



A PLACE *at the* TABLE

Matthew Krenz welcomes fellow Charlotte
chefs and purveyors to his family ranch
for an outdoor gathering

By Alison Miller



Photography by Peter Taylor



THE TABLE IS SET WITH FAMILY HEIRLOOMS. OPPOSITE: JUSTIN BRIGHAM OF SYCAMORE BREWING PULLS A TAP FROM HIS FIRE TRUCK TURNED MOBILE TAP HOUSE.

For Matthew Krenz,

who's just as at ease driving through a pasture in a pickup truck as he is helming the kitchen of one of Charlotte's hottest restaurants, there's no better place to host a summer gathering than his parents' ranch.

Thirty miles southeast of Charlotte, the highway gives way to quiet country roads and the landscape loosens its belt. Here, a winding gravel driveway flanked by a pasture of grazing cattle ends at a brick house the Krenz family designed and built in 2002. On six acres surrounding their home, and nearly fifty more down the road, Matthew's parents, Alan and Bridget, raise Hereford-Angus crosses.

On this balmy night, the Krenzes' serene flagstone patio, anchored by a stately brick fireplace, hosts a handful of Charlotte-area chefs and farmers who, on a rare break from cooking, crafting, planting, and sowing, take a seat at the table set by Matthew, executive chef of the Asbury, the intimate dining room inside Uptown Charlotte's historic Dunhill Hotel.

At the bottom of the sloped sidewalk leading to the backyard, Sycamore Brewing's Justin and Sarah Brigham pour beer from an exquisitely restored 1938 Ford fire truck outfitted with eight taps.

"Matt's been with us every step of the way," says Justin, holding the couple's 8-month-old daughter, Claire. "Before we opened the brewery, he used to come to our house and we'd brew beer together in five-gallon batches."

Nearby, Zack Gadberry, a chef-turned-cheesemaker at Uno Alla Volta cheeses, and his wife, Victoria, are mid-conversation with Paul Verica, owner and executive chef of Heritage Food and Drink. "Isn't that Sammy's smoker?" Zack asks, pointing toward Matthew, circumspect over a couple of cast-iron skillets.

Sammy is Sammy Koenigsberg, who runs New Town Farms with his wife, Melinda. Around here, the Koenigsbergs are known as founding farmers—or, as Matthew refers to them, "the O.G.'s of farming here in Charlotte." Established in 1990, their organic farm provides vegetables, chickens, eggs, turkeys, and Ossabaw Island hogs to twenty or so Charlotte-area chefs, including Matthew.

Charlotte's that kind of place—big enough for cosmopolitan clout, small enough that chefs and farmers here are tightly bound, supporting one another by crafting a specific cheese or lending a wood-fired smoker.

As they are at the Asbury, the dishes Matthew has prepared tonight are all at once redolent of

his upbringing, imbued with the fruits of local farmers, eye-catching, and pleasing to the palate.

Fresh, seasonal peas and beans pair with corn, tomatoes, and herbs in a peak-of-summer salad. The macaroni and cheese, bound by cheddar fondue and goat milk gournay, is flecked with piquillo peppers and crispy country ham. At

Matthew's father, Alan, is a seventh-generation cattle farmer—and Krenz Ranch beef is not just any beef. The ranch is a cow-to-calf farm, an industry rarity. As they grow, cows move to different pastures, roaming freely. Instead of hanging for two weeks, as is customary, Krenz beef hangs for at least six weeks, resulting in a



the end of the night, Matthew's rosemary and honey-tinged peach ice cream will be drizzled with cocoa gravy, just like his grandmother Peggy Kent used to make.

The *pièce de résistance*, though, is a beer-braised Krenz Ranch brisket rising from a pool of golden raisin barbecue sauce. Ranching is synonymous with the Krenz pedigree—

more intensified, dry-aged flavor.

The Asbury is the ranch's primary customer. The ranch only sells half cows, and Matthew is committed to using every part of the animal. Bones become broth; tallow fortifies biscuits; risotto is laced with liver. In addition to the requisite steaks and half-pound Krenz Ranch burger—arguably the best in Charlotte—you

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: RACHEL RUSSELL AND MATTHEW KRENZ; TOASTING WITH SYCAMORE BREWING BEER; MARINATED BEAN SALAD; SMOKED BEEF SHANK-BRAISED GREENS; OPPOSITE FROM TOP: TALLOW BISCUITS; PEACH ICE CREAM AND COCOA GRAVY ATOP A TALLOW BISCUIT.

can slice into homemade sausage and charcuterie, beef heart carpaccio, and oxtails.

Soon, guests take their seats, some at the teak table, others in wrought-iron furniture that once sat on Grandma Peggy's back patio. Paul, whose artful incarnations of farm-fresh food at Heritage Food & Drink have earned him near liturgical status in Charlotte food circles, sits across from Rachel Russell, Matthew's fiancée. Their King Charles Cavalier Kenzie, named after the bygone McKenzie's Bakery in New Orleans, settles in beneath her feet.

Rachel is no stranger to the restaurant world. Her mother, Anne Avegno Russell, opened the legendary New Orleans restaurant Gautreau's when she was pregnant with Rachel, her sixth child.

"My mom always said we were never allowed to open a restaurant or date anyone who worked in one," she says with a wry smile. "So when I met Matthew, I thought, 'I'll just go on a date with him. I can't fall in love with him because my mom said not to.' And then, of course, that's what happened."

Anne passed away in 2009, but on this tranquil summer night, the dinner table is set with her heirloom silver. Matthew's radiant watermelon salad fills an antique silver tray Anne once used for entertaining, and an eighteenth-century vase, also passed down to Rachel, overflows with ivory hydrangeas on the fireplace mantle.

"My parents lost their house in Pass Christian, Mississippi, during Katrina," Rachel says. "That tray, along with a lot of the silverware, was buried in the sand and we dug it out. When he was preparing for this dinner, Matthew brought it out and polished it. He always makes my mom feel alive through his cooking and the way he entertains. I've never met anyone who cares about people as much as he does."

Soon, Matthew appears with the family-style feast, clad in cast iron—one pan passed down from Matthew's great-grandmother, another seasoned in Anne's New Orleans kitchen.

As his friends and family serve one another, Matthew steps back, finally stopping to catch his breath. "To have this many like-minded people around a table talking shop and enjoying life is really what it's all about. It should happen more often."



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Marinated Bean Salad
Serves 4 to 6

For the buttermilk chive dressing:

½ cup buttermilk
½ cup mayonnaise
½ cup crème fraîche
1 small bunch chives, finely chopped
1 tablespoon roughly chopped fresh dill
1 tablespoon paprika
1 clove garlic, minced
Fresh lemon juice and zest
Salt and pepper

For the salad:

2 cups fresh local peas and beans, cooked
Kernels from 2 large ears of corn, roasted or sautéed
1 cup toasted almonds
3 large tomatoes, diced
½ medium red onion, julienned
½ cup sprouted bean mix
2 tablespoons minced chives
2 tablespoons roughly chopped fresh parsley
½ cup olive oil
Juice of 2 lemons
Hot sauce (Krenz uses Texas Pete)
Sherry vinegar
Salt and pepper

1. Make the dressing: In a medium bowl, mix buttermilk, mayonnaise, and crème fraîche until smooth. Stir in herbs, paprika, and garlic. Add lemon juice and zest, salt, and pepper to taste. Refrigerate.

2. Make the salad: In a large bowl, combine peas and beans, corn, almonds, tomatoes, onion, sprouts, chives, and parsley. In a separate bowl, stir together oil, lemon juice, hot sauce, vinegar, salt, and pepper. Stir into pea and bean mixture and marinate at room temperature for at least an hour. Top each portion with a dollop of buttermilk chive dressing.

Tallow Biscuits with Rosemary and Honey-Infused Peach Ice Cream and Cocoa Gravy
Serves 6 to 8

For the biscuits:

4 tablespoons unsalted butter
4 ounces beef tallow
3¾ cups self-rising flour
½ cup sugar
1 cup milk
½ cup heavy cream

For the ice cream:

½ peach, peeled and sliced
1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary
4 tablespoons honey
2 cups heavy cream
1 tablespoon vanilla extract
¼ cup powdered sugar
1¾ cups sweetened condensed milk
1 pinch cinnamon
¾ cup diced peaches

For the cocoa gravy:

¾ cup heavy cream
¼ cup sugar
2 tablespoons cocoa powder
3 ounces dark chocolate chips

1. Make the biscuits: Cut butter and tallow into flour until mixture is coarse like cornmeal. Stir in sugar. Combine milk and cream, then work into dry mixture, being careful not to overwork. Place dough on a floured surface, then dust dough with flour. After a few folds, roll until 2 inches thick and cut into squares or use a biscuit cutter to portion. Bake at 425 degrees until golden brown.

2. Make the ice cream: In a saucepan over low heat, gently cook peach slices

with rosemary and honey, allowing flavors to infuse for 15 to 20 minutes. Immediately place in a blender and puree until smooth. Whip heavy cream and vanilla until medium-stiff peaks form, slowly sifting in powdered sugar while whipping. In a blender, process peach puree, sweetened condensed milk, and cinnamon until smooth. Cool to room temperature. Gently fold in whipped cream and diced peaches. Freeze in a loaf pan wrapped in plastic wrap.

3. Make the cocoa gravy: Heat cream and sugar in a saucepan with cocoa powder, stirring well. Pour hot liquid over dark chocolate and let sit for 2 minutes. Whisk until completely smooth. Serve immediately.

4. To assemble: Scoop ice cream over biscuits and top with gravy.

