



Ben Garver / Berkshire Eagle Staff

At Blantyre, above, at an elegantly set table, a meal in several courses took ingredients from many of the farms this column has explored this summer.

# Blantyre lunch gathers a season of farms

By Francesca Olsen  
Berkshire Eagle Staff

If you don't already know, let me tell you: I am The Eagle's new food editor. I really like this new aspect of my job, especially when it means I have a work shift that involves eating lunch at a Gilded Age mansion.

I visited Blantyre in Lenox this week for a food assignment, and Ann Fitzpatrick Brown, the estate's owner, invited me to stay for lunch. So how does this fit into my column on local farms? During harvest season, 95 percent of the vegetables at Blantyre are locally sourced — and I've been to many of the farms. My lunch was a culmination of a summer of weekly outings to agricultural outposts all over the county, and it illustrated perfectly how local food becomes fine cuisine in restaurants and resorts all over the Berkshires.

Lunch started with dark, strong coffee served in a small french press and poured for me by Luc Chevalier, the maitre d'hotel. Two types of bread followed, baked in-house by Executive Chef Arnaud P. Cotar, then an heirloom tomato soup with a perfectly seared scallop placed in the center.

The main course was halibut, which was light and juicy and not overly seasoned, with sea salt on the top which brought out the deep warmth of the fish. It was

## In their field

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served with ratatouille, a shaved potato cake, the French name for which I don't remember, and some French green beans.

Dessert was coconut sorbet and a small sugar cookie. I was full, everything was healthy and fresh and perfectly cooked, and the experience will stay with me for months to come.

But let's get to the farms! A former Blantyre employee provides blueberries when in season. The tomatoes in my soup came from Farm Girl Farm in Sheffield, which I wrote a column on. Other Blantyre veggies come from Equinox Farm in Sheffield, which — guess what — I visited this summer for this column, and Left Field Farm in Cheshire. Melons come from Dave's Melons.

Cotar told me he cooks everything from scratch and tries to make his produce as fresh as possible.

"We use as many farms as we can," he said.

He said it's not really difficult for him to plan a menu around what's in season. He uses the same farms regularly, so he has



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good relationships with the farmers and calls every week to order what he needs. He generally will call about a month before he changes a menu to ask what will be in season.

"I want to build the menu as much as I can around what they have," he said. "I suppose if you want to work with a farmer, that's the way to do it ... you just have to really pay attention to the seasons."

And while it's a significant hit for the farmer, it's not a culinary tragedy for Cotar if he needs to sub an ingredient out due to crop loss (all farming is weather-dependent) — and he doesn't have to do so often.

"If you really want to be true farm-to-table, sometimes things aren't there, and you have to deal with it," he said. EW

## Quiet fine dining

I am much more regularly in touch with homemade, all-access food, but lunch at Blantyre is actually not out of the question financially: A three-course menu is \$55 a person, plus a house gratuity and state sales tax. If you have something to celebrate, this is a great place to eat.

Reservations are required, and the resort is open for dining Wednesday through Sunday (Monday and Tuesday for guests only). This Tuesday, I was the only one there, and they set me up with some beautiful silver and china in the conservatory.

I am unaccustomed to Gilded-Age hospitality. When I am a hostess, I like to tend to people, then let them wander, talking to other guests and grazing off our dining room table.

This was different. The surroundings and everyone's graciousness made me feel like I should be on my best behavior. I had a beautiful, meditative lunch, a short span of time in which I was alone, free to daydream and enjoy without worry or the pressure of deadline.

— Francesca Olsen