

When first walking into the *Stone Barns* center in Pocantico Hills, NY, you almost forget that you're still in New York, there for a 21-course farm to table feast. Rather, you feel like you're on the set of *Game of Thrones* waiting for a giant dragon to swoop down from above you.



The property is majestic; with a structure that indeed looks like a stone castle on a property of luscious greenery. Maybe it was the impending feast that connected it all, but what I know is that walking in, I felt like royalty amongst this opulent backdrop.





As we walked up to the building, we were asked to wait in a beautiful enclosed stone veranda. We were soon greeted by a staff member, James, our tour guide for the next hour, who straight from the start, was clearly passionate about his role at the farm.

As a quick lay of the land, Blue Hills and Stone Barns are not the same entity, but are indeed related. *Blue Hill* is the restaurant owned by chef Dan Barber along with his siblings David and Lauren Barber. The Restaurant is situated on the farm known as *Stone Barns Center of Food and Agriculture*, a non-profit organization meant to provide an area of excellence for food and agricultural sustainability. The farm was originally a dairy farm owned by the Rockefeller family, and they eventually donated the farm and started working closely with the Barber family. As mentioned on the website, "*their goal was a working farm practicing innovative and transparent four-season agriculture, open to the public as a hub of learning, creativity and experimentation. They envisioned a place where people could connect with the land and farmers, a place that would inspire people to create and participate in a more ecological food culture*". The partnership between the Stone Barns Center and Blue Hill truly embraces the concept of a farm-to-table sustainable ecosystem.



We walked through a number of areas that directly sourced the meal we were about to indulge in. This included their massive indoor greenhouse where they grew a variety of key ingredients such as different varieties of radish, tomatoes, etc...





Their bakery was certainly one of the highlights of my day, as the bakery was nothing short to fantastical (once again reminding of a bakery that would exist in the Game of Thrones show). It had an actual stone mill, and loaves of fresh bread all lined up to perfection.



One of the other noteworthy areas we stopped by was their mint garden; yes, mint garden! A garden that held almost a dozen different types of mint leaves; from peppermint to spearmint to even chocolate mint (yes... it smelt just like the ice cream!).



Before being escorted to the dining room, for what was considered the main feature of the night, we stopped by their outdoor bbq pit area where we learned a number of interesting facts about charcoal. For example, animal bones can be used as charcoal!

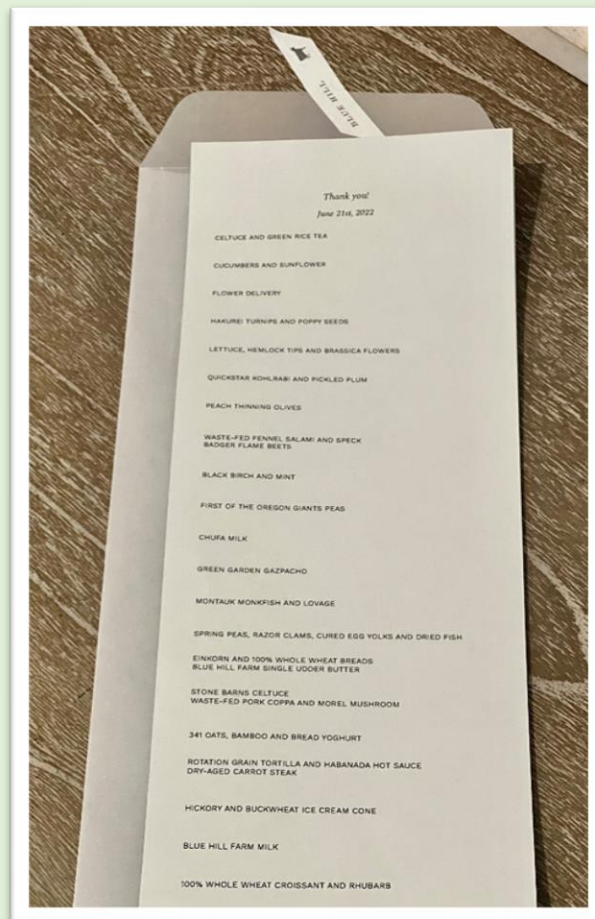


In fact throughout the night we continuously learnt a variety of interesting tid-bits of information. Here are a few highlights,

1. You can use bone as charcoal; at Blue Hill they try to use all parts of the animal as efficiently as possible.
2. The stress hormone Cortisol can cause “holes” in your bones; in both animals such as cattle and in humans! Blue Hill farms does their best to reduce stress in their livestock in order to raise them in the healthiest way possible.
3. Endosperm is wheat is the innermost layer; and the layer with the least nutrition. It’s also what “white” bread/flour is made from. Bleached white flour is where they literally bleach the endosperm. Blue Hill uses only the outer more nutritious layers for ALL of their flour uses.
4. Oats naturally contain a lot of healthy lipids in its composition. Most companies extract that out to reduce the fat content; but that’s actually healthy fats such as omegas. It also serves as a great filler with meat to reduce meat consumption.
5. At Blue Hill, they try to minimize meat by making it the side feature along with lots of healthy vegetables and grains.

What we didn’t get to see were happy grass-fed cows, chicken and other livestock, which I hope to go see sometime in the near future.

Finally....On to the dinner!



We started by entering a beautifully decorated bar area, followed by a perfectly rustic chic dining area.



It's almost an obvious statement to say that dinner was incredible! It was *Incredibly* tasty, *Incredibly* unique and more than anything, *Incredibly* presented! It truly brought together the full concept of farm to table, where all we had seen came together perfectly plated in this magnificent meal; All of the produce we saw in its growth phase on the farm presented itself thoughtfully throughout the meal; the cute turnips, the buttery lettuce, the beautiful flowers, the mint. The milk & eggs from the local cows tasted fresher than you can imagine and that healthy whole wheat made for a terrific croissant dessert.

A few of my favorites included,

- Tasting the *Spring Peas, Razor Clams, Cured Egg Yolks*
 - The waiter presented us here with 3 different cured egg yolks of different color, which he shredded over vibrant green peas. It was explained to us that the different yolk colors came from the different feed that the chickens consumed. The reddish yolk for example came from feeding the chickens a diet high in red-pepper. Not only did the color reveal itself, but the red-pepper flavor fully came out in the taste of the shaved egg yolk. It was one of the most unique culinary things that I've ever seen.



- Being escorted into the Kitchen to watch the team at work,
 - Being a foody who happens to be in the world of sustainability has given me the pleasure of being an ambassador to a lovely NGO called *Chefs4Impact*. Upon making the reservation, I happened to mention this to the restaurant, and given the mission of Blue Hill Stone Barns, they happily embraced this and mentioned that the chef would come and say hello during dinner. Well, not only did he say hello, he invited our table to come sit in the kitchen during a portion of our meal to watch their magnificent kitchen in action. It was truly chaotic, inspiring and very memorable for us all.



I won't ruin the whole experience for you, but to wet your palates I'll leave you with some pictures of the meal and hope that it entices you to try this for yourselves.











-By Shila Wattamwar