

# Brandywine Valley's Sweet Surprises

NEW DISCOVERIES TO ENJOY AND SHARE

Carol Metzker

LOOKING FOR A LITTLE JOY TO START the holidays? Or a day trip while the days are still gold and crisp? Southern Chester County and the Brandywine Valley hold barnfuls of culinary delights, fall fun and holiday pleasures.

## START WITH A FAVORITE

Meander through a charming courtyard and arbor. Slide open rustic barn doors and enter a local favorite: OsoSweet Bakery Cafe, the Chadds Ford 2024 Business of the Year. The café's coffee and butternut squash, bacon and sage scone are steaming. Snuggle into a comfy chair and sink your teeth into a big

cookie with chunks of chocolate — it is indeed oh, so sweet!

Chef Tess Wofford — inspired by a family bakery in Germany during her high school exchange trip sponsored by the Longwood Rotary Club — brings European influences to local ingredients. Mushrooms from the Woodlands, Phillips Mushroom Farm's shop, and seasonal herbs and vegetables from nearby Barn Star Farm go into fresh breakfasts and lunches.

## ONE-OF-A-KIND CAPTIVATING

Cross a cute covered footbridge from the café to The Naked Lady Gallery & Shop. Named after a lily



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PHOTO CREDIT: WILL SWAN/CHESTER COUNTY'S BRANDYWINE VALLEY

with a bare stem and glorious pink trumpet blooms on top, the enticing boutique celebrates its first birthday in November. Owner-artist Caitlin Michener dyes and hammer-prints fabric clothing and notecards with petals, leaves, bark, roots and more, including flowers that surround the shop in season or grow in her home garden.

The colors are ethereal and natural, as are the textiles — deep teal blue from indigo leaves on a head-turning angora sweater dress and silk blouse. Cotton scarves with gold from last summer's coreopsis blooms. Purple from logwood bark and pale plum from the shells of cochineal bugs that feed on prickly pear cactuses. Find a new wardrobe addition for a Thanksgiving gathering.

## FEEL THE HEAT

A unique spot for a gathering is Simmer Down, in Wilmington's Quoin Hotel, a spot so cool it sizzles. Tucked in the building's basement — formerly a school and the money room of a bank — is a bar so alluring that *Esquire* magazine deemed it one of its top for 2024. Go for the ambiance, drinks that make a splash to fit the mood and season, and curated music playlists.

The design is impeccable: lighting that showcases the vaulted brick ceiling and armchairs with jungle upholstery Henri Rousseau would have loved. Sit at the green marble bar in front of a mural by Philly artist Reverend Michael Alan while imbibing the popular Gravy Train cocktail with Jamaican rum and coffee. By the fireplace in the back, let the fantastical surroundings and a \$42 Oaxacan Old Fashioned — El Silencio Rare mezcal, tequila, orange and mole bitters — take you on a flight of fancy.

1. Simmer Down at The Quoin Hotel
2. Koselig Nook
3. OsoSweet Bakery Cafe
4. Caitlin Michener, owner of The Naked Lady Gallery & Shop, harvesting indigo for clothing



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### WELCOME TO WARMTH

Candles along the brick wall flicker, casting a soft glow over white futons, meditation cushions and soft rugs. At a low table, new acquaintances share watercolor doodles. In a cozy corner, old friends visit around white cups filled with organic tea from loose leaves, zests and essential oils: tangerine ginger, jasmine and “NamasTea” — a stellar blend of honeybush, apricot, clove, lavender and peppermint. Local guitarist and vocalist Anna Spackman strums, singing original compositions from her latest recording. Welcome to Koselig Nook, formally opened this fall.

The community place and after-dark teahouse in the Midway Arts Building in Coatesville lives up to the essence of its Norwegian name — *koselig*, a feeling of warmth and contentment — fulfilling the dream of Ara, the owner. The space’s simplicity allows for dozens to congregate for poetry circles or sound baths, or small groups to hang out in inviting nooks. Without alcohol, guests are encouraged to connect authentically.

To heat up in the cold or charge up with buddies, head to Splitting Edge Axe Throwing, just two minutes from the teahouse. Engage in friendly competition for lots of laughter or a few rounds just for fun.

Catty-corner from the original Hank’s Place — where we excitedly watch construction rise like a phoenix — the new Chadds Ford Coffee House’s space looks like you stepped into a Wyeth painting. Pick up coffee, tea and baked goods at the quartz counter. Then grab a table under wooden ceiling beams or by the stone wall. Behind the scenes, the kitchen is a former bank vault.

### HOLIDAY EATING

Since holiday eating reportedly carries no calories, live it up!

Take a tasty adventure with any number of colorful, yummy varieties of pan dulce from Panaderia Lara. Sample small loaves of lightly sweet bread, with icing of pretty colors, while you wait for your cup of coffee.

For some, the bakery in Kennett Square and Hermanos Lara market in Oxford will be newly discovered hidden gems. The market also offers authentic Mexican lunchtime favorites and pastries,

### Look Ahead to Fields of Dreams

Next year head out back to the open fields at Dove Valley’s vineyard’s where, if you’re lucky, you’ll catch a game of vintage baseball. Cheer on local teams including the Brandywine and Diamond State baseball clubs, both founded in 1865 in West Chester and Wilmington, respectively.

Using rules from 1864 and uniforms — without gloves, as they did back then — matching the ones worn by their founders, they play using a wooden catcher’s backstop held up by hay bales.

The games are grand, old-fashioned fun. All you need is apple pie.

tres leches cakes and a selection of other delights: piñatas, herbs, mangos, spices and sauces.

Along Kennett Square’s restaurant row, Trattoria La Tavola’s twinkling lights reflect in stemware and tumblers with a touch of blue. Friendly staff serve up red and gold plates of large mushrooms (of course) stuffed with spinach and crab and Caesar salad with succulent shrimp. The chocolate chip cannoli with a golden crunch and filling was so sweet I ordered more to take home. Everything from bread at the start to the tiramisu ending is homemade. A hand-painted cityscape of the Duomo and surrounding Venice adds to the charm.

La Tavola is a BYOB, so take along a bottle of local Va La Vineyard’s recently released 2019 La Prima Donna. The nearly-sienna “orange” wine — white grapes soaked in their skins during fermentation — also pairs well with Neuchatel Chocolate’s newly introduced instant favorite: latte macchiato truffles.

### EXPAND YOUR LIMITS

Back in Wilmington, just steps away from Simmer Down and next door to La Fia, the year-old independent bookseller Huxley & Hiro shines. Check the outside windows above for glimpses of Huxley the cat and Hiro the Shiba Inu dog, the owners’ pets that watch over the street and customers below. Shop for gifts: puzzles, games and books, of course — mysteries, biographies, sci-fi and more. There’s even a section called “Curious Histories, Stories Stranger Than Fiction.”

On Concord Pike, Sleeping Bird Doughnuts, which opened at the end of summer, offers such yummy donuts that for the first few weeks they sold out before closing time. One bite of the s’mores brioche and you’ll understand why.

Cross the border at Oxford and land in Rising Sun, Maryland. There, the fun and funky Dove Valley Winery offers never-before-heard-of flavors of wine including orange creamsicle (surely made from the orange creamsicle grape!), blueberry cotton candy and winter spice.

This year’s holidays will be sweeter than ever. ♦

- 5. Chadds Ford Coffee House
- 6. Dove Valley Winery
- 7. Trattoria La Tavola
- 8. Huxley & Hiro Bookstore
- 9. Sleeping Bird Doughnuts



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