important part of Blantyre’s future, both economically and socially,” says Brown, who has relied heavily on the talents of wine director Christelle Cotar and sommelier Luc Chevalier to help expand the list from 500 to 2,400 selections over the past five years.

The list presents a generous balance of breadth and depth across the United States and California, mixing mature benchmark wines with fresh, locally sourced varieties. There are deep verticals of Bordeaux, including offerings of Château Lafite Rothschild dating back to 1800 and 22 different selections from the hallmark 1982 vintage. Here, diners can find some affordable gems, such as Château d’Aquitaine 1995 (\$95).

The list also features big verticals of California Cabernets, such as the 1990 and complete listing of Harlan dating back to the winery’s founding in 1990 (\$800) and 14 vintages of Ridge Monte Bello 1978 (\$265). From Italy, there are 15 vintages of Sassicaia 1980 (\$490), and Australia is anchored with 15 vintages of Penfolds Grange back to 1989 (\$750).

The heavier reds are popular in winter, guests tend to enjoy more elegant wines in summer, when the Boston Symphony Orchestra takes its annual residency at the nearby Tanglewood Music Center. “We pour lots of white Burgundy during the summer,” says Brown. The list has more than 175 choices, from William Fèvre Chablis 2000 (\$120) to Ramonet Montrachet 1990 (\$2,000). A Burgundy selection is equally impressive, with mini-verticals of Domaine de la Romanée-Conti and Domaine de la Romanée-Conti. Chardonnay and Pinot Noir coverage continues into California and Oregon. The list ends out with classic Syrah and Grenache wines from the Rhône and Nebbiolo from Piedmont.



Blantyre casts a wine list deep in first-growth Bordeaux in Gilded Age luxury. Clockwise from left: sommelier Luc Chevalier, chef Christopher Brooks, wine director Christelle Cotar and owner Ann Fitzpatrick Brown.

Brooks’ cuisine, which emphasizes clean flavors and light sauces. The restaurant offers seasonal prix-fixe menus (from three to five courses) that range from \$125 to \$165. The menu is concise, but each choice is tempting, and diners will find themselves hard-pressed to make a selection.

From the sea, there’s an olive oil-poached halibut served flaky over a preserved Meyer lemon risotto with blanched langoustines and asparagus. From the land, there’s spring lamb served three ways—as a perfectly cooked chop, tender slices of loin and house-cured merguez—accompanied by couscous, eggplant puree and a drizzle of a mint-yogurt dressing. Service is formal yet unobtrusive, and guests are left to enjoy one another’s company for a memorable evening.

Brown has worked tirelessly to return Blantyre to its Gilded Age glory, and the wine program is a labor of love that has evolved for three decades. Sometimes wine lovers will ask to buy some of the collectibles to take home, but Brown insists that every bottle in the cellar be appreciated within the house’s century-old walls. “I’ll sell my jewelry before I sell off my wine collection,” she says.

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