

Art of dining Great Barrington

Preface
Artist Gregory Crewdson’s studied compositions of American life are famed for their intricacy. But for his last meal the photographer opts for comfort and charm.

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“This area around Great Barrington, Massachusetts, has always been important to my life and work. I grew up in Park Slope in Brooklyn but used to come here on weekends and holidays. My family had a cabin in the nearby town of Becket, two miles down a dirt road. I have early memories of my younger brother and me picking mushrooms in the forest, followed by family meals around a long table. We ate rustic meals but there are key elements from those times – my love of salmon and grilling – that have stayed with me.

I was excited when I discovered that Mark Firth, who helped build Diner in Brooklyn, was going to open a restaurant here. There is a sense of connection when I walk in the door at Prairie Whale and I have my own table. I don’t eat pork – and Mark raises pigs – but there’s a lot of other stuff on the menu. I think the steak that I’m choosing for my last meal is the best I’ve ever had, honestly.

They serve comfort food here and if I’m going to die I want to eat something comforting. I’m a routine-driven person and there are things I eat and drink every day. I always have the same cup of coffee from Fuel, a café down the street. My girlfriend Juliane and I normally run every morning; I’m also a big open-water swimmer. My favourite thing to eat is called – well, I’m a little embarrassed to say this – a Gregory Crewdson Salad. I make a large bowl at the beginning of the week and it’s my dinner for a few days: greens grown by a friend, local duck confit, fresh tortellini and locally made kale pesto. I originally named it the Crewdson Salad



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but after many failed attempts to get my kids to eat it, my seven-year-old son Walker announced one night at the dinner table that he wanted to officially change the name to Gregory Crewdson Salad, I guess in an attempt to distance himself from it.

My work has the same amount of fixation and routine as my eating habits. I try not to make big distinctions between my life and work. I prefer to blur the line where art ends; it’s a sort of mantra. I always loved storytelling and the movies. The pictures I create are in some ways fictional but I keep on getting drawn back to the scenery here. My most recent body of work, *Cathedral of the Pines*, is inspired by the town of Becket. One of my most iconic photos is called “Sunday Roast”, a picture I made on a big stage set: a young boy sitting with his grandmother in front of a slab of bloody beef.

Profile

Photographer Gregory Crewdson’s surreal and elaborately staged images create filmic, dream-like recreations of suburban life in the US. Producing a single image can busy teams of 30 people for weeks at a time and the resulting pictures grace the world’s leading collections. *Beneath the Roses* – a series of 56 colour photos – ranks among his most acclaimed work; his current project *Cathedral of the Pines* will be shown at Gagosian Gallery, New York, in January 2015.

Venue

Housed in a former residence dating from the 1850s, Prairie Whale opened in 2012. It is the vision of Mark Firth, co-founder of Brooklyn restaurants Diner and Marlow & Sons. Firth moved from the city to a cattle-raising farm near Great Barrington in 2011 and provides much of the pork; the rest of the food is sourced from local producers and Prairie Whale’s own garden.

Menu

To start
Caesar salad with mustard greens, fried green tomato croutons, piave cheese and marinated anchovies; or fettuccine with kale pesto, egg yolk and grana padano

Main
Rib-eye steak on the bone with romanesco cauliflower, duck-fat potatoes, bordelaise sauce and shallot butter

To drink
Carafe of sparkling water and Les Champs Libres crozes-hermitage fufoune 2010 red wine

To finish
Coffee and cookies



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Recipe

Fettuccine with kale pesto, egg yolk and grana padano cheese
Serves 6

Ingredients
560g fresh pasta
Pesto
2 cloves garlic, sliced
1 bunch kale, chopped
½ cup grana padano, grated
½ cup olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
Pasta sauce
1 clove garlic, sliced
1 pinch chilli flakes
115g-170g chicken stock
6 egg yolks
Extra virgin olive oil, dash
Grana padano, grated, to taste

The method

- 1 For the kale pesto, add all ingredients into blender then the olive oil until it has a smooth consistency. Add salt and pepper to taste.
- 2 Add pasta to well-salted boiling water. Cook for 2-3 minutes and serve al dente.
- 3 While pasta is cooking, sweat garlic in a pan with olive oil until brown.
- 4 Mix pesto with chicken stock and bring to the boil, then add chilli flakes.
- 5 Drain pasta and add to pan, cooking on a low heat.
- 6 Place pasta in a bowl and make a nest in the middle for egg yolk. Sprinkle the cheese and season to taste.



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- 01 Gregory Crewdson
- 02 Unless you’re looking at a photograph, of course
- 03 Front dining area
- 04 The restaurant’s main bar
- 05 Fettuccine with pesto, egg yolk and cheese
- 06 Rib-eye steak on the bone with romanesco cauliflower
- 07 Caesar salad
- 08 Post-dinner cookies
- 09 Duck-fat potatoes
- 10 View from the bar
- 11 Les Champs Libres crozes-hermitage wine
- 12 Coffee to finish



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I don’t really eat during production because I’m too nervous but it is more important to keep the crew happy. Doug Trumbull, the special-effects guy who was responsible for movies such as *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *Blade Runner*, lives near here and his wife’s sister does the catering for us.

I’d want Juliane and all of our children at my last meal, of course. But it would also be great to have artists and photographers around the table such as Walker Evans, Edward Hopper and John Cheever. Back in reality, I’d invite two of my closest friends: Wes Anderson and Noah Baumbach. It’s always special when we get together but it usually happens in New York. Noah and I have dined together in Great Barrington but not Wes. It just won’t happen. Well, maybe if it were my last meal.” — (M)



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