

HOT THIS MONTH **LITTLE BANGLADESH. IACO HOTELS. ROBO-BARTENDERS. WHISPERING**

American Airlines

American Way

AUGUST 2019

Jazz singer
Ines Tričković
overlooking her
hometown

Dubrovnik

**An insiders
guide to the
magical
city on the
Adriatic**

**MOVING
IMAGES**

**The story
of Cuba's
abandoned
cinemas**

**CREAM OF
THE CROP**

**Rural
Vermont's
world-famous
flavors**



August 2019

Vol. 52, No. 08

48

DUBROVNIK

Five notable locals, from a jazz singer to a food writer, show us their side of the medieval city

85

CUBAN VISION

A photographer's quest to capture the abandoned cinemas across the Caribbean island

68

THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM

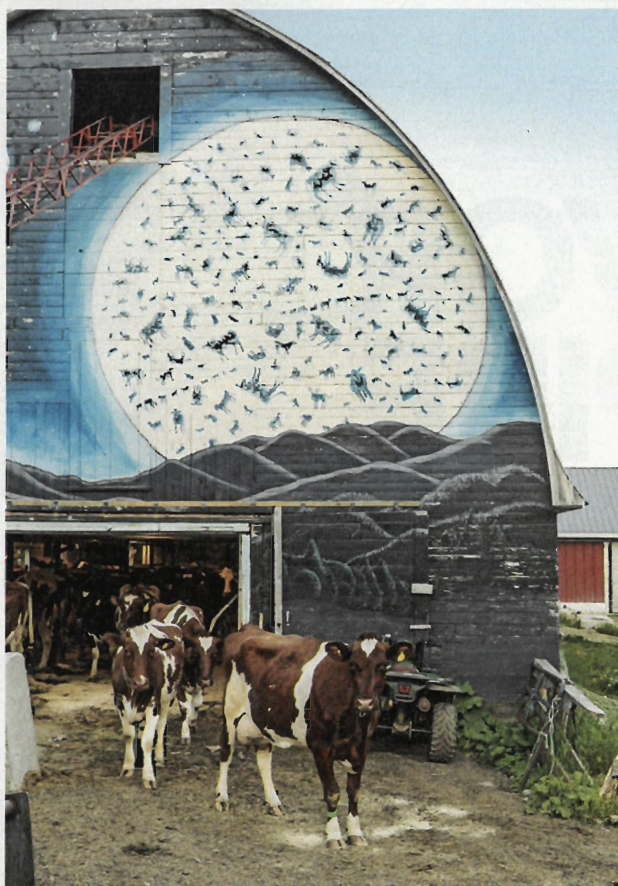
The unexpected rise of rural Vermont's artisanal food makers

GRETA RYBUS

FLAVOR EMPIRE

HOW THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM, A REMOTE
CORNER OF VERMONT, CAME TO PRODUCE
SOME OF THE MOST DELICIOUS FOOD AND
DRINK IN THE WORLD

Words **JUDY CANTOR-NAVAS**
Photography **GRETA RYBUS**



MATEO KEHLER'S FAMILY BEGAN summering in Vermont's Northeast Kingdom, on Caspian Lake in Greensboro, a century ago. His great-grandfather, a traveling salesman from Massachusetts, happened upon the isolated little town near the Quebec border and grew transfixed by the mountains, the sloping dairy farms and the pristine lake.

Motivated by memories of what he calls the "happy place" of his childhood summers—roaming the hills, or playing among family camps around the waterfront—Mateo and his brother, Andy, who lived in Bogotá, Colombia, as children and spent their high school years in Woodstock, Vermont, bought a 160-acre farm in Greensboro (population 710) in 1998 and set out to create "meaningful work in a place that we love."

They made that phrase a slogan for their Jasper Hill Farm cheese, which uses local milk from both cows and goats and is ripened in a 22,000-square-foot cellar built into the hill on the farm. The result are cheeses that have been repeatedly recognized as among the world's best. At the 2018 American Cheese Society Competition, Jasper Hill's Harbison soft cheese took Best of Show, while their Calderwood raw milk cheese was

Above: Cows and goats at Jasper Hill Farm
Right: Cheesemaker brothers Andy and Mateo Kehler in the Jasper Hill cellars

Previous spread:
Jasper Hill Farm's Winnimere, a young cow's milk cheese wrapped in the inner bark of a spruce tree; Caspian Lake

first runner-up. (The 2019 winners will be announced this month.)

Mateo says the quality of the cheese is intrinsically linked to the local landscape and community. "It is truly reflective of this place," he says, referencing the grassy hillocks and forests beyond. The remote region, bordering Quebec and New Hampshire, is known as the Northeast Kingdom, and its terrain alternates between dense maple and spruce expanses and undulating fields dotted with grazing cows and farmhouses. It's the state's least populated area, accounting for a vast 20 percent of its land mass but only 10 percent of its population. Despite its remove, it's become heralded in the past decade or so as a place that produces some of the world's most delicious food and drink.

I can relate to Mateo's love of the land. I first started coming to the area as a teen to visit my older brother, Howie Cantor, who left New York City to settle here 40 years ago, on a quest for what he calls "extreme ruralness." He found it, and established Deep Mountain Maple with his wife, Stephan, selling their syrup both locally and at the Greenmarket in Manhattan's Union Square. Today, the area is where my family spends cherished summer vacations; it's where my brother has taught my son how to fish and drive a tractor. >





Cows grazing
in Jasper Hill
Farm pastures

ROYAL FEAST

Where to eat in the
Northeast Kingdom

Kingdom Taproom and Table

This popular speakeasy-like basement bar in St. Johnsbury recently added a street-level restaurant where chef Lisa Foster uses local goods for a global menu and serves cocktails with Vermont-made spirits. kingdomtaproom.com

Parker Pie Co.

Fourteen years ago, the Lake Parker Country Store in West Glover started serving pizza out back. Today the restaurant serves Hill Farmstead beer on tap and pies with toppings including local hot Italian sausage and Deep Mountain Maple syrup. parkerpie.com

Juniper's Restaurant

The eatery for the 300-acre Wildflower Inn in Lyndonville plates farm-to-table offerings including burgers made with grass-fed Vermont beef paired with Cabot cheddar and maple glazed bacon. There are also vegan and gluten-free options. wildflowerinn.com

THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM IS THE Vermont of Vermont," says Heidi Lauren Duke, CEO and event curator for Highland Lodge, a landmark farmhouse-turned-inn with white wood cabins built in the 1920s and its own beach on Caspian Lake. "It doesn't feel as suburban as other areas of Vermont have become." In Greensboro, going downtown still means walking to Willey's, the general store that first opened in 1900, on Breezy Avenue, right off the lake. As always, it's a place to stop in and pick up a quart of milk and a pair of Carhartt work pants. But the shelves and refrigerator now offer testimony to how the Kehlers and other young, small-scale agricultural entrepreneurs have made the Northeast Kingdom a hotbed of culinary excellence. In addition to work pants, you can find Jasper Hill cheese.

Jasper Hill's award-winning Harbison, the dairy's icon, is named after Anne Harbison, the beloved proprietor of a bed-and-breakfast whom the Kehler brothers call "the grandmother of Greensboro." So creamy it's spoonable, the cheese

is wrapped in strips of spruce bark from trees on the farm, fomenting its woodsy taste, which is balanced with lemon and mustard flavors. Bayley Hazen Blue, a raw milk blue cheese with nutty sweetness and high grassy notes, carries the name of a Revolutionary War-era road that brought the first settlers to Greensboro.

"We try to minimize practices that would standardize our cheese, or mute character that can be linked to our landscape," says Mateo of the cheese's terroir. He and Andy (the company's head of operations) worked in house construction before envisioning Jasper Hill. They currently source milk from Ayrshire cows on their own two farms, as well as three other farms in the area, and have started a new goat farm in partnership with a couple who have moved from California.

In winter, Jasper Hill livestock eat dry hay (most farmers use cheaper silage), enhancing grassy notes in the cheese. It's one way that the Kehlers are reviving traditional dairy farming and cheesemaking practices. At the same time, they use the latest in >

YOUNG AGRICULTURAL ENTREPRENEURS HAVE MADE THIS AREA A HOTBED OF CULINARY EXCELLENCE.



"THERE'S AN AMAZING ABILITY TO CREATE WONDERFUL PRODUCTS IN THIS LITTLE AREA."

technology and advances in biological science. "It's kind of like the crossroads of the ancient and the modern," Mateo says. "And that is tasted in the cheese."

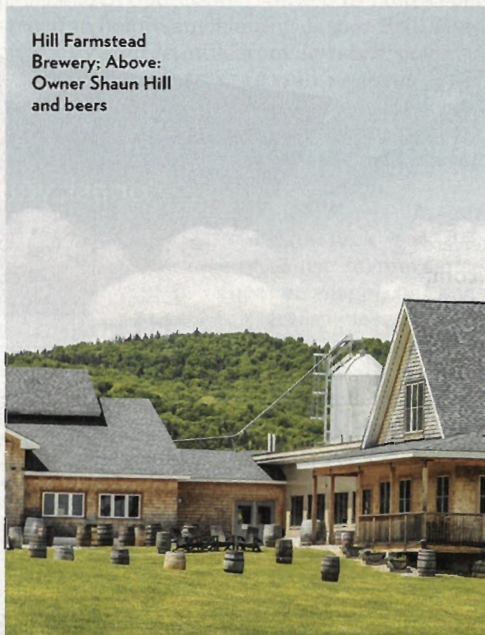
Wiley's store also stocks a good selection of Vermont craft beers, which, if you're lucky, can include a few bottles of the Greensboro-brewed Hill Farmstead, which has been voted the best brewery in the world for the past five years running by review site RateBeer. In 2018, Hill Farmstead scored number one out of more than 30,800 breweries reviewed by RateBeer's online community throughout the year.

As a result, traveling dirt roads to the family farm where founder Shaun Hill started the brewery in 2010 has become a popular pilgrimage for craft beer fanatics. Hill, whose ancestors co-founded the town of Greensboro in the 1780s, says that opening the brewery on the farm was a plan he had sketched out by the time he was 20 years old, his solution to "how to live in Greensboro and preserve the place that I loved." He subsequently spent five years training in European and Vermont breweries. To explain his return to the Northeast Kingdom,

he quotes Henry David Thoreau: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately."

Production is limited, and brews such as Edward, an American pale ale made with water from the family well, and Anna, an ale brewed with local wildflower honey >

**Hill Farmstead
Brewery; Above:
Owner Shaun Hill
and beers**



WHERE TO STAY IN VERMONT'S NORTHEAST KINGDOM

Highland Lodge

The views of Greensboro's Caspian Lake and 136 acres of surrounding hills and pastures from the lodge's wraparound porch remain unchanged since this converted farmhouse first welcomed boarders in the 1920s, but the bar now offers a selection of Vermont craft beers and cocktails infused with maple syrup. The lodge has its own beach as well as bikes for exploring hundreds of miles of off-road trails. highlandlodge.com

Rabbit Hill Inn

First established as a tavern in the late 1700s, Rabbit Hill Inn is beloved for both its romantic setting in picturesque Lower Waterford Village and its candle-lit dining room, offering a sophisticated menu made of seasonal ingredients. rabbithillinn.com

Jay Peak Resort

Jay Peak summer attractions include hiking trails, a water park, golf course and skating rink. The 57-suite mountainside Tram Haus Lodge has an on-site spa. jaypeakresort.com

Lakeview Inn

This historic wood-frame 10-room B&B dates back to 1872 and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Lush gardens and the lakefront setting have attracted artists and writers over the years. lakeviewinnvermont.com



"I WENT TO THE WOODS BECAUSE
I WISHED TO LIVE DELIBERATELY."

Caspian Lake
Left: Howie Cantor
at the sugar shack
where he boils maple
sap into syrup

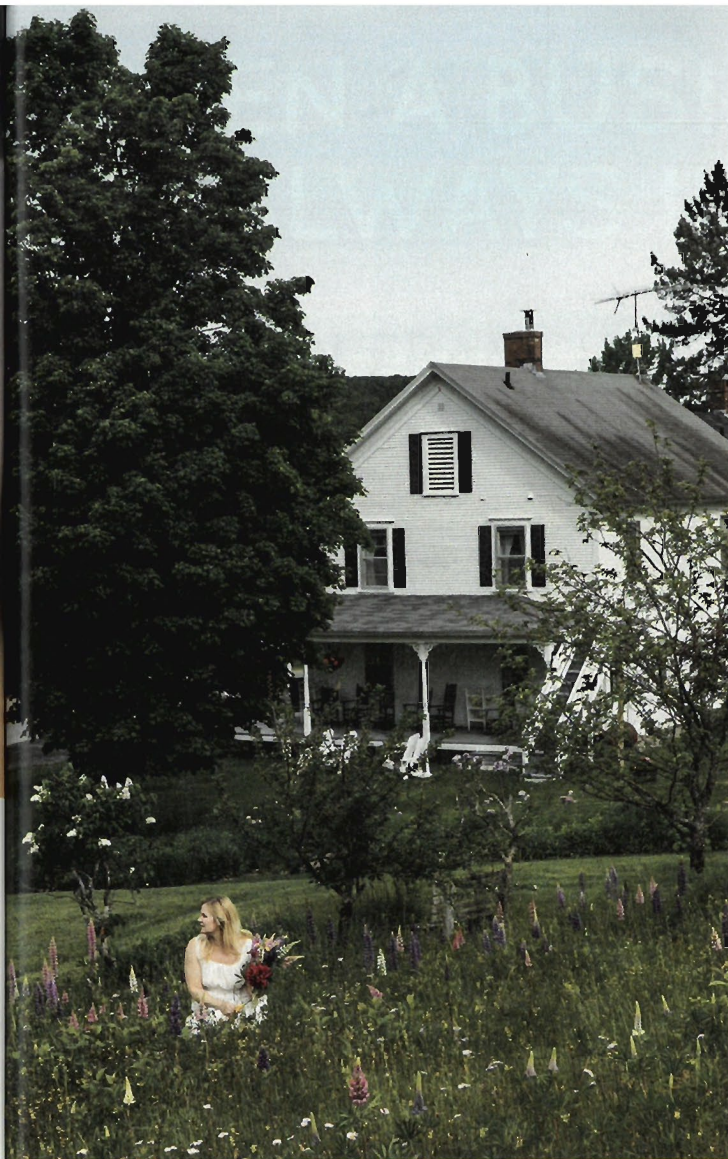


and dandelions, are named in honor of Hill's ancestors and distributed almost exclusively in Vermont. Most is sold at the brewery, where lines form Wednesday to Saturday at the farm's retail store. Hill is cagey about his tricks of the trade, but many beer obsessives have surmised that the well water is the secret to the beer's success.

Some Northeast Kingdom upstarts have grown so quickly they've had to move to bigger digs. Caledonia Spirits began eight

Clockwise from top left: Caledonia Spirits president Ryan Christiansen; Caledonia's Bar Hill gin and barrel-aged gin; Caledonia's local raw honey; lead distiller Scott Emery

years ago up on Barr Hill—not far from Hill Farmstead Brewery—where beekeeper Todd Hardie keeps his bees and grows organic barley and hops. The honey and grains are essential to the gin and vodka he distills with partner Ryan Christiansen in nearby Hardwick. Christiansen, a native Vermonter, bought Caledonia in 2015 from Hardie, who still supplies ingredients. Today, Caledonia's gin and vodka are distributed in 30 states. The growth has necessitated the move to larger quarters >



in a just-opened multimillion-dollar facility in the state capital of Montpelier, west of the Northeast Kingdom. Visitors can observe the distilling process and then have a drink at the bar.

Rather than a business plan, Christiansen credits his company's success to "a desire to make rural Vermont work for me." He explains that after college, he knew he wanted to stay in Vermont, and he wanted to work independently. "Living in Vermont doesn't make it easy, in regard to a career, but there's been an amazing ability here to create wonderful products in this little area," he says. "I think it's because it's not expensive to live here, so creativity is not restricted. Time moves a little slower, and that's a good atmosphere for creative thinking."

VISITORS WHO COME FOR CHEESE STAY FOR THE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES.

Above: Heidi Lauren Duke picking fresh flowers at Highland Lodge; Parker room at Highland Lodge



THE SUCCESS OF THESE YOUNG companies has drawn a new generation of travelers. "We have tons of young visitors," Highland Lodge's Duke says. "It's not the same group of people as before." Visitors who come to the area for beer and cheese stay for the outdoor activities. In the summer months, there are hundreds of miles of off-road bike paths and hiking trails to explore, and more than half a dozen lakes in the Northeast Kingdom in which to start the morning with a solitary swim.

"It's changed here like the rest of the world has changed," muses my brother Howie. "Before, a lot of people just never got past Stowe [the ski resort an hour away]. Here everyone has been trying to live off the land for the past 40 years, raising their own food," he tells me. "It had been slowly evolving and all of a sudden it's like it exploded, and that goes along with the rise in food consciousness happening everywhere."

In a way, he was an early pioneer of the >

Highland Lodge offers
paddling, kayaking
and canoeing on
Caspian Lake



"THE DECISION TO STAY HERE REQUIRES A SPECIFIC PERSONALITY AND SET OF VALUES."

small-batch, land-focused movement up here. Every spring, with snow still lingering on the forest floor, he disappears for days into the sugar shack down a muddy path from his house to boil maple sap into syrup. Howie has purposefully kept his operation small, still relying largely on a tubing system through which sap is pulled downhill to the sugar-house via gravity. "You take what the tree gives you," he says.

Over the years, my brother has witnessed how industrialization has affected the livelihood of local farmers. "Once you could have 40 cows, a sugar bush and a woodlot," Howie explains. "You'd grow your hay in the summer and sugar in the spring and cut logs in the winter." That self-sufficiency has proven elusive as of late. Maple farmers now typically sell their crop to companies who deliver a standardized product to the mass market. "The industry doesn't want any differences in price or quality," says Howie. "It's as if wine was just wine." The situation has grown dire for dairy farmers, with hundreds in the region closing down. Many now rent their land to large companies who create mega farms, or sell their milk to distributors at regulated prices so low the farmers are challenged to break even.

But Howie is encouraged by the success of

the new generation of agro-entrepreneurs as they support small farmers. "Corporate America is a curse word in the Northeast Kingdom," Shaun Hill says. "I see young families continuing to choose to dairy farm, to raise vegetables, to preserve a connection to place, to recognize that 'wealth' is truly a connection to land and family. The decision to stay in the area requires a specific personality and set of values."

Mateo Kehler concurs, referring to the "epic decline" of small dairy farms that can't compete in today's market. "Our business is really a response to globalization," he says. He explains that the profits from Jasper Hill cheese, a product sold in high-income areas, are being pumped back into the Northeast Kingdom as neighboring dairy farmers supply them with milk.

"Our goal is to keep farmers on the land, to make sure we can be part of liveable communities where our general stores are thriving, kids are in school, and young people are moving here instead of moving away," says Kehler. "This is the beginning of something. We're trying to set something in motion here that will have momentum for generations." **AW**

A TASTE OF THE NORTHEAST KINGDOM

From sausages to cider,
a sampling of NEK food
and drink to enjoy on-site
or at home

Eden Specialty Ciders

Cider makers Eleanor and
Albert Léger use
heirloom apples to create
fermented ice cider
as well as dry bubbly
and still varieties.
edenicecider.com

Pete's Greens

The farm stand offers up to
100 types of organic locally
grown veggies, along with
pasture-raised meat, bread
and other locally made
goodies.

petesgreens.com

Hill Farmstead Brewery

Expect a line for growlers at
the Greensboro brewery's
retail shop, open Wednesday
through Saturday.
hillfarmstead.com/onsite

Northeast Kingdom Processing

On Thursdays, this butcher
operation offers nitrate-free
bacon, sausages and steaks
from their own Black Angus
herd. They also ship
anywhere in the U.S.
nekprocessing.com

Brown's Beautiful Blueberries

Pick a bucket of blueberries
in this gorgeous rural grove,
open only in summer.
bbblueberries.com