

APARTMENT LIFE: Smart Ideas for Small Spaces

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*Refined Elegance  
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# Easy Modern

# Dream Greens

At this gorgeous, sustainable restaurant in the Napa, *California*, wine country, the focus is on artfully cooked produce, straight from the region's fertile fields.





Ubuntu owner Sandy Lawrence



torona almonds with sea salt and lavender sugar



Roasted beets with Asian pears and whipped blue cheese



Farro with caramelized baby root vegetables



The front window clearly states what **Ubuntu** is about: “**restaurant & yoga studio.**” Still, it’s hard to imagine how those two disparate worlds find a home together in Napa, California, until you step inside.

As you look over the 20-foot communal table made of recycled 370-year-old wood, your eyes move to the stainless steel hood that canopies the open kitchen and, above that, to translucent glass doors that turn yoga students into twisting, bending silhouettes. It’s an impressive warehouse-size room with native-rock walls and open rafters, but the genius of the concept doesn’t emerge until diners taste the food that glorifies vegetables in a way that makes carnivores wonder why they ever craved Kobe beef.

The name, Ubuntu, a South African term that means “humanity toward others,” reflects owner Sandy Lawrence’s philosophy. Lawrence, who sold her event-planning company in Miami and moved full-time to the Napa Valley in 2002 to open Lion’s Run Winery, is trying to live a good life and significantly reduce her carbon footprint. This desire is reflected in her rammed-earth house about six miles away, in the lush biodynamic garden that serves the restaurant and in the dramatic design of Ubuntu.

Instead of hiring an experienced restaurant architect, Lawrence turned to Michael Baushke of Apparatus Architecture in San Francisco, who was the visionary designer behind her home. They worked closely to make Ubuntu a model of green design, using, for example, reclaimed floors and furniture produced by local artisans. Mark Chatterley’s figurative sculpture, aptly named “Alternative Perspective” because one of the four figures is upside down, stands sentry between the bar and the communal table.

When it came time to focus on the food, Lawrence brought in ten top chefs from all around the country. Upon their arrival she sent them to the farmer’s market to buy the ingredients needed to prepare a meal for her and seven other tasters. Jeremy Fox, who was the chef de cuisine at Manresa, a Michelin two-star restaurant in Los Gatos, was the clear winner. “All of us knew right away that Jeremy brought something special,” Lawrence says. He also brought along an added bonus—his wife, Deanie Hickox Fox, who works beside him as pastry chef.

There’s no tofu, tempeh, seitan, brown rice or other meat substitute to be found in Fox’s repertoire. In fact, the chef refuses to use the word “vegetarian” to describe his food; he simply refers to

Ubuntu as a “vegetable restaurant.”

At the height of summer, about half the produce comes from the restaurant’s one-acre garden, created by legendary wine-country gardener Jeff Dawson. What’s grown on site is noted in capital letters on the daily menu; the rest is brought in from farms that adhere to a similar organic philosophy. Even most of the 200 labels on the wine list are from organic producers.

**E**ach dish Fox creates celebrates the natural flavors of an ingredient, but like an artist he adds his own exciting twists. It could be something as basic as Marcona almonds, which he tosses with sea salt and lavender sugar. Or it could be as complex as his roasted-beet salad, featuring baby chioggias baked in salt spiked with fennel, juniper berries and other spices. When they’re ready to serve, he places the beets on a purée of Asian pears with wisps of arugula and dollops of airy whipped blue cheese. For a main-course cassoulet, the chef cooks yellow-eye beans separately, cold-smokes tomatoes for the sauce and finishes the dish with a farm-fresh egg.

“I want to show all the ways you can prepare a vegetable,” Fox says. “I don’t want to cover up the ingredients.”

In his farro with roasted vegetables, for example, he sautés baby turnips, carrots and other roots in brown butter and deglazes the pan with saba, the fruity Italian condiment, to add a rich coating. He then spoons the vegetables over the cooked grain.

Deanie Fox’s desserts are equally imaginative, whether she’s preparing a whimsical float with Concord-grape-and-mascarpone ice cream and house-made ginger soda or little pads of brown-butter shortcake topped with honey-roasted figs and rosemary cream.

Ironically, neither Lawrence nor the chefs are vegetarians, yet together, with their dedication to serving organically grown, locally sourced food, they have created a groundbreaking destination here. “We always knew we’d have a philosophy-driven restaurant,” says Lawrence. A restaurant and yoga studio makes perfect sense. 🍷

*Recipes follow. See Resources, last pages.*

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CAREN ALPERT. WRITTEN BY MICHAEL BAUER.



The Ubuntu biodynamic garden



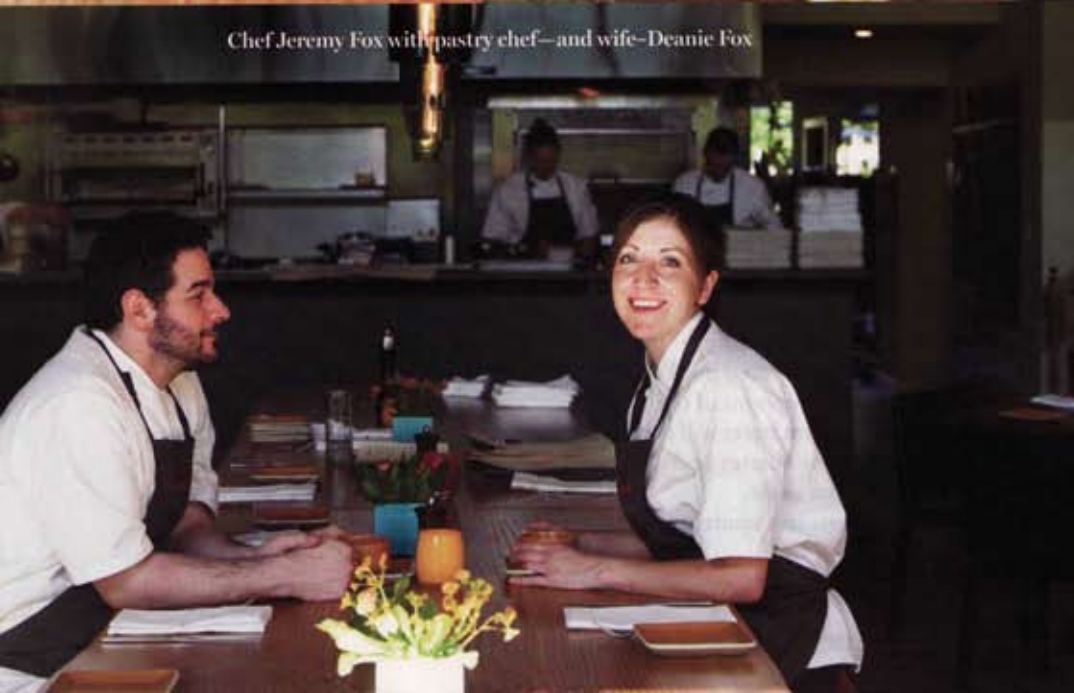
Cassoulet of shell beans and farm eggs with smoked tomato



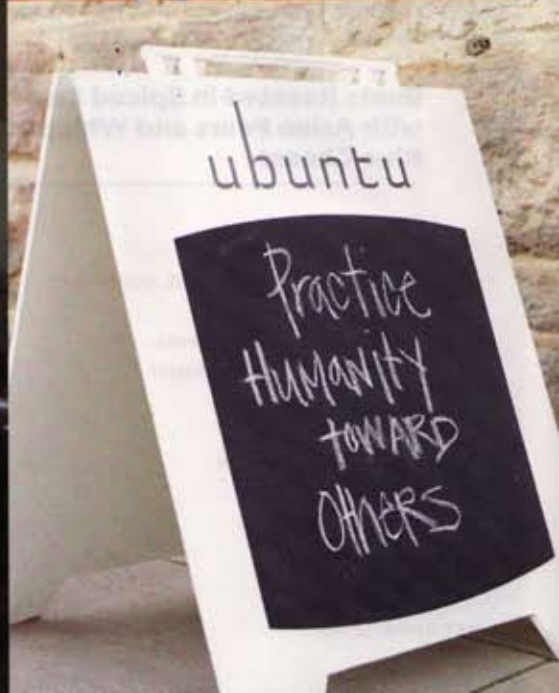
Honey-roasted figs with brown-butter shortcake



Concord grape and mascarpone ice cream float



Chef Jeremy Fox with pastry chef—and wife—Deanie Fox





## UBUNTU RECIPES

### Marcona Almonds with Sea Salt and Lavender Sugar

- 2 cups Marcona almonds
- 1 tsp. dried lavender
- 1 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tbsp. sea salt
- 2 tbsp. extra-virgin olive oil

1. Preheat the oven to 300°F. Roast the almonds on a baking sheet until fragrant, 10 to 12 minutes.
2. Grind the lavender very fine in a coffee grinder, or with a mortar and pestle.
3. In a bowl, toss the almonds with the lavender, sugar, salt and olive oil to coat. *Serves 6.*

### Beets Roasted in Spiced Salt with Asian Pears and Whipped Blue Cheese

#### Beets:

- 1 lb. kosher salt
- 1 tsp. each fennel seed, coriander, juniper berries
- 40 baby choggia beets
- 4 tbsp. balsamic vinegar

#### Poached Pears:

- 2 cups white wine
- 4 cups water
- 2 cups sugar

- 3 star anise
- 12 black peppercorns
- 2 cloves
- Grating of nutmeg
- 1 lemon, zest removed in strips with a vegetable peeler, and juiced
- 5 Asian pears, peeled, halved, cored, and stored in a bowl of water acidulated with juice of 1 lemon
- 1/2 lb. blue cheese, at room temperature
- 2 tbsp. heavy cream
- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt
- 25 leaves arugula

1. To roast the beets: Preheat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, mix the salt and spices. In a 9-by-13-inch baking dish or an ovenproof vessel with a lid, pack the beets in the spiced salt mixture. Cover with foil or the lid, and bake until beets are tender, 45 minutes to 1 hour. While still warm but cool enough to handle, peel beets with a towel, rubbing off the skin, and transfer to a covered bowl to keep warm. Add 2 tablespoons of the vinegar, and toss. (Warm beets will absorb liquid better.) Halve or quarter beets, depending on size; set aside.
2. To poach the pears: In a nonreactive

pot large enough to hold the pears, bring the wine to a boil, and cook until reduced by half. Reduce the heat so that the liquid barely simmers. Add the water, sugar, spices and lemon juice and zest, and cook until sugar dissolves. Add pears, setting a plate on top to keep them submerged, and simmer until they are tender, about 30 minutes. Remove pot from heat; allow pears to cool completely in poaching liquid.

3. In a bowl, whisk the blue cheese and cream until blended; set aside at room temperature.

4. To serve, purée two of the pears with just enough poaching liquid to blend; strain through fine sieve. Slice the remaining pears about 1/2 inch thick. Spread the pear purée over the bottom of a serving plate. Toss the beets in the remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar, the olive oil and a pinch of salt, and arrange evenly over purée. Spoon any beet vinaigrette over. Top with sliced pears and spoonfuls of whipped blue cheese. Garnish with arugula leaves. *Serves 6.*

### Cassoulet of Shell Beans and Farm Eggs with Smoked Tomato

- 1/2 cup hickory chips
- 6 tomatoes, halved
- 1 onion, diced
- 1 carrot, diced
- 2 stalks celery, diced
- 1 lb. yellow eye beans, soaked overnight in refrigerator in water to cover, and drained\*
- 2 quarts water
- Salt
- 1 lemon, zest stripped off with vegetable peeler, and juiced
- 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 12 cloves garlic, grated or minced
- 1 tbsp. chopped fresh rosemary
- 1 tsp. chili flakes
- 3 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 small baguette (about 7 oz.) or other bread, torn into rough pieces
- 3 tbsp. chopped Italian parsley
- 6 large eggs

1. Arrange one oven rack in the bottom of a cold oven, and a second in the middle. Light the hickory chips in a cast-iron pan and place on the bottom rack. Put the

