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RESTAURANT *of the* YEAR

THE FOOD ISSUE

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Jamie Malone



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RESTAURANT OF THE YEAR

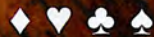
the Bachelor Farmer AND *Marvel Bar*

BY *Mecca Bos*

PHOTOGRAPHED BY *Terry Brennan*

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WE ALL KNOW about the Twin Cities' strong Scandinavian pedigree, but rarely does it find its way into our fine-dining culture. Which explains why many mouths were saddened when Aquavit closed its Minneapolis outpost nearly a decade ago. Thankfully, the Bachelor Farmer opened last summer to fill this niche—to convince you once more that you really, really like lingonberries and gravlax. And to show you how much fun eating them in a beautifully restored Warehouse District building can be (Governor Dayton's sons Eric and Andrew are the project's moneymen and creative brains).

The menu, though influenced by contemporary Nordic cooking, is approachable and never tethered to the confines of that tradition. Dishes are peppered with plenty of non-Scandinavian ingredients simply because they taste good (e.g., saffron, hazelnuts and Camembert). Chef Paul Berglund's takes on house-smoked and cured fish, pates and sturdy vegetables like beets, Brussels sprouts and cabbage are elegant, delicious and inventive with an eye on comfort and simplicity. Case in point: With its heady balance of contrasting temperatures, textures and sweet and savory flavors, the house-smoked sturgeon with scrambled eggs, fingerling potatoes and capers will haunt you long after you've dined.

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Enchanting as it is, the food competes with amazing interior design in both the dining room—a gallery-like space with striking, blue and white wallpaper—and Marvel Bar, Bachelor Farmer's sexy basement drinking den offering the finest cocktails in town (ask for the Deuce Deuce). While Marvel Bar is marvelous, don't miss the upstairs bar, which doesn't get nearly as much love, but ought to (see the three-person red leather banquette at the end of the bar—perhaps the best seat in town).

Four more reasons to love the Bachelor Farmer: 1.) Order any bottle of wine off the short but thoughtful list, and, if you wish, they'll charge you for just two glasses—the remainder of which then becomes available to other diners, so that everyone gets to try more wine. Up-for-grabs half-bottles are posted on a vintage chalkboard. Genius. 2.) The menus come stamped with the words "Friends & Family," which is basically the m.o. of this welcoming place 3.) Your bill arrives in a Moleskine guestbook, the idea being that you'll add a synopsis of your dining experience. 4.) Speaking of the bill, the Bachelor Farmer falls into that zone that's neither cheap nor expensive, where you can spend \$20 or \$200 depending on your mood (and account balance). And once you've plunked down the plastic, the word "value" comes to mind.

The whole of it amounts to an experience rather than simply dinner, and for my money, that amounts to the restaurant of the year.



Clockwise from top: "shared chicken"; beef tartare; behind the scenes at the Bachelor Farmer.