

## Sustainable Destination

BY LINDSAY SUCHOW; PHOTOGRAPH BY DEBORAH DEGRAFFENREID



Julia and Nigel Widdowson decided to set up shop in the rural Dutchess County town of Stanford for the same reason the late Hollywood heavyweight James Cagney decided to lay roots there decades ago: a passion for agriculture.

“We were weekenders from Manhattan, and when the children were old enough and out of the house, I wanted to move up here,” says Julia Widdowson over coffee inside the Red Devon, a café, market, and restaurant she co-owns

with husband Nigel. “I love this whole part of the world. I think it’s unsurpassed for its beauty.”

Growing up in south Texas “in a household full of strong conservationists” instilled in Widdowson a commitment to land preservation—a major factor in her and Nigel’s choice of relocation. Though they live on Temple Farm in Millbrook, they couldn’t resist nabbing their business space just 10 minutes away in Bangall, a hamlet of Stanford, about three years ago. The Red Devon is the former home of the Stage Stop steakhouse, in earlier years owned by Cagney, who lived on nearby Verney Farm in Stanfordville.

“It was just too easy a commute not to consider,” says Widdowson. “It wasn’t specifically Stanfordville, but the whole area [that drew us]. We’re trying to really think regionally.”

And nobody can accuse Widdowson of lacking a regional state of mind, especially when it comes to her tangible promotion of Hudson Valley farmers and undying advocacy for farmland protection. In fact, keeping things local is just one element of Widdowson’s overall approach to sustainability. The evidence is in the Red Devon, a sprawling fine-dining restaurant adorned with rustic wood and an inviting fireplace, expansive sky light, and old-fashioned bar.

The restaurant boasts a laundry list of innovative green building features conducive to its owners’ craving for social responsibility. Solar panels, a landscaped green roof, and a rainwater harvesting system draw energy from the sky. An energy-efficient extraction fan moves air from the kitchen, and the building also has low-flow toilets, excessive insulation, and high-performance windows. A 20-ton capacity ground source heat pump, including 11 geothermal wells, provide heating and cooling. Volatile organic compound (VOC)-free paints and finishes were used throughout, as well as materials with high recycled content. And that’s just to name a few.

Almost as green as the structure is the cuisine; one would be hard pressed to find a food, drink, or condiment in the Red Devon that isn’t produced in New York. Grains for fresh

bread are courtesy of the Widdowsons' neighbor Al Earnhart, an organic grain grower in Millbrook. For items like croissants which require heavily milled flour, Widdowson utilizes the King Arthur Flour Company, which owns three mills in the Finger Lakes region. The meats are no exception. The beef sold at Red Devon is as local as Widdowson can get: she raises her own. The glass-encased meat display includes pasture-raised pork from Herondale Organic Farms in nearby Ancramdale, local trout, and house-cured and smoked bacon from De Kalb Junction near the Canadian border.

With New York's plentiful agricultural resources, Widdowson demonstrates through local sourcing how easy it is to be a locavore.

"I really wanted it to be local, seasonal, sustainable," says Widdowson—but unfortunately when she proposed these requirements to her chef, Jim Jennings, he balked at the thought of cooking without lemons. "So we're going to try and satisfy as many of our three criteria as possible. If not, we take it back to two. If we have to take it back to one, it's going to be organic."

Another special feature of the Red Devon is a café that sells freshly baked breads, pastries, and espresso drinks. Surrounding the café is the fresh local produce and goods market; a mounted chalkboard displays the Red Devon's Farmer of the Week (which, at the time of this visit, was Green Horizons of the Berkshires).

"I always felt that the Hudson River Valley could be a Napa or a Sonoma if people would support [agriculture]," says Widdowson.

The atmosphere of the Red Devon ventures into classy and sophisticated, but comfortably straddles coziness and warmth—much like Stanford itself, with its stunning, secluded properties and welcoming family-owned businesses sandwiched between expansive pastoral views and wooded wonderlands.

Widdowson admits the greater Stanford area, with its isolation and "destination" status, loses green points for its virtual absence of public transportation and its residents' reliance on automobiles to navigate its winding country roads. But what this bucolic horse-farming town lacks in downtown feel is more than compensated for in the quality of life, with its natural beauty, fresh air, ample open space, and access to fresh local food from dozens of area farms—which, one might reason, adds back those lost points.

"The people that I've met, I've liked. I love small towns," says chef Jennings of Stanford. "And the fact that there's a fine dining restaurant in a small town... People will have to find you. It's more of a destination. But to me, it's perfect."

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