



Blackberry Farm

The addition of cottages, organic gardens, and a signature restaurant gives us another reason to love this classic resort in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains

BY CLINTON SMITH PHOTOGRAPHED BY MONICA BUCK



Kristian Holbrook feeds the sheep before preparing them for milking. OPPOSITE PAGE: Blackberry Farm's white Virginia-style fence has become an icon of the resort.

The golden foliage of the Great Smoky Mountains peaks in October. OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP TO BOTTOM: Cheese is made on-site with fresh milk from the farm's sheep and goats. Haesel Charlesworth makes jams and jellies, just one of the food crafts the FarmStead seeks to revive. Farm-fresh eggs often show up in dishes on the resort's various menus. Garden manager Jeff Ross brings in one of the last harvests of fall vegetables.

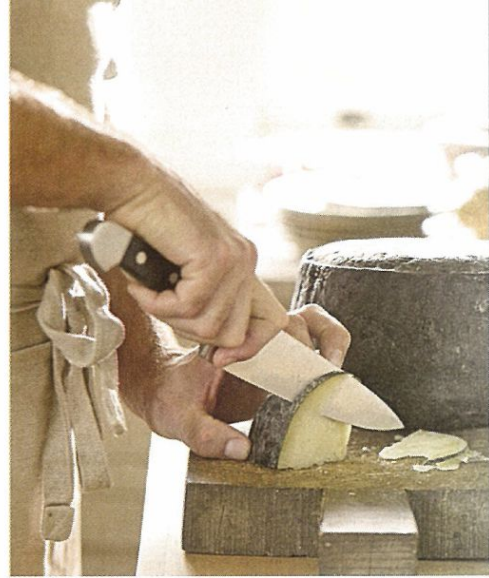


The winding, unmarked blacktop road that leads to Blackberry Farm

is unassuming, at best. While new visitors to the Relais & Châteaux resort look for any indication that they are even on the right road, repeat guests have come to recognize the white fence that precedes the main entrance as an extended welcome to the 4,200-acre property. But these days, it's the glimpse of a new collection of farm buildings rising from a grassy knoll that raises the level of anticipation for passersby, including myself, en route.

Although these structures look as if they've been there for hundreds of years, frequent visitors will wonder if they sprouted from the rich Tennessee soil since their last visit. Long a culinary destination in itself, the resort recently spilled over to the adjacent 640-acre parcel of land it acquired six years ago to bring the farm-to-table (or field-to-fork) experience to guests, looking to the property's historic roots as a working farm for inspiration. With the addition of these buildings, along with 11 new guest cottages, a series of organic gardens, a larder, and a creamery, Blackberry Farm has created a new anchor community for its renowned food and wine program called the FarmStead.

The resort's new signature restaurant, The Barn, is the focal point of the FarmStead. *Majestic* is a word I've used only to describe things such as Gothic cathedrals or, maybe, Swiss mountain vistas, but here it's the word that best describes this restaurant, with its soaring 29-foot ceilings and grand stone fireplace. Designer Suzanne Kasler brought elegance to the 19th-century rough-hewn structure that Blackberry Farm founder Kreis Beall had relocated to the property. For oenophiles, it's the 8,000-square-foot wine cellar, complete with a tasting room and a 40-foot-long dining table with seating for 50, that is no doubt the building's



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The Farm in Fall Don't miss these events at the resort.

September 14–16: OR16
Chef Nate Appleman of A16 in San Francisco teams up with David O'Reilly of Owen Roe Wineries in Oregon.

September 19–21: Bird Watching: Annual Hawk Migration Watch the hawks as they migrate South for the winter.

November 14–16: Behind the Lens Learn the secrets of capturing the perfect moment during a weekend of digital photography.

December 12–14: Reading Series Share a weekend of conversation and readings by the fire with a Southern author.



pièce de résistance. As for the food, each of chef Peter Glander's dishes is inspired by local culinary traditions, dubbed Foothills cuisine, and features ingredients from the resort's working farm, as well as produce, vegetables, and livestock from other farms and farmers in the surrounding East Tennessee community. Proprietor Sam Beall often taps notable chefs and vintners from across the country and globe to visit the resort; these visitors have become a star attraction, and The Barn is their new venue for cooking classes and wine tastings. "For the past 11 years, we have been thrilled to share with guests some of the most talented food and wine personalities in the world. Now, we are more excited than ever to do so in a setting designed for just that purpose," says Beall.

One of the most endearing, if not most important, things taking place at Blackberry Farm is the revival and documentation of the lost art of farm crafts, including cider pressing, seed saving, canning, and preserving. With the addition of a creamery and a larder, the resort has taken an active role in resurrecting long-forgotten Southern food and farming traditions that served rural communities for generations. Guests can be hands-on with the various tasks. My visits with jam maker Haesel Charlesworth to learn about canning, pickling, and preserving local fruits and vegetables, as well as with master gardener John Coykendall for a crash course on seemingly exotic heirloom vegetables from the region, brought back memories of gardening and spending time in the kitchen with my grandparents when I was a child.

Though guests can immerse themselves in these farm experiences, a visit to the resort in no way means roughing it. My stay in one of the new Singing Brook cottages put me closest to the FarmStead facilities and activities. Each cottage is like a miniature home away from home. The large, luxurious bathtubs alone are worth the trip.

And while the favorite standbys of a Blackberry Farm visit remain—spa treatments, horseback riding, hiking, fly-fishing and, yes, sheer relaxing—the FarmStead offers experiences I know I won't find anywhere else. ♦

For details, see *Sourcebook*, page 199.

ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT: The Barn is the center of activity for Blackberry Farm's new FarmStead experience, which regularly hosts world-class chefs and vintners. Designer Suzanne Kasler imbued the multipurpose space, which can accommodate special events as well as cooking classes, with what she dubbed an "Armani greige" palette. "The space is sophisticated but has a simple purity," she says. OPPOSITE PAGE: "It's classic and handsome," says Kasler of the main dining room. Mohair covers the banquettes, and touches of cognac orange are peppered throughout. "We wanted to create warmth and comfort in a space that has such volume," she says. A full-grown tree on one table was inspired by one Kasler saw at the Ritz in Paris.