

# Foodie scene is the cherry on top for Traverse City

Wine, beer, food and fruit thrive in this 'magical little bubble' in Michigan

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 USA TODAY

to find culinary offerings (and interest) and an opportunity to contribute. The Michigan vacation destination is still the Cherry Capital of the state, with an annual festival drawing half a million visitors and downtown's Front Street filled with vendors offering products made with the fruit. But the food and beverage scene has grown far more sophisticated.

"Traverse City has transformed itself so much," Oosterhouse says. "The flavors and the profiles of everyone here have elevated, so it's changed what you can expect."

Many credit celebrity chef Mario Batali with boosting interest in dining here. Batali began visiting the area just one week every summer and now stays from June to Labor Day.

"The chefs involved in the scene celebrate what's here; they're not trying to be anything they're not," Batali says. "Now people are coming for gastro-nomic tourism."

You can often get recommendations from Batali via Twitter, and it's no secret he's one of the many fans of The Cooks' House, the city's claim to culinary fame.

Quaint despite its stardom, The Cooks' House is in an unassuming white house. Chefs Eric Patterson and Jennifer Blakeslee create an ever-changing seasonal menu sourcing from local farms.

A partially open kitchen offers four chefs' table seats in front of the action. And the intimate dining room set among bookshelves, delicate art and a seamlessly integrated bar feels as if you're being entertained in their home. Five- and seven-course tasting menus offer samplings of the beautifully presented dishes, but ordering a la carte won't take away from the unforgettable experience.

Perhaps the only other eatery

quite as committed to local sourcing is Trattoria Stella in The Village at Grand Traverse Commons. Equally popular with locals, the Italian restaurant has changed its menu daily for 12 years and lists the farms and purveyors that provide ingredients.

Track down your favorite finds from dinner at the Sara Hardy Farmers Market on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The waterfront gathering draws locals and visitors for fresh produce and flowers, Boss Mouse's famous Smoked Butter cheese and 9 Bean Rows' wait-worthy croissants and pastries. Choose bread from Bay Bread Co., grab raw local honey from Champion Hill Farm and pack your own picnic to enjoy across the street in Clinch Park or out on Old Mission Peninsula.

The scenic half-hour drive to the Old Mission Lighthouse winds along a trail of 10 wineries. Find flights of three to six samples, plenty of picnic opportunities and local goods at each.

The beer scene is just as compelling for drives outside downtown. Grand Traverse is home to 19 microbreweries and counting, and every local has a favorite or two. For a brewery unlike most, venture to Brewery Terra Firma, which is growing its own ingredients on a 10-acre farm.

Here, I walk past the herb garden to the hop yard, where a smiling guy in a Hawaiian shirt joins me, beer in hand. Vice president Charlie Kinzel nods as I review all of the breweries I've stopped in and my awe that each is travel-worthy and distinct.

"It's a magical little bubble and everyone's doing well," he says. "We're not 'Us, too.' We're who we are, and we're completely different."

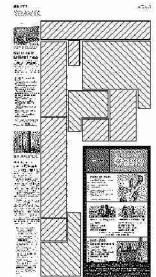
**A** TRVERSE CITY, MICH. rhythm of wine splashing, glasses clinking, staff murmuring tasting notes and groups laughing in the distance echoes beneath the high ceilings at Bonobo Winery's wide-open tasting room. Like a host in his own home, co-owner Todd Oosterhouse makes the rounds, asking guests at the bar if they need anything.

Moments later he's giving me the grand tour when we peek in on groups in several breakout areas designed for conversations one wouldn't have at a crowded bar.

"People can hang out and escape the tasting room cattle-call feel," says Oosterhouse, who opened the winery in December 2014 with his brother, Carter. "We just wanted that comfortable feel, whether you walk in in shorts or a tuxedo."

Though it's the nicest tasting room (or combination of rooms) I've ever seen — you may know Carter from cable design shows *Trading Spaces* or *Million Dollar Rooms* — I am at ease in what feels like the set of a photo shoot.

The Oosterhouses are two of many Traverse City natives who returned home in the past decade





PHOTOS BY ASHLEY DAY, USA TODAY

**At Traverse City Whiskey Co., you can try a flight of four varieties, including bourbon whiskey infused with cherries.**



**Grab a salad with arugula, roasted beets, raita sauce and quail egg at The Cooks' House.**

**Find every  
variation  
of cherry-  
infused foods  
at Cherry  
Republic on  
Front Street.  
Sample  
mustards,  
sausages,  
salsas,  
sauces,  
coffee, jams,  
candy and  
pastries.**

