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A DINING ROOM WITH A VIEW

A local farm, a Swedish chef, and a spectacular setting add up to an exciting new restaurant in Malibu.

BY MARY ANN NORBOM PHOTOGRAPHS BY GARY MOSS



IT OPENED ALMOST ON A WHIM LAST SUMMER, but now Malibu Farm (malibu-farm.com) is arguably *the* most-buzzed-about new restaurant in Malibu. It has become a magnet for A-list Malibuites like Julia Roberts as well as locals who come in with their kids and visitors who've driven to the coast for the day. With tall, super-lean, Swedish-American chef-owner Helene Henderson at the helm, the heart of Malibu Farm is the food. Many of the ingredients used in preparing Henderson's dishes come from the fields of nearby farms—including her own—and are consumed within a day or two of harvesting.

Henderson spent her first 18 years in Lulea, Sweden, where cooking was part of her everyday life. Then, with nothing more than “a plane ticket and \$500,” she moved to New York, and then to Los Angeles a few years later. There she met and married John Stockwell, now a successful actor-turned-director, and she began cooking professionally. In 1995 Henderson launched a successful catering company called Lavender Farms Catering, and a decade or so later authored a cookbook entitled *The Swedish Table* (University of Minnesota Press, 2005). She later became a private chef, with Hollywood movie moguls as clients.

Her husband's love of surfing brought the couple and their three children to Malibu in 2008. “We bought a two-acre property and started a farm just for fun,” she says. Quite by accident it launched her next business and, ultimately, her new restaurant. “Women in the neighborhood kept asking me to do cooking classes, and then one night we did a dinner for all my students and their husbands. From that, several of them suggested I open my own place.”

Part of the California Department of State Parks and Recreation, the 109-year-old, 780-foot-long Malibu Pier had a restaurant property at its very end, which had been sitting empty for years. In June the concessionaire approached Henderson about taking over the space. Henderson was skeptical. “I knew about food but knew nothing about running a restaurant,” she says. “All I initially agreed to was a pop-up restaurant for the Fourth of July weekend.”

The kitchen in the empty café was good to go but the dining area was another thing altogether. “I brought in my friend, interior designer Vanessa Alexander, and in 48 hours she had it redecorated,” Henderson says. They experienced some delays with start-up logistics, so they ended up bumping the pop-up to Labor Day weekend.

With a perfect location perched over the ocean, Malibu Farm is awash in white and blue. Seating 42 guests, the eatery's tables are made from weathered wood. A large communal table, accompanied by industrial-style gray chairs, sits in the middle of the single square room. There's seating for another 24 guests outside.

The Labor Day weekend pop-up was a smash success, and so, without looking back, Henderson decided to continue with the venture, initially serving just breakfast and lunch on Wednesdays through Sundays. Dinner will be served starting in January.

“My husband refused to come in for the first six weeks. He was sure we were going to implode, because I knew so little about the restaurant business,” Henderson says, laughing.





OPPOSITE: Chef and owner Helene Henderson puts the farm in everything she brings to the table. THIS PAGE: The menu is fresh and flavorful, with choices like a salmon sandwich with olive tapenade (top left), and the vibe is fresh and airy, both inside (bottom left) and out.



The focus here is on super-simple food, heavy on vegetables and grains and without too many sauces. Breakfast features items like quinoa oatmeal with maple syrup and coconut milk, and scrambled farm eggs with seasonal vegetables. Swedish mini pancakes with whipped cream and berries offer a taste of Henderson's heritage.

Hugely popular on the lunch menu are the kale Caesar salad and the chicken-ricotta-bacon burger. Cauliflower *lavash* pizza brings the farm to the table. Beverages include freshly squeezed juices like orange, kale, and beet, which can be blended, and the best-ever homemade lemonade. Curbside pickup—at the front end of the pier—is available for those who don't have time to take in the view.

"Fresh, Organic, Local" is Malibu Farm's motto. It's on everything from the menu that lists the four local farms that provide so many of Henderson's ingredients to the sign over the counter where you order. They're delicious words to live—and eat—by. ♦