

# Green Cuisine

## The Red Devon Restaurant prides itself on its imaginative use of locally grown ingredients served in an eco-friendly setting

By: Jan Greenburg, Hudson Valley Magazine (Published May 15, 2009)



Photographs by Jennifer May

When we first moved to the Hudson Valley, eating out pretty much meant burgers, pizza, and the ubiquitous Saturday night roast beef special. We often went to the Stage Stop restaurant in the tiny hamlet of Bangall. We got a kick out of the 16-foot salad bar with its generous assortment of dressings, and the trip — along winding country roads bordered by pastures of grazing cattle — reconfirmed why we had chosen to live here. We knew that the Stage Stop had been actor James Cagney’s watering hole. And when we discovered it was near the home of the Germond family — victims of a grisly and as-yet-unsolved 1930 Thanksgiving eve murder — a frisson of intrigue was added to the experience.

So it was with a fair amount of nostalgia that we drove to Bangall recently, first for lunch and then dinner, at [Red Devon](#): a café, farm market, and restaurant now occupying the building that used to house the Stage Stop. It is also the Hudson Valley’s first “green” restaurant, having been restored to standards that exceed even those of the Green Restaurant Association (the organization created in 1990 to help restaurants achieve environmentally friendly solutions).

Local residents Julia and Nigel Widdowson purchased the building in 2005 intending to open a restaurant and market that would not only support local farms and producers, but also utilize local artisans and workers. The café-market opened for breakfast and lunch in February 2008 and the restaurant for dinner last summer. The name Red Devon comes from the breed of beef cattle the Widdowsons raise on their nearby farm.

The outdoor area is still somewhat a work in progress. There is a new green roof; the catchment basin, now a gaping hole out front, will be planted with native wetland plants. A mass of crimson clover will border what is now a rather institutional-looking parking area. There are two entrances, one to the market-café and the other to the reception area and bar which opens onto the spacious main dining room. The room, painted a soothing terra-cotta, is the work of local decorative painter Muriel Calderon.

Wainscoting on the walls is fashioned from reclaimed yellow pine; artist Chris Lehrecke fashioned the wood sconces that cast a pleasant, warm light throughout. The white-clothed tables and booths are set far enough apart so that conversation is not only quiet but private. The really cutting-edge “green” features — which include a ground source heat pump for heat and air conditioning, the rooftop solar hot-water system, the basement-level compressors for the refrigeration units, and the variable volume kitchen hood — are not readily apparent. The Widdowsons have clearly made a decision not to aggressively broadcast the building’s green credentials (although a descriptive handout is available in the bar area).

Executive Chef Jim Jennings brings his East Texas roots to the kitchen. Some may remember his two Bois d’Arc restaurants (in Woodstock and Red Hook), where he was a proponent of sustainable and local agriculture before it became part of the mainstream lexicon. Jennings began working with the Widdowsons before the restaurant’s opening, developing menus that would support the Red Devon’s ingredient-driven philosophy.

Our party of four was seated at a booth and given the well-thought-out, moderately priced wine list. It offers a good selection of wines by the glass and in quarts as well as full bottles (something we wish more restaurants would do). Glasses of a Guy Bossard Muscadet and a 2005 Domaine de Beurenard Cotes du Rhone were outstanding, as was a 2007 Baudry Chinon Les Granges.



Artistic endeavor: Chef Jim Jennings in the Red Devon dining room, which was decorated with help from local artisans

Both a full dinner and a lighter bar menu are available in the evening, and we chose from each. The house-smoked trout and fennel chowder with purple potatoes and bacon was rich and pleasingly musky, infused with smoky flavor. According to Jennings, the flavors are heightened by chilling the soup and heating it just before serving. Smoked sweetbreads were firm, not mushy, and served with creamy slow-cooked grits, wilted spinach, and Jennings’ signature barbecue sauce (a kitchen staple that he says he has been playing with for years and plans to bottle and sell at the market). We shared two salads: one of local apples and Berkshire blue cheese with a creamy buttermilk and cider vinaigrette; the other, sweet roasted red and yellow beets with pecan-crusting Coach Farms goat cheese and a tangy blood orange vinaigrette.

Being lovers of all things pig, we were curious about the rack of pork, for us an unfamiliar cut. When asked, our server said that she didn’t know what it was either. When we (nicely) suggested she find out, she returned to tell us it was the loin with the bone still attached. (Note to the kitchen: the waitstaff could be better informed about sources and preparation.) Brine-roasted and served with mashed potatoes, carrots, and a fava-bean purée with lemon and caper brown butter, it was a hearty and substantial dish.

Southern fried chicken from the bar menu was just as it should be, well battered and fried to a nice — not charred — crisp; it was accompanied by mashed potatoes, collards, and a rich cream gravy. At the moment, the restaurant is sourcing beef from Uphill and Herondale Farms, and only using the Red Devon beef for strip steak. The Widdowsons are building up their herd, choosing to breed from within for genetic purposes. Eating grass-fed livestock raised on different farms is a singular pleasure, since the taste and mouth “feel” of the meat varies according to the breed and pasture used. We sampled the short ribs from a British White breed. Served with a roasted garlic risotto, roasted root vegetables, and

Brussels sprouts, they had a pleasantly clean, almost savory flavor. The Red Devon strip steak, aged in-house for about three weeks, was richer in flavor with a mouth feel more akin to that of a conventionally grain-raised animal. The accompanying frites, always a test for any kitchen, were perfectly crisp (all too often, they're soggy).



Just like Mama's: Jennings uses his mother's Texas recipe for buttermilk pie, which includes eggs from Thunder Hill Farm, butter from Ronnybrook Dairy, and ice cream made with Hudson Valley Fresh milk

For dessert, we shared a buttermilk pie served with house-made ice cream using milk provided by Hudson Valley Fresh; according to one in our party, it was "the best ice cream I have ever had!" All in all, we were full and happy, with just one complaint: Despite reassurances from the always friendly waitstaff, the wait between courses and for our appetizers was unsettlingly long.

In addition to dinner, the Red Devon serves breakfast and lunch and sells prepared food at the market. The burgers, hot dogs, bacon, sausages, charcuterie, and hams allow for the use of whole animals, and the kitchen does well by them. Sandwiches are generous, easily big enough for two. Roast beef and meatloaf (the latter served with smoked bacon, fried onion rings, a homemade spicy catsup, and sprigs of rosemary) are

two standouts. Less successful is the Monte Cristo. Turkey breast, ham, Gruyère cheese, and blackberry jam on a deep-fried challah is a dysfunctional marriage between breakfast and lunch. Chili has just a bite of spice, and is available with or without meat.

This is a big enterprise; Jennings is assisted in the kitchen by Sara Lukasiewicz, a CIA grad who handles much of the butchering and charcuterie; Edmund Haase, Jr., the former chef at Meals on Wheels in Hyde Park, who concentrates on sourcing livestock and produce; and Brian Henderson, who prepares fresh baked goods and pastries almost daily.

We're definitely rooting for the Red Devon. Not only is it serving what has been a chronically food-deprived area, but it is doing it right, with its commitment to environmental and social responsibility. Knowing that you are supporting your community while partaking of really fine food makes the experience just that much better.

### **Red Devon Restaurant & Market**

► 108 Hunns Lake Rd., Bangall

845-868-3175 or [www.reddevonrestaurant.com](http://www.reddevonrestaurant.com)

Dinner Thurs.-Sat. 6-9:30 p.m., Sun. brunch 11 a.m.- 2 p.m.

Appetizers \$11-\$15, entrées \$23-\$32, desserts \$8-\$14