

FRESH CONCEPT

A homestyle restaurant with a field-to-fork philosophy opens in a cozy Newport storefront

TSK (THAMES STREET KITCHEN)

677 Thames St., Newport
(401) 846-9100

Open Tues.-Sun., 5:30-10:30 p.m.,
Sun. brunch 10:30 a.m.-2 p.m.

Reservations recommended. BYOB
(Fifth Ward Liquor is two doors
away.)

Visa, MasterCard & Discover accepted
Handicapped accessible

BY DANIEL COMBS

There's something happening on Thames Street. Make your way down past the overhyped bars, beyond the tourist trap shops and into the quiet residential streets beyond Narragansett Avenue to Thames Street Kitchen, a new, locally sourced restaurant that has been open for just over a month. The restaurant's story is something out of a book.

The chefs, Tyler Burnley and Chad Hoffer, both 28, met in New York City where they both cooked at BLT Prime under chef Marc Forgione (of "Iron Chef America" fame). They ended up marrying twin sisters Anna and Julia Jenkins, whose family has long called Newport home. The couples' paths brought them back to the City-by-the-Sea and after Tyler and Anna's wedding last September, the cooking duo decided it was time to open their own restaurant.

What has developed in the nine months since is a family project to dwarf all family projects.

"It kind of just happened; all of it just kind of happened," Hoffer pondered when trying to remember how they had settled on a concept. What they settled on — which the North Dakota native calls "country style"

— is a locally driven, home-style restaurant tucked into a cozy storefront. Its rusticity is aesthetically peerless; the atmosphere within the cozy dining room is a constant reminder that this is a welcoming family affair.

The 27-year-old twin Jenkins sisters act as hostesses. Their cousin Emily Loftus works as server. Another server the night I visited was chef Burnley's younger brother, Tucker, who shared his sibling's farm aesthetic, favoring Carhartt pants and a worn flannel shirt over the standard striped black of a food runner. Anna and Julia's second cousin Jimmy Furtado built the tables from re-purposed church pews, while their mom, Andrea, donated her house's old windows to be used as mirrors that hang on the wall.

The dining room's centerpiece is the massive, raised farm table — enormous, dark, gnarled and knotted. The table comfortably fits eight people around a fresh, understated floral centerpiece, affording views from one side into the kitchen through old, wavering glass panes and from the other out the open windows to the sidewalk. The table is perfect if you come with a big party, but maybe even better if you're by yourself, when you can sit next to others in a communal affair, sharing wine and swapping stories with strangers ... soon to be friends.

"It's been almost all locals so far; which is good," Anna explained.

"That's who we want to support and be supported by." Among those supported by this tasteful new venture is Simmons Farm, where her husband used to work and where they held their wedding.

"Simmons made the move back here a lot easier," Burnley explained. "We go there a couple times a week to pick up veg." What the farm has to offer determines the menu, which

changes nightly. Burnley and Hoffer build the menu each day and then spend the night cooking for the entire restaurant themselves.

"It can be really tough, especially when we have large tables, but we're really hesitant to hire anyone else," Hoffer said. "With the two of us we know the quality is there, so we don't have to worry about that."

The quality is more than there. The night I visited there was an appetizer of burrata (\$8), the soft, creamy cheese within a mozzarella shell. It was perfectly earthy alongside its vibrantly green accoutrements — biting arugula cut by a swath of sharp pesto, subtly muted by shears of asparagus. It is spring on a plate.

There was baby beet salad (\$7), the fleshy, purple roots mildly cooked, their skins intact. They tasted like something that was pulled from the ground, the way nature wants beets to taste. They sat on a bed of capacious spring greens, mildly accented with some friendly, pickled pearl onions and a sprinkling of mild goat cheese.

A bowl of ravioli came stuffed with a fava bean puree (\$9), perfectly prepared. The crunch and smokiness of the accompanying bacon a perfect foil to the texture of the silky beans.

For entrees there were scallops (\$24) out of a dream. A dish has never been more elegant to eat. Stick a fork in a perfectly seared, juicy sea scallop, whirl it across the plate and it naturally grabs onto the earthy cauliflower puree it's sitting on, the tiny pungency of the black olive vinaigrette around the plate's edge, and the sunny lemon juice seeping from the strategically placed wedges of fruit. What you end up with is a golden bite: a bright cloud of earth, sea and sky on a fork.

Roasted chicken breast (\$17) was juicy with crisped skin, under which



Hands-on.

Tyler Burnley, foreground, and Chad Hoffer work side by side in the kitchen preparing the halibut and scallops specials. The menu changes nightly at Thames Street Kitchen, where ingredients come from Simmons Farm in Middletown, Little Rhody in Foster, Exeter's Shartner Farms and Farming Turtles, and Blue Skys Flower Farm in Cranston.

was a bread and mushroom stuffing. Mushrooms make an encore in the kale, which benefits from a large amount of butter. The salty, bitter greens sit opposite and combat, to good effect, the sticky sweetness of the spaetzle, a German egg and flour pasta. The three components, though disparate, make an amazing, earthy team — a reminder that food comes from the land. Sitting at the farm table, crunching down on the crisped chicken skin, the refined country aesthetic reaches an apex.

Dessert (\$6) is a surprise that doesn't make a menu appearance. The chefs prepare house made doughnuts and ice cream. Neither are what they seem. The strawberry rhubarb

ice cream was sneaky. The house grown rhubarb seemed to grow in power and plant pungency with each grassy, unadulterated bite, while the strawberry lends a sweetness to the strong flavor of spring.

The doughnuts though, were the true game changers of the night. Here, almost as an afterthought, were hands-down the best doughnuts I've had my entire life. Audible gasps can be heard when diners first touch them and they collapse like sugary pillows between their fingers. There is so much air packed into the unassuming, little golden spheres that eating them is like breathing batter.

Yes, there's something very special happening on Thames Street.

Appetizer option.

Fava bean ravioli gets crunch and texture from bacon.
PHOTOS BY DAVE HANSEN



'Country style' Goat cheese and pickled pearl onions go with the baby beet salad, above left. The roasted chicken breast, above right, accompanies spaetzle, kale and mousseron mushrooms. The greens and goat cheese came from Simmons Farm.



Spring on a plate.

The burrata appetizer is mozzarella cheese before it's stretched into its final form, served with pesto, asparagus and arugula.