



Bread and pastries are just part of what National Provisions has in store.

BEYOND BREAD

By Kate Savage / Photos by Bill Luster

Husband-and-wife team
have bold plans for
National Provisions

beyond bread

On the corner of National and Walton avenues, close to downtown Lexington and tucked between the established neighborhoods of Kenwick and Mentelle, is a slice of France — 15,000 square feet of France called National Provisions..

Housed in what was originally the John. G. Epping Bottling Works and subsequently a marble and tile company, National Provisions is part of the evolving and ambitious multi-themed brain-child of husband-wife owners Krim Boughalem and Andrea Sims.

Boughalem, 47, who looks like a young singer-songwriter George Moustaki and speaks English so quickly and with such a distinct French accent that it still sounds like French, is from southeastern France close to the Alps. Sims, 44, is a Lexington native with an undergraduate degree from the University of Kentucky who gravitated to Europe. After living in Milan and for a couple of years in the French countryside in an old chateau she helped to restore, she headed to New York City via Paris in the late '90s. In New York City, she lived and worked as an interior decorator specializing in faux-finish painting — an old-world

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— Krim Boughalem

skill she learned in France. Meanwhile, Boughalem, having taken an equally circuitous route via London, had for several years been living in New York managing fancy restaurants. Not surprisingly, their stars crossed at a street party on Bastille Day.

Weary of the restaurant business and the sky-high New York prices, the couple considered moving outside the city. On a trip to Lexington they found a house they loved on Hampton Court and, without really having a plan, bought it and moved here.

After a year's hiatus, they made their first foray back into the food business by opening Wine + Market on Jefferson Street in 2008.



An inviting entrance on National Avenue beckons customers to the Beer Hall, part of National Provisions' multi-themed eatery.



Wine + Market became the nascence of the revival that street still enjoys. “We opened Wine + Market in our neighborhood,” Sims said, “because we had come from New York where there was a little bodega on every corner, and we were tired of having to get in our car and drive someplace when we just wanted a carton of milk.”

With the clarity of hindsight, they soon realized Wine + Market was too small to be a feasible concept. “It just couldn’t feed on itself and be self-sustaining,” said Sims. “Because of space limitations we couldn’t keep enough choices of everything for people to come and shop, and we had no kitchen.”

Their next venture was to renovate a downtown space and open the restaurant Table 310 on Short Street while never losing their desire to have a big indoor market. They inquired about the old Epping bottling plant on National Avenue that they first saw when shopping for marble counter tops for Wine + Market. “We loved the space,” said Boughalem. “We were looking for an empty warehouse, a blank canvas. We knew it was a great neighborhood, convenient for many, and extremely underserved.”



Above, from left, Sarah Wylie Van Meter, Griffin Van Meter, and Laura Massie enjoy a meal in the Beer Hall; left, owners Andrea Sims and Krim Boughalem have an ambitious vision for their business.



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He joins Associate Broker, Greg Martelli, owner of Foxhill Architecural Specialties and Heirloom lumber. Greg has been in the real estate business for over 30 years and brings a high level of expertise to the design and layout of farms, barns, bridges etc. He is a “highly awarded” participant in historical renovation and construction.

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So even though the timing wasn't perfect, when it became available shortly thereafter, "We scooped it up," he said, continuing, "We haven't been disappointed for a minute with our choice."

The couple spent the next two years "settling" the new space, selling Wine + Market, scouring the Internet, going to government auctions for used restaurant equipment, and redesigning the old building into various inter-related components. "Everywhere will be one sort of interconnected space with a different atmosphere," said Sims, trying to capture the essence of their vision that continues to evolve.

The building dates back to 1863. "We haven't really done anything to it except take it back to what it was," Sims said. "We've let the space dictate what it should be, and we've allowed for the beauty of the building to speak". Their commitment was recognized at this year's annual Blue Grass Trust awards dinner when craftsman Nathaniel Hensley received the Preservation Craftsman Award for the work he is doing to restore some of the outside windows.

Sims says she and Boughalem are a good team. "Krim is food; I'm the space," she said, acknowledging she generally designed, built, and did everything, then adds modestly "well, not literally — but with just a couple of carpenters whom I oversaw." The exposed beams in the bakery and the steel frames of glass are painted bright shiny lipstick red, and Sims spent hours applying a faux-marble finish to the walls to match the Norwegian pink marble counter tops in the bakery, as well as creating a trompe l'oeil on the floor by



Clockwise from top left, a cheese and charcuterie plate, a lemon meringue tart, and individual quiches are among the bountiful offerings.

painting what looks like old worn tiles onto the concrete slab.

Originally the plan was to open the Provisions/Market first, but it became obvious that the more urgent need was the kitchen and the bakery to provide bread and desserts for Table 310. So in November 2013 National Boulangerie was the first space to open.

At National Boulangerie, Becca Schmutte, 21, provides all the pastries and desserts for that location and for Table 310, often working seven days a week and usually 10 to 12 hours a day. While attending Sullivan University in Lexington, she was the pastry chef for more than a year at Table 310. "I love it here," Schmutte said. "I am nowhere near where I thought I would be having to start after coming out of school, and most of this I owe to Chef Brian [Surbaugh] for giving me the chance, and Krim and Andrea for giving both of us carte blanche."

Everything is made from scratch and comes out fresh every day, so sometimes popular items run out. Schmutte has regular items that she makes in small and larger sizes, but will take anything as a special order, including wedding cakes, adding that selections change with the seasons and holidays. "We made red, white, and blue macaroons for the Fourth of July instead of the traditional pastel colors," she said.



Krim Boughalem is the "food" part of the team, according to wife Andrea Sims.

For customers and employees alike, the macaroons are the next best thing to being in France. Drura Parrish, shopping at the Boulangerie with his mother who was purchasing a dozen assorted to take to a dinner party — caramel, mint, and strawberry-flavored, (12 for \$23.95) — said, "Coming here is the easiest way to inject joy into my day." The same goes for two women working at the counter that day, both besotted Francophiles. Patricia Clements, a UK graduate in art history, spent her semester abroad in France, and Kate Lorenzo, after getting her master's in French literature, spent two years in Deauville teaching English and perfecting her French. She will be going to Vanderbilt in the fall to get her PhD. Meanwhile, she is spending her "summertime selling macaroons and baguettes, and shamelessly taking advantage of any French speakers who come in." She said having French people come to National Boulangerie is a testament to the fact that "we are really 'nailing' the French pastry."

Schmutte is responsible for the pastries, and a mysterious man named Mo bakes the bread at night. No one seems to know Mo's last name but say he was the original bread baker at Sunrise Bakery and was there for many years. In addition to the traditional baguettes,

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beyond bread



Above left, a communal table encourages conversation at the Beer Hall, which serves more than 150 different types of beer.

there are various shapes and sizes of loaves, all made with white flour although there are plans to add wheat. This daily batch supplies the restaurant needs of Table 310. Mo also is responsible for the bakery's top-selling croissants as well as muffins and a selection of quiche. Clements and Lorenzo both agreed that Mo knocks his croissants out of the ballpark, and they are "better than any we ever had in France."

The Beer Hall, with its separate entrance on National Avenue, has been open since May. Offering more than 150 different selections of craft brews, The Beer Hall offers a cash and carry service at a 45 percent discount for to-go sales, and, unlike other local specialty beer establishments, has the sit-down food service component.

Brian Surbaugh, a soft-spoken young man who grew up in Lexington, is the executive chef for both the National Avenue enterprise as well as Table 310. He earned his chops at Dudley's before moving to Seattle for eight years while also attending a community college to learn about sustainability and the stages of farm-to-table food production. Surbaugh appreciates the creative latitudes that Boughalem and Sims afford him, calling them both "visionaries" as well as "very sweet, sweet people." He will oversee the menu of what will be their

Bluegrass Brasserie once fully opened.

A brasserie is an unpretentious restaurant that serves drinks, especially beer, along with simple and hearty foods. Think cassoulet, pot au feu, confit of duck with dumplings, bison brisket hash, and you'll be ready to order. One half of the Brasserie is already open and serving lunch and dinner. The other half, in a co-joined space, should be fully operational by October. Surbaugh said the current menu will expand to include fish selections. In addition to their chalkboard daily specials, they offer a "day-of-the-week" special. On a Monday you will be able to order Kentucky rabbit ratatouille with local greens. Tuesday it's braised Kentucky beef with whipped potatoes. Boughalem stresses that their prices are



In an earlier life National Provisions was the John G. Epping Bottling Works, shown here in a 1940s photo.

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beyond bread



Dominic Sawaya and Maja Redzic enjoy a light meal in the Boulangerie.

“aggressive.”. “We are trying to stay around \$20.00 so we are not considered high end.”

The open section of the Beer Hall has one long table that provides communal or refectory-style eating. Each place is meticulously set with a crisp, starched, sparkly white folded superior cotton napkin, a water glass, and cutlery. It looks inviting, and it's impossible not to be impressed by the attention to detail. The second phase of the Brasserie, on a step-up adjacent level with an anticipated opening in October, will include booths or “banquettes,” as Sims calls them, using the French term.

For now Boughalem and Sims are focusing their attention on what they consider the “piece de resistance” of their operation that will be the supply station and complete the circle of sustainability and self-sufficiency. National Provisions will be what they ultimately attempted at Wine + Market but with space to offer viable selections of meat, cheese, local vegetables, charcuterie, fish, a raw bar, prepared foods, dry goods, dairy, and fresh flowers as well as a center counter to eat and drink. They are already working with David Wagoner, owner of Three Springs Farm in Elizabethtown, who will be their main produce supplier.

They plan to add a small brewery in the back of the building, and Sims said she hopes to own a farm “and take it all the way back to the beginning with a school and lodging — a sort of ecotourism where people can come and learn butchering and baking and growing vegetables.” Everything Boughalem and Sims are attempting is part of a carefully thought-out concept. What might be easy to dismiss as French arrogance is in fact a fierce steadfastness to a vision and ideology that is different for Lexington. If you want to take a mini-trip to Europe and never leave town, then National and Walton is the place to go. **KM**




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