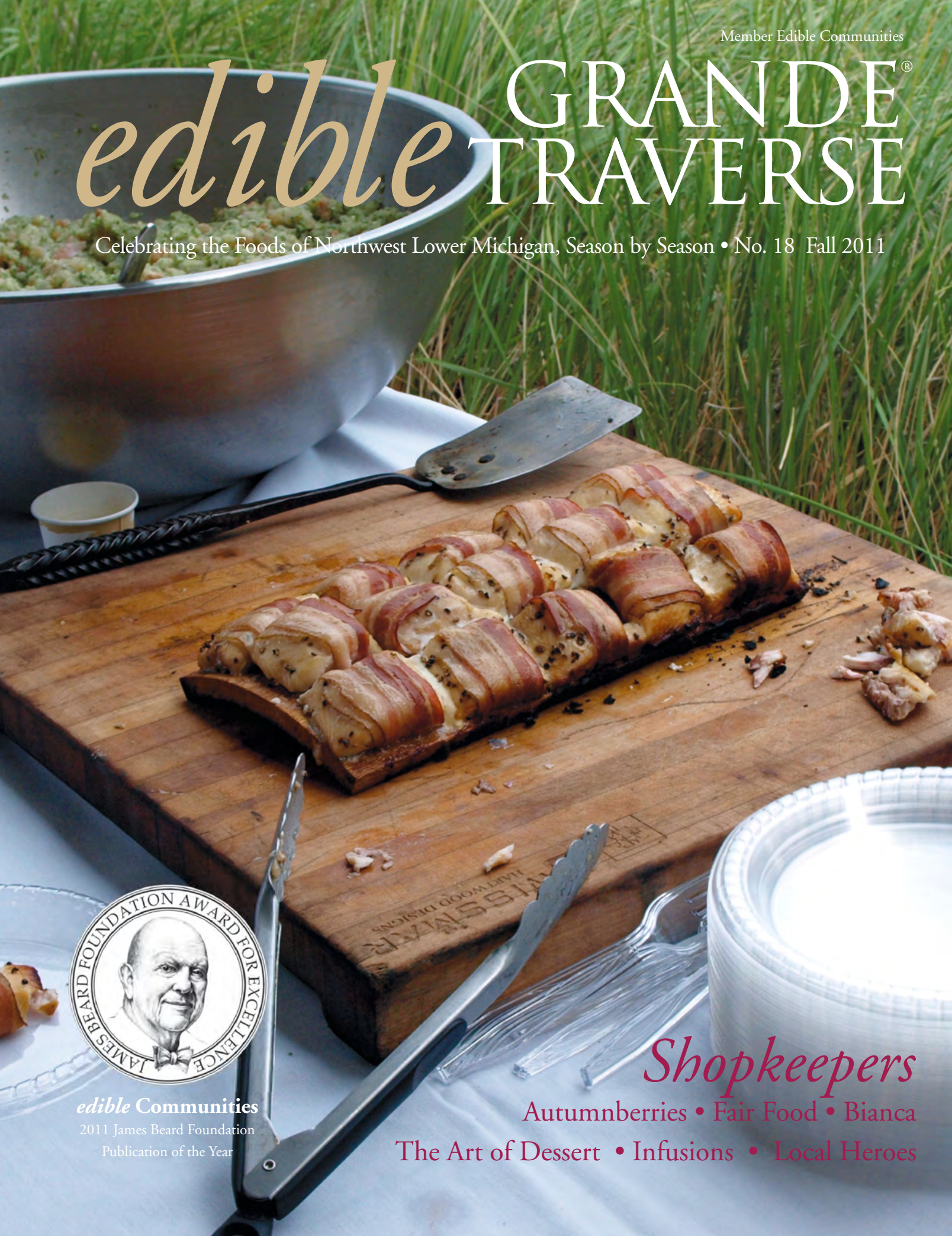


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Chef/Restaurant



FARM TO TABLE THE KINDEST CUTS

BY PATTY LANOUE STEARNS
PHOTOS BY GARY L. HOWE

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The whole-animal trend is resounding at fine-dining spots around the country, thanks to the sustainability movement and big-name chefs such as Mario Batali, who put items like beef cheeks on his menu at Babbo in New York, to the delight of his patrons. Indeed, Chef Anton, who considers Batali his culinary hero, says the meal he ate at Babbo was the best one of his life.

Anton says using the whole animal is not only ethically and sustainably better, it’s also more cost effective—he was paying eight to 10 times more for certain cuts—but still, a lot of work. At the end of the day, his hands are fatigued. He hopes to get faster.

It helps that the chef can tap nearby farmers whose livestock are allowed to roam and are treated humanely, rather than en masse. “The owners care about their animals. I’m not getting a ‘white pig,’ as they call factory-farmed pigs, I’m getting heritage breeds. Halpin Farms feed them yogurt and eggs on the finish, which produces better marbling, pink meat and better flavor.”

Inside Stella’s frigid cooler are examples of his newfound craft: swirls of rust-hued sausage links, fatback curing in red pepper and garlic, pancetta from the pork belly, curing in salt and spices. In the freezer beyond, a variety of frozen ground sausage mixes, spiced with fennel and other savory herbs, sit in packages, awaiting their turn inside the handmade pastas that Stella fans drool over.

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LAMB AND BEEF BOLOGNESE

Serves 6–8

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2 onions, diced
2 cloves garlic, minced
1 tablespoon dried thyme
salt and pepper to taste
olive oil
½ pound ground lamb
½ pound ground beef
½ lamb heart, ground fine
1 lamb kidney, ground fine
1 quart veal stock or water
½ cup tomato paste

2–4 ounces butter, depending on desired richness
Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese, grated fresh

Sweat onions, garlic and thyme with a little salt, pepper and olive oil. Add all meats to pan and turn up heat; brown as brown as you can without scorching or burning. Add veal stock and tomato paste. Turn down to simmer. Cover and simmer for 6 hours, adding a little bit of water if it reduces too far. To serve, toss with garganelli pasta, chunks of whole butter and a little of the pasta cooking water. Season to taste. Grate Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese over pasta.

NOTES ON BASIC CUTS AND THEIR USES AT TRATTORIA STELLA

Pig

head meat—head cheese—style
fritter/tortelloni
shoulder—pulled pork/roast/sausage
loin—steaks
tenderloin—steaks
rib—steaks
belly—slow cooked or pancetta
ribs—slow cooked
round—pulled/roast/sausage
tail—slow cooked and pulled
legs—slow cooked shanks
feet—slow cooked, mashed and frittered
bones—stock/soup/sauce
fat—rendered for baking
liver—bolognese/pâté
kidney—seared with rosemary and
onions
brain—tortelloni
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neck—roast
ears—slow cooked & deep fried
grind—fennel sausage/blood
sausage/skin sausage/country
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[gamey fat makes utilizing the entire
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sweetbreads—quick seared
neck—roast
shoulder—roast
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shanks—slow cooked
liver, kidney, heart—same as pig
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Christof and Isabel Wiesner and Tony Maiele, he “started messing with parts—the feet, ears, head.”

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Certainly, appreciating the finer points of offal and sweetbreads may take a learning curve for mainstream diners. The poetic-sounding Italian names on Stella’s menu help. Above all, the cuisine has to taste pretty amazing for a diner to be convinced. Fortunately, Anton’s cuisine is impeccable.

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And that’s why Anton keeps cultivating dishes like slow-cooked lamb’s tongue, served with lamb sausage and a fried egg with panzanella (tomato-bread salad) on the side, an appetizer that nearly sold out one recent evening and was so tantalizing to one customer that she ordered it as an appetizer and as an entrée; and, because he “wanted to start a conversation about ‘whole animal,’” Anton’s campanelli (little bell) pasta stuffed with pig head, which delighted guests at the Art D’Art event in Harbor Springs this summer. Mostly.

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Serves 6–8

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- 1 boned leg of lamb, rolled and tied
- salt and pepper
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme

Season leg generously with salt and pepper. Combine herbs and oil; rub leg with this mixture.

Preheat oven to 450°. Roast lamb 10–12 minutes, until brown, and remove. Turn down heat to 300° and return lamb to oven. Roast 15–20 minutes, until internal temperature reaches 135°. Remove from oven; allow to rest 10–15 minutes. Slice and serve with sauce.

Sauce

- 2 cloves garlic
- olive oil
- salt and pepper
- 2 large tomatoes, diced
- 4 sprigs rosemary, chopped into dust (no wood)
- ¼ cup beef or lamb stock
- ¼ pound butter in chunks

Rub garlic with oil, salt and pepper. Wrap in aluminum foil and roast at 350° for 10–15 minutes, until soft.

In a very hot pan add diced tomatoes and fresh rosemary. Season with salt and pepper. Let cook until just starting to mush out. Add stock, the smashed roasted garlic and butter. Whip with a whisk immediately to incorporate the butter and pull off of heat.



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