

{ from the kitchen }



Kelly Steinmetz

## Flying Fork Cafe and Bakery

**ASPEN EXPAT MOVES OVER MCCLURE PASS AND INTO DINING DISTINCTION**

by Stewart Oksenhorn  
Photographs by JT Thomas

**T**he process of making the bagels served Sunday mornings at Paonia's Flying Fork Cafe and Bakery starts Friday morning with a sponge: the mix of flour, yeast and water that is the foundation of an authentic New York-style bagel. Later that night, owner Kelly Steinmetz and his crew turn the sponge into dough by adding more flour and yeast, plus honey and malt. On Saturday, the dough is portioned; late Saturday night, after all the other kitchen work is done, the bagels are shaped by punching a thumb through the dough — “to give them that nice bagel shape,” says Steinmetz. The process continues at 2:30 Sunday morning when the weekend baker seasons the bagels — Steinmetz likes to stick to the basics of poppy, sesame and garlic, though he makes allowances for his asiago cheese variety — then boils and finally bakes them.



## Recipes courtesy of Chef Kelly Steinmetz Flying Fork Cafe and Bakery, Paonia, Colo.

### Gazpacho

**MAKES APPROXIMATELY 2 1/2 QUARTS**

1 medium zucchini  
 1 medium yellow squash  
 1 medium red bell pepper  
 1/2 medium yellow onion  
 1/2 medium red onion  
 2 medium cucumbers  
 2 medium carrots  
 4 celery stalks  
 3-4 tomatoes, whatever kind is ripest  
 1 28-ounce can crushed tomatoes, do not strain  
 1 teaspoon crushed pepper flakes  
 1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil  
 2 cups cold water  
 Fresh oregano, thyme and Italian parsley, chopped  
 Kosher salt  
 Freshly ground black pepper

Wash all of the vegetables (I leave on the skins for extra vitamins and texture). In batches, process the zucchini, squash, bell pepper, onions, cucumbers, carrots, celery and whole tomatoes in a food processor until approximately 1/2-inch in size. Mix processed vegetables, crushed tomatoes with their juice, pepper flakes and olive oil in a glass, stainless-steel or plastic container (not aluminum). Add water to create a souplike consistency. Season to taste with oregano, thyme, parsley and salt and pepper. Let sit overnight to enzymatically cook and marinate.

### Rose Water Panna Cotta

**MAKES 12-14 4-OUNCE PORTIONS**

1/2 ounce cold water  
 1/2 ounce rose water  
 1 envelope unflavored gelatin  
 3 cups heavy cream, divided  
 1 cup sugar  
 1 vanilla bean, just the paste from inside  
 14 ounces mascarpone

### Balsamic Strawberries

1 container strawberries, thinly sliced  
 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar  
 1 tablespoon sugar  
 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

For the panna cotta, combine water, rose water and gelatin. Set aside. Heat and stir 1 cup heavy cream, the sugar and vanilla-bean paste, until the sugar dissolves. Strain into the gelatin mixture and stir to dissolve. Add in and mix the mascarpone and 2 remaining cups heavy cream to the gelatin-and-cream mixture. Pour into 4-ounce ramekins and refrigerate overnight.

Toss strawberries, vinegar, sugar and pepper in a large bowl to combine. Let stand for a minimum of 30 minutes. Strain and spoon strawberries over panna cotta.



All this toil and time, Steinmetz says, is “for fun” — though there is also a measure of cultural obligation. Having been raised Jewish on Long Island, Steinmetz is practically duty-bound to include bagels as part of the Sunday-morning nosh for his diners (not to mention a strong desire to satisfy his own cravings). The bagels — as well as the fresh cream cheeses, with flavors including artichoke-parmesan-spinach — are not a high-profit item, selling for \$1.25 apiece. Nor are they a staple of the menu: The Flying Fork, which leans toward Italian cuisine in the cafe side, serves bagels only on Sundays, and only for a few hours.

“We open at 9 to a line at the door. It’s comical,” says Steinmetz. “And by 11, 11:30, they’re gone.”

The bagels seem to fill Steinmetz’s mission to have his restaurant be more than a place for diners to fill their stomachs. The Flying Fork is a gathering spot, an employer of 17 people, a place for Delta County farmers and ranchers and winemakers to spotlight their produce. It is also a place that has helped raise the profile of Paonia from a quiet agricultural town to a place with a palpable hip quotient. Motorists passing through, Aspenites on a weekend tour of Delta County wineries and farm stands, and those relocating to the lower altitude and warmer climes on the other side of McClure Pass have the option of homemade ravioli or grilled Muscovy duck, and a thoughtfully selected Italian wine list at the Flying Fork. Of all the segments of society — day-trippers unexpectedly finding a fine-dining spot in rural Paonia, local bagel lovers — the one that might be most grateful are Delta County Realtors.

**“We open at 9 to a line at the door. It’s comical,” says Steinmetz. “And by 11, 11:30, they’re gone.”**

“The most incredible thing is how many people, in six years, have come into the kitchen, grasped my hand and said, “Thank you. Thank you for doing this,”” says Steinmetz. “I’ve had Realtors come in and thank me because they had clients for whom I was the deciding factor in buying a second home here. [They say] ‘I can be in the middle of nowhere and still have a civilized meal, a real meal.’”

Food has always attracted Steinmetz, a 40-year-old with muscular arms, a well-tamed beard and a great smile. At 9, he had a shellfish license that permitted him to dig clams out of the mud off the beaches of East Hampton, where his grandparents had a home. While his siblings planned to follow their father, a pediatrician, into professional life, Steinmetz filled a notebook with ideas about the restaurant he would one day open.

Steinmetz graduated from the restaurant management program at Newbury College, outside of Boston, in 1991 and took a sous-chef position at the Thunderbird Lodge in Taos. After breaking his femur skiing in the New Mexico backcountry, he left Taos to split his time between Santa Barbara, where he managed a chain of yogurt stores, and the Hamptons, where he bartended. He first came to Colorado to visit a cousin who was renting a riverside house in Carbondale and got hooked on the Roaring Fork Valley: “I could always visit the ocean. But the mountains offered an incredible quality of life,” he says.

Steinmetz’s early life in Colorado was literally on the mountain: He helped run several restaurants at the Snowmass ski area and



lived upstairs at the Spider Sabich “picnic palace.” He also had the graveyard snowmaking shift on Snowmass.

While food had always been his passion, Steinmetz gained direction in his Snowmass years. Italian food had been in his blood early on; his divorced mother’s Italian boyfriend had Sunday family meals that would last until the final bites of homemade pasta and focaccia were gone. The job he eventually landed in Snowmass — sous chef at Il Poggio — honed his focus.

“I walked into the backyard, and it was like the Garden of Eden. The place was just exploding. Apples and pears were falling off the trees; heirloom tomatoes were laying on the ground,” says Steinmetz, recalling the herbs, fruit trees, berry bushes and grape vines on the downtown property. “I went, ‘I want to serve food ... right ... here.’”

“I worked under [Il Poggio owner] Chris Blatchley, and that was incredible,” says Steinmetz. “He really helped bring it together for me, his eye for quality — textures, flavors, keeping things fresh. My menu, my style, very much emulate what I learned from him.”

Still, it is possible that the five years under Blatchley were not as formative as the day he first went to Paonia. Steinmetz, who was scouting out a location for a restaurant, knew he would cook Italian. But he had no idea he would enter the realm of local, seasonal ingredients until he laid eyes on a failing health-food store. Inside, the spot was decrepit; the property was in foreclosure, and the business had been abandoned. But outside, he found hope.

“I walked into the backyard, and it was like the Garden of Eden. The place was just exploding. Apples and pears were falling off the trees; heirloom tomatoes were laying on the ground,” says Steinmetz, recalling the herbs, fruit trees, berry bushes and grape vines on the downtown property. “I went, ‘I want to serve food ... right ... here.’”

Almost as significant as the garden was the event taking place next door: the Paonia Mountain Harvest Festival, where local farmers and vintners were selling their wares. Before that day, Steinmetz’s idea of local food had been limited to the famous Olathe corn and Palisade peaches. Now his eyes were open to a concept on which he could build a restaurant.

“Seeing everything, right here, alive — it was incredible. This vision came together that day,” he says. “I underwent negotiations that afternoon.”

Steinmetz has held true to that vision since the Flying Fork opened in June 2003. His main supplier is the local Red Hat Produce; between Red Hat and what he pulls out of his garden, he has bypassed entirely the purveyors that work on a massive, international scale. He says that more than 90 percent of his

products are made on premises: All the breads and sauces are from scratch; the chickens are local, and brined and smoked at the Flying Fork; the spinach fettuccine is handmade. About 60 percent of the wines offered come from within a few miles.

The rewards — including mentions in *Gourmet* and *Bon Appetit* — have been hard earned. For the first 18 months it was in business, the Flying Fork was open every day. Over a relaxing lunch under the backyard fruit trees, Steinmetz — who has no sous chef or dessert chef — mentions that he can count on two hands how many times he has indulged himself with the opportunity of a leisurely meal in his own garden. He lives in a cramped apartment above the restaurant, though he is in the early stages of turning the space into a lounge with a deck overlooking the garden. But the hours and any inconvenience are outweighed by the accomplishment.

“I’m not just in business, I’m part of the community,” he says. “I’m providing a wonderful service. This is the place everyone hopes to find — the really neat place in a small town.” <sup>eA</sup>

---

*Stewart Oksenhorn is the arts and entertainment editor at The Aspen Times, a connoisseur of local foods, and is fond of robust conversations over long, lingering meals.*