

SEVEN DAYS

Chef Matthew McClure Levels Up at Woodstock Inn & Resort

With a mandate for sustainability, the seven-time James Beard Award semifinalist melds hyperlocal ingredients with elegant technique.



by **Suzanne Podhaizer** September 16, 2025



At Kelly Way Gardens in Woodstock, pollinators are in an autumn frenzy, zipping through beds of marigolds, zinnias and calendula. Rattlesnake pole beans — a prolific variety with long, purple-streaked green pods — dangle fetchingly from weathered wooden posts.

On this peaceful four acres, established in 2013, ingredients abound in all directions. Here, a hoop house filled with tomatoes, oddly shaped and cracked as heirlooms often are; there, Concord grapes vining over an archway, their clusters a mix of purple and green fruit.

The bounty fuels the menu at the luxurious [Woodstock Inn & Resort](#), a mile down the road past the historic [Billings Farm & Museum](#). Throughout the summer and fall, hundreds of varieties of organic vegetables, herbs, edible flowers, fruits and berries grow. Harvested by the inn's gardeners, they make their way onto thousands of customers' plates.

The immediate beneficiary of this cornucopia is Matthew McClure, the inn's executive chef and food and beverage director since summer 2022. McClure is in charge of the inn's special events, its main restaurants — including the newly refurbished Richardson's Tavern and the well-established Red Rooster — and other eateries that serve golfers and downhill skiers.

With a food budget “in the millions” and, seemingly, a million moving pieces, the job is a huge one.

“Some days it's awesome. Some days it's a test,” McClure admitted with a chuckle. On any given day, his crew might serve 300 to 400 meals. In busier times, the number is closer to 600. But under McClure's stewardship, the inn has emerged with something rare: a pair of hotel restaurants that can simultaneously sate its faithful clientele *and* push the art of cuisine.



Chef Matthew McClure harvesting produce at Woodstock Inn & Resort SUZANNE PODHAIZER

Born and raised in Little Rock, Ark., McClure graduated from New England Culinary Institute a quarter century ago. After stints in other places, he returned to his home state and, in 2013, was founding chef at a buzzy restaurant called the Hive, in Bentonville.

There he developed a style that melded folksy ingredients with elegant technique. He was known for his buttermilk corn bread with sorghum butter; cavatelli with porcini and soybeans; and a playful menu staple he called Arkansas Trail Mix: candied black walnuts and pecans tossed with smoky black-eyed peas and housemade cheese straws.

Seven times, these sorts of dishes made him a James Beard Award semifinalist for Best Chef: South.

McClure had never heard of the Woodstock Inn when its recruiters got him on the phone, and he wasn't looking for a job. "My wife and I had discussed moving back to the Northeast," he noted. "But I had a good job with a company I was happy with."

Plus, McClure was initially unsure if the inn was as dedicated to the local food system as they made it sound. "I asked a lot of skeptical questions," he explained, recalling a moment when he said: "If you're just looking for somebody to stand next to a stove, that's not enough for me."

If he were to take the job, he explained, he would aim for a cultural shift in the inn's kitchens and dining rooms, investment in Vermont's food infrastructure, and eschewing the purely showy in favor of the practical.

"This should be the dining table of Vermont," he said of the inn. "If you're going to sit at your desk, have a glass of wine and write up some dishes, and call a vendor and order everything, you're doing it wrong."

Instead, he suggested, someone in his role ought to be saying: "The farmers are going to dump 100 pounds of [a vegetable] on us, so we need to make a couple dishes out of that."

During the job interview process, as he probed how deeply he could dive into supporting local agriculture with the inn's dollars, McClure was swayed by the earnest answers he received about the property's mission, which grew out of the legacy of venture capitalist and philanthropist Laurance Rockefeller — once referred to as "America's leading conservationist" by first lady Claudia "Lady Bird" Johnson.



Rockefeller and his wife, Mary (granddaughter of wealthy Vermont-born conservationist and railroad tycoon Frederick Billings), purchased the Woodstock Inn in 1967 and reopened it in 1969 after a renovation.

The inn is a wholly owned subsidiary of the nonprofit Woodstock Foundation, which also owns and operates Billings Farm & Museum. This means that although the Woodstock Inn is a luxury resort, its profits feed into the funding for the 501c3 and are used to support a variety of educational programs, as well as preservation.

McClure was sold. As soon as he and his family relocated, he began seeking out producers that could supply the prodigious appetite of the inn's food-service program.

Sunnymede Farms in Hartland Four Corners ended up on the list, thanks to a timely visit by farm manager Wylie Wood, who stopped by McClure's kitchen with a box of Black Angus. Last year, Wood said, the inn bought 6,800 pounds of ground beef, plus a significant number of steaks, reaching a high point during peak foliage.

The partnership between Sunnymede and the inn's many restaurants, Wood noted, has allowed the farm to scale up. "Our relationship with them let us grow so that we could be sustainable," he explained.

"I can speak to his devotion to supporting local farms," Wood said of McClure. "He seems quite driven in that, and it's apparent that it's the model he wants" at the inn.

While limitations in Vermont's food infrastructure mean that McClure can't meet all the inn's needs with local ingredients, he said, he's striving for growth, not purity.

"We have a business to run, and we've got to honor that as well," he said. "We're trying to find that happy medium, keeping close to our passions ... *and* making sure we don't run out of food."

During the late summer and early autumn, that task is much easier. In those months, around half of the inn's produce comes from Kelly Way Gardens.

"It's a little slice of paradise here," said the inn's garden manager, Kevin Jones. "I like to tell the locals to come sit in our Adirondack chairs and escape from the real world." He added that the garden "is open for everyone to come and see."

While it's a peaceful place to sit, he continued, the five-person garden team works long hours to coordinate harvests for the kitchen and keep things beautiful and shipshape for guests who want to peek at the flowers.

To that end, Jones is in touch with McClure almost daily, he said, making sure the chef knows what's ripening and available.



Grounds of Woodstock Inn & Resort SUZANNE
PODHAIZER

Extra veggies go to the “Staff Caf,” which offers free fare to the inn’s employees, by way of an extensive salad bar and hot and cold dishes. “Yesterday it was meatloaf and mashed potatoes,” Jones said. “I’ve never worked somewhere where you can get meals for free. We’re feeding the people who make the inn so special.”

Over the next few years, Jones noted, he’ll be working with McClure to expand the garden’s vegetable production and increase the number of available varieties. “We’ve been trying to make [the inn] more of a food destination,” he said.

McClure said they’re also aiming to dial in succession plantings so that the kitchen receives an ingredient over the course of weeks, rather than all at once. “I don’t need 500 pounds of eggplant in one day,” he said with a laugh. “I need 50 pounds per week for three, four, five weeks.”

He's also working with the team on harvesting vegetables, such as summer squash, at the perfect medium size: too big and the produce is woody; too small and it's squandering the plant's potential, no matter how charming the results.

Using baby produce is "lazy cooking," McClure explained. "I think of my roots in the South, and we're poor. I want to cook food in a responsible manner."

He's also teaching the culinary team to pickle and preserve the harvest, with the aim of serving Kelly Way's bounty throughout the winter and spring.



On a recent September evening with the slightest hint of autumnal chill, it was easy to spot the influence of local agriculture on the menu at Richardson's Tavern, named after captain Israel Richardson, who operated one of Woodstock's first lodging establishments in the 1790s.

Although the Red Rooster, which is open daily for breakfast, lunch and dinner, used to be considered the inn's signature restaurant, the recently renovated tavern is now the torchbearer for McClure's Vermont-driven cuisine. Still, both restaurants make ample use of local, seasonal ingredients.

The fare at the Rooster includes comfort food such as poutine topped with Maplebrook Farm cheese curds (\$16) and a Woodstock Burger made with Sunnymede beef, served on a housemade sesame bun with pimento cheese and bacon jam (\$28). There are also hints of McClure's Southern roots: black-eyed pea succotash and sweet corn arrive alongside local chicken (\$40), and peaches and candied pecans top the Bibb lettuce salad (\$17).

Dining in the tavern, which sports a fresh coat of forest-green paint and a woodsy, well-heeled Vermont-cabin vibe, guests are treated to some of McClure's more inventive dishes, chosen from a menu that devotes a section to fare from "farm + field."

One such offering, a rosette of Napa cabbage, was presented with its ends fetchingly charred, in the center of a green pool of butter beans cooked with preserved Kelly Way ramps and garlic scapes (\$18). Marigold petals and a thick sprinkling of "seed crunch" adorned the plate.

Pieces of medium-size summer squashes, in various shapes and colors, were treated to a hard sear, showered with sweet and floral bee pollen, and dotted with melty burrata and salsa macha (\$18).



Veggies aren't the only stars. Two different staff members recommended the Champlain Valley Farm Hog Chop (\$50). Cooked to a rosy medium, the hearty slab of meat — which came sliced but with the on-the-bone section included — was served on polenta mixed with fresh corn kernels, along with radicchio and peachy mustard, plus crispy fried leaves of sage.

Dessert was a study in shades of gold. A sunny olive oil emulsion, similar in feel to a citrus curd, sat beneath slices of compressed peach, honey ice cream and a pile of shortbread-like crumbs (\$14).

The hues of the dessert were reminiscent of the blooms I'd spied that afternoon at Kelly Way Gardens. A single tiny blossom perched atop the scoop of ice cream brought the meal full circle.