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RICHARD FRISBIE :: Destination Dining - Windfall Restaurant

September 04, 2009 05:57 PM EDT

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The Windfall Restaurant in Cranberry Lake is located in an "officially" unpopulated region of New York, 2.5 miles down Tooley Road, just before the pavement ends. I joked as my partner and I drove down the unlined lane, "Beyond Here Be Dragons." Then, just before we fell off the edge of the Earth, John and Roz Dragun's restaurant came into view. Here, the Culinary Institute of America graduate and beekeeping chef decided, "If we build it, they'll come" and, along with his wife, is working to create a fine dining experience in what began as a bar & grill in the last outpost of civilization.



The Draguns are too young to call the Windfall a response to a mid-life crisis, but their youngest daughter did graduate from high school last year. John graduated from the CIA some time before that. He honed his skills in one of the best restaurants in the Hudson Valley, Cafe Tamayo, in Saugerties, New York. The chef there worked at the Russian Tea Room and cooked at the James Beard House three times.

Roz raised the family while she helped with the books and ran a Bed & Breakfast in the other half of their two-family home. Their love of the outdoors found the pair fishing and kayaking in the Adirondacks so often they decided to buy a summer house in Cranberry Lake. With their small-business skills and food service background they were perfectly positioned to purchase the nearby Windfall Bar & Grill when it went on the market four years ago. They went from part-time to full-time Adirondack residents, boomeranged careers, and haven't looked back. Now, Roz runs a two bedroom B&B at the Windfall while she helps manage the restaurant.

It is when you are seated in the Windfall's dining room that you finally begin to feel as if you are in a restaurant, not a bar & grill. It is a sunny, bright, high-ceilinged room with seating for 38. There is no linen service in the area (it really is isolated) so only special dinners - anniversaries, birthdays, etc. - have tablecloths and cloth napkins which Roz has to launder herself. "Everyday diners" get paper napkins and utensils set on bare tables. We were everyday diners.

Roz told me: "We have a split personality, to some degree. Locally, we have a reputation for good food. We get all the bookings for anniversaries, Christmas parties, special occasions, etc., from the locals, and we have a pub menu that caters to their everyday needs. They especially like 'Fish Burgers' otherwise known as Fish Sandwiches. Then we have the broader reputation, for fine dining, that spans to Keene, Lake Placid, Canton, Potsdam, Watertown, etc.... Yes, people willingly drive for an hour or better to come to our restaurant."



My friend and I drove for five hours to dine there, so I know what she says is true. We had reservations (always recommended) and were seated immediately. We let Chef John pick the food we would eat and invited Roz to join us at the table for a running commentary on the dishes he prepared. Then, we just let the eating begin.



It was an odd combination of food delivered to our table. We ate family style, an option regular diners don't have, sampling and sharing the dishes as they arrived. Appetizers, salads and entrees kept appearing in no particular order. Each looked good and tasted delicious, but some of the combinations didn't always work on the same plate. All-in-all, it was an imaginative way to taste the menu, but lesser folks could not have gotten through it.



First of all, the wine selection is very good, excellent for the region, and heavy with New York entries. However, we had an unusual beginning with a young fruity Italian red, Banfi Centine Toscana 2006. It was a good drink, but odd with the grilled shrimp and garlic aioli. (\$7.99) No matter, new dishes kept appearing that worked with it. I loved that Chef John could grill seafood and still have it moist, and that he made the aioli for this dish as he prepared it. Talk about fresh! It turned out that every dish of his that I tasted was my favorite.





There was a plate of goat cheese and feta cheese that had been breaded and deep-fried, (\$6.99) served with a simple tomato marinara. The cheese was from a local farm. When I asked Chef John how fresh it was, he replied, "It was in the goat 3 days ago!" It would have been fine any way it was served, but I liked the

innovation.

I realized that the red wine made sense. Especially when the grilled portobella mushrooms (\$5.99) came out, and again when a bowl of capellini with tomatoes and kalamata olives appeared (\$10.99) and quickly disappeared. This is also offered as an entree with grilled shrimp or mussels. (add \$4.99) I could have eaten a whole bowl myself. Chef John said that some locals hadn't seen black olives before and had to be encouraged to taste them. Now it is a very popular dish.



Next, a personal favorite wine, a Hermann J. Wiemer 2007 Dry Riesling, was poured as the soup was served. It was a Ribolitta, a Tuscan white bean soup, (\$4.50) with zucchini and chicken in a rich flavorful broth. White wine after red? Soup after seafood and pasta? We were like little kids, eating and drinking what we wanted, when we wanted it - conventions be damned. As the plates piled up on the table we turned to a new wine for the salads.



A house salad is included with every dinner, but we tasted the North Country salad. (\$6.99) It's a good mix of braised red cabbage, bacon and goat cheese, but the "house

dressing", a vinaigrette, was too sweet for me. Don't mind that though, anything even a little sweet is too sweet for me. Roz kindly said that I didn't like it because "sugar ruins your palate." Instead, I ate the Caesar salad, (\$4.99) which was everything I could expect, and the dressing - complete with raw egg and anchovies - made no compromise for the parochial tastes of the locals. I was thoroughly happy.



We opened another Centine, a Kendall-Jackson 2007 Chardonnay, and a Ravens Wood 2006 Lodi, a nice old vine Zinfandel, and the second red of the evening. It was really a mix and match evening. (The wines were from \$16 to \$26 each.) There were so many different platters of partially eaten food and half drunk glasses of red and white wine - we were having a ball!



It didn't stop there. The waitress brought serving dishes of chicken picatta (\$14.99) with capers in creamy lemon sauce and pork schnitzel with melted cheese; some of pot-stickers, more of chicken satay, (\$6.99) and a penne pasta with prosciutto and peas (\$13.99) in an alliterative and very tasty dish - especially with the Parmesan! Chef John was having fun, and so were we. His menu is all over the globe.



My favorite dish of the evening was the real Southern catfish & hush puppies. If Chef John had to hang his hat on one dish, I would suggest this one. Of course, he doesn't have to. They're all good!



By this time he was sitting with us, eating and talking about food. The last dish served, before dessert, that is, was a beautiful 16 oz rib eye steak, (\$20.99) red inside, the marbled flesh nicely grilled on the outside. I tasted the pure grass-fed goodness of it and wished I had room in my stomach to eat more - but I did not. We passed the wine again and started to pick at the platters with our fingers while we talked about CSAs, farm co-ops and the wide variety of local food available. Our dinner was a veritable smorgasbord of colors, aromas and flavors, the texture as different in our mouths as the shapes were on the plates. Truly a fantastic meal!



Oh, for dessert (\$4.99 each) there was his specialty, a creme brulee to die for (I'm told) that disappeared as it hit the table. You know how am about desserts, I can take them or leave them. This wasn't my choice - I blinked and it was gone. It is that good. I did try the walnut/pear wontons, deep fried and served with a raspberry sauce. They were outlined in red, sweet and savory, the crunchy, red wine reduction in the filling bringing all the flavors together. It was a fitting way to end a feast.



A somewhat incredulous couple at a neighboring table, who earlier had sent over a bottle of wine to encourage us in this extravagance, joined us for coffee. Jay Rogers, salesman for Newton Falls Fine Paper, said "I am a loyal customer. Not just because of the food - which anyone would agree is the best. It is because of the feeling of family I get here, and the passion for food, that I love this place." Talk about unsolicited testimonials. I can only echo his sentiments. The Windfall Restaurant in Cranberry Lake is a mere five-hour drive away. I'm going again, soon!

ADDENDUM: Some of the entrees are available on the menu as half portion appetizers. That explains why I thought our dinner serving was all mixed up.



The catfish was spectacular, but Chef John didn't like the way it was plated by his sous chef, so for lunch the next day he served it to me correctly. I actually ate the one with peas for dinner and the one with carrots for lunch!

Also for lunch, he cooked the fish burger (Fish Sandwich \$7.99) plated as it is usually served, on a hoagie roll with sweet potato french fries.

To drink, we had his special home-made root beer, in frosted mugs, a real thirst quencher.

John Dragun is a great chef and a stickler for details!

[Windfall Bar and Grill](#)

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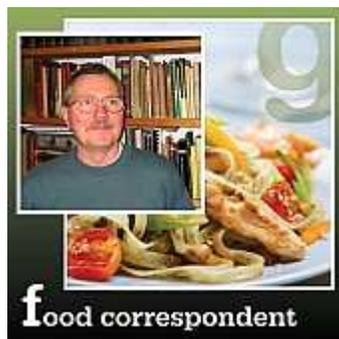
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RICHARD FRISBIE is published twice a month to Gather Essentials: Food. It is a food junkie's take on growing, raising, preparing and - above all else - eating food. Together we'll explore the trends, addictions, equipment and regional specialties that make up the sometimes mundane and sometimes sublime cooking and dining experience. You can keep up with my other postings and Gather activity by joining my Gather network -- I look forward to hearing from you.

You can read all of my articles <http://rfrisbie.gather.com/> or find them with those of the other Food Correspondents, plus celebrity chef content and plenty of other Foodies at <http://foodtalk.gather.com>

BIO - Richard Frisbie writes culinary travel articles, is a columnist for his local newspapers, and is a regular contributor to the many Hudson Valley, Catskill Mountain and other regional New York publications. Online, he writes frequent articles for EDGE Publications, GoNomad and Travel Lady, as well as Gather.



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Comments: 39

[Sonia M.](#) Sep 4, 2009, 6:29pm EDT

Richard, what an extraordinary dinner!!!! WOW
I too love catfish and hushpuppies....

The place sounds fabulous and I can see why anyone would frive that far to eat there.....good job

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 11:21am EDT

John is one of the chefs I "follow", but it's taken me awhile to drive the 5 hrs to get to his restaurant. He's a licensed scuba diver, chef, brewer, and excellent IT guy (he built my first network) who fishes and boats and hikes - what's not to like?

[Katie Scarlett \(Site Bouncer Wanna Be\) O.](#) Sep 4, 2009, 6:42pm EDT

Wow it sounds great! So he was educated in the culinary arts in Poughkeepsie (CIA) and went further north to open his restaurant. Sounds about right. How wonderful that he kept his secrets in NY and you were able to enjoy them. Everything looks and sounds fantastic. I have to say, the prices you were quoting are really quite reasonable for delicacies prepared so well. It sounds like a wonderful place and I'm glad you will be able to enjoy it again soon. Some of those dishes really looked so fantastic. They all sounded wonderful.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 11:25am EDT

The prices are amazing Katie, but it is in the middle of nowhere. I remember the snowstorm he drove through to see his weekend getaway - he showed me the video of the blizzard - and he loved it so much he bought it. Then he completely redid it, and then bought the next (but one) door bar & grill.

[j - Frugal Mom - r.](#) Sep 4, 2009, 6:48pm EDT

That goat and feta cheese really makes my mouth water...yummo! It looks like a fantastic place to dine. We are ordering take out tonight from a local Indian restaurant, and I could easily eat anything from their vegetarian menu. With three boys under 7 we are no longer restaurant goers, we are take out people:)

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 11:27am EDT

He has a kids menu - \$4.99 for everything - but sometimes it is easier to deal with little ones at home. I could use some Indian right about now too.

[j - Frugal Mom - r.](#) Sep 5, 2009, 3:21pm EDT

Exactly Richard, I don't think there would be anything relaxing about dining out with three little ones. We used to order food from the kids menu for the boys, but they would actually rather share some of our food with spices in them.

[flit.](#) Sep 4, 2009, 7:08pm EDT

now you've gone and made me hungry! (and my dinner won't be for ages yet... waiting for kid to get here) ... it is simmering on the stove though, and smells very good

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 11:29am EDT

Bon Appetit, Flit - thanks for stopping by!

[Kimberly Ripley](#) Sep 4, 2009, 8:52pm EDT

Oh my goodness, Richard.....this all looks SO much better than the Reese's Peanut Butter Cups I just ate for dinner!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 11:29am EDT

You need to have kids at home just so you eat better! What food group does Reeses fit into . . . Chocolate or peanut butter?

[Kimberly Ripley](#) Sep 5, 2009, 10:12pm EDT

Peanut butter, of course....it's a protein!

[Dan S.](#) Sep 5, 2009, 6:14am EDT

It sounds like you probably had a hard time standing up after that meal! Bon appetit!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 11:31am EDT

Oh, Dan - pshaw! A lesser man couldn't have done it, but I've been known to have that for lunch - a lunch that ended just in time for a wine-tasting and then dinner! I love my work.

[Tonia, who hugs trees G.](#) Sep 5, 2009, 12:41pm EDT

My mouth started watering as I read this - what a wonderful, and eclectic, array of dishes. I would go out of my way to eat at this establishment. Hmm, maybe sometime I can catch a ride on the catfish truck when it is departing Arkansas :)

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 5, 2009, 12:54pm EDT

I think getting home would be a problem - we don't send the catfish back!
Thanks for stopping by Tonia - you Arkansas folks grow some mighty fine fish!

[Tonia, who hugs trees G.](#) Sep 5, 2009, 2:04pm EDT

I think after eating there I'd be able to just roll myself all the way home :)

Yes, I've grown quite fond of the catfish they raise around these parts.

[Peter Wimsey](#) Sep 9, 2009, 3:34pm EDT

What an exciting story (pause while I stop drooling)!

The Culinary Institute has been a godsend to many parts of New York State.

Is there a single Hudson River village that does not have a great restaurant run by a CIA graduate?

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 9, 2009, 3:45pm EDT

Only Ithaca outdoes us (Cornell Hotel School) with more restaurants per capita than even New York City. Thanks for stopping by Peter.

[Amanda "middle of nowhere" C.](#) Sep 12, 2009, 12:54am EDT

Hey Richard. I haven't been on in a few days and I realize I've got some reading to do. I had the pleasure of visiting the Adirondacks several years back and it's a wonderful place. Somehow, I missed the Windfall.

[Amanda "middle of nowhere" C.](#) Sep 12, 2009, 12:55am EDT

P.S. thanks for stopping by my post. Sorry about the error...somehow Saturday morning just slipped right by without my notice. Have a good weekend!

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 12, 2009, 8:32am EDT

Ah, it was late (or early, depending on perspective.) You've had a tough couple of weeks - I'm glad to see you back.

[Digital Diva S.](#) Sep 13, 2009, 6:51pm EDT

Your photos made my mouth water and your story made me want to be there. I will remember that name the next time I get to that area.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Sep 14, 2009, 12:43pm EDT

Thanks Di - I'd like to be back there too. My big debut article in Adirondack Life will include this and the Farmhouse Restaurant - look for it in their May/June 2010 issue.

[Lisa Gensheimer](#) Oct 4, 2009, 1:36pm EDT

Thanks for the food and wine recommendations, Richard. I'm going to tuck it away -- we're thinking of a paddling trip in the Adirondacks sometime next year.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Oct 5, 2009, 10:59am EDT

Thanks Lisa. I'll have more recommendations by then - and all the maps and guides you'll need are on my online bookshop - What fun you'll have!

[Kathryn E.](#) Oct 6, 2009, 1:03pm EDT

the food looks delicious.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Oct 6, 2009, 1:07pm EDT

thanks Kathryn - it was pretty enough to eat!

[Kathryn E.](#) Jan 6, 2010, 5:30pm EST

looks even better in the winter...weather here.

[Joan O.](#) Oct 14, 2009, 9:23pm EDT

Food looks great. Sounds like a nice place to have a meal.

[Richard Frisbie](#) Oct 15, 2009, 11:06am EDT

Thanks Joan - I ate there several times - it is a Great place to have a meal!

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 20, 2009, 12:00pm EST

First of all, what an inspirational and enterprising couple. I love that they just following their loves and enjoy each moment. The fact that this place is so isolated must make the food taste even better. People always appreciate what they had to work for...I love the fact that you got to taste so many of these delicacies and that Chef John is such a perfectionist that he redid the way the catfish was served...

(by the way, have you ever been to Belzoni, Mississippi - catfish capital of the world?)

Oh, and fresh goat cheese - wow - each plate looks wonderful and yes, you caught all the best angles - still filled with

aroma and flavors and I am drooling...that plate of pasta reminded me of a youtube cooking video I watched last night

-
featuring Clara - the Depression cook - have you seen it!?

All in all, I loved this Richard. It will take me a while to read all of your wonderful offerings but you've opened up worlds for me. Now, I'm more and more interested in food preparation - seriously, thanks to you, I fed many folks this summer with my stir fry, bean soups, and red beans and rice dishes. I'm getting more confident! Ok let me go wipe off the drool - I just reread about the salads - yummmm! Salud

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 20, 2009, 12:30pm EST

Ok you did it, tonight, we're grilling shrimp! Of course, king crab has gotten very expensive but a couple of legs is all we need and what's left over we make a soup with the next day. thanks again, Richard. Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 20, 2009, 12:48pm EST

You are in shrimp country - enjoy!

I once drove down the Mississippi through the Southern states and enjoyed catfish on many occasions. Then, years later I took my friend to a catfish place in Olive Branch Mississippi, oh my!(right outside of Biloxie, I believe) They served a catfish fried sandwich with all the bones! I couldn't get him to try catfish again. Even Chef John's farm-raised fillets - sadness!

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 20, 2009, 12:56pm EST

Richard, with all the bones? oh my - that's awful - I don't blame your friend. They must have gotten the order mixed up - well, Belzoni is the capital and next time you're down there - holler at me down on bayouland - but remember I am back in Santa Barbara now...(of course, we have some fine restaurants this way too -)! Salud

[Richard Frisbie](#) Nov 20, 2009, 1:10pm EST

You are kinder than I - I suspected them of "giving it" to the New Yorkers! These weren't fillets, they were skinned headless bodies, cleaned and breaded and deep fried - served between 2 pieces of toast spread with tartar sauce. Definitely a bony sandwich!

[Mariana T.](#) Nov 20, 2009, 1:16pm EST

Oh - then you are so right - they were just some azzzzzholes who didn't like anyone who had any level of sophistication - those types will end up choking on a catfish bone someday soon anyway...let me dig up my redneck voo doo doll! Salud

[Barbary Chaapel](#) Jan 17, 2010, 3:20pm EST

Oh, I wish I could have been with you two on this tour of taste.
I always enjoy your original comments and photos.

(For moment there I had a vision of the chef being a spy who came in from the cold.
That caused a big smile for me.)

[Richard Frisbie](#) Jan 18, 2010, 12:53pm EST

the spying chef - I like it! Thanks Barbary - it is always a delight to hear from you.

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