

CATERING

TO THEIR EVERY WHIM

By Cynthia Grisolia/Photos by Lee Thomas

Apiary, the catering company and new event venue on Jefferson Street in downtown Lexington, sits quietly and unassumingly behind a brick barricade. But don't be fooled — inside the hive things are, well, buzzing, with workers doing what they do best: creating and refining culinary delights. Executive chef Tony Yalnazov sears a pork loin, looking for the perfect combination of seasonings, while chef de cuisine Philip Cronin compares three recipes for light, crispy chicken wings. Susanna Henderson, Apiary's pastry chef, meanwhile, experiments on mini popovers to find the ideal mix of taste and texture.

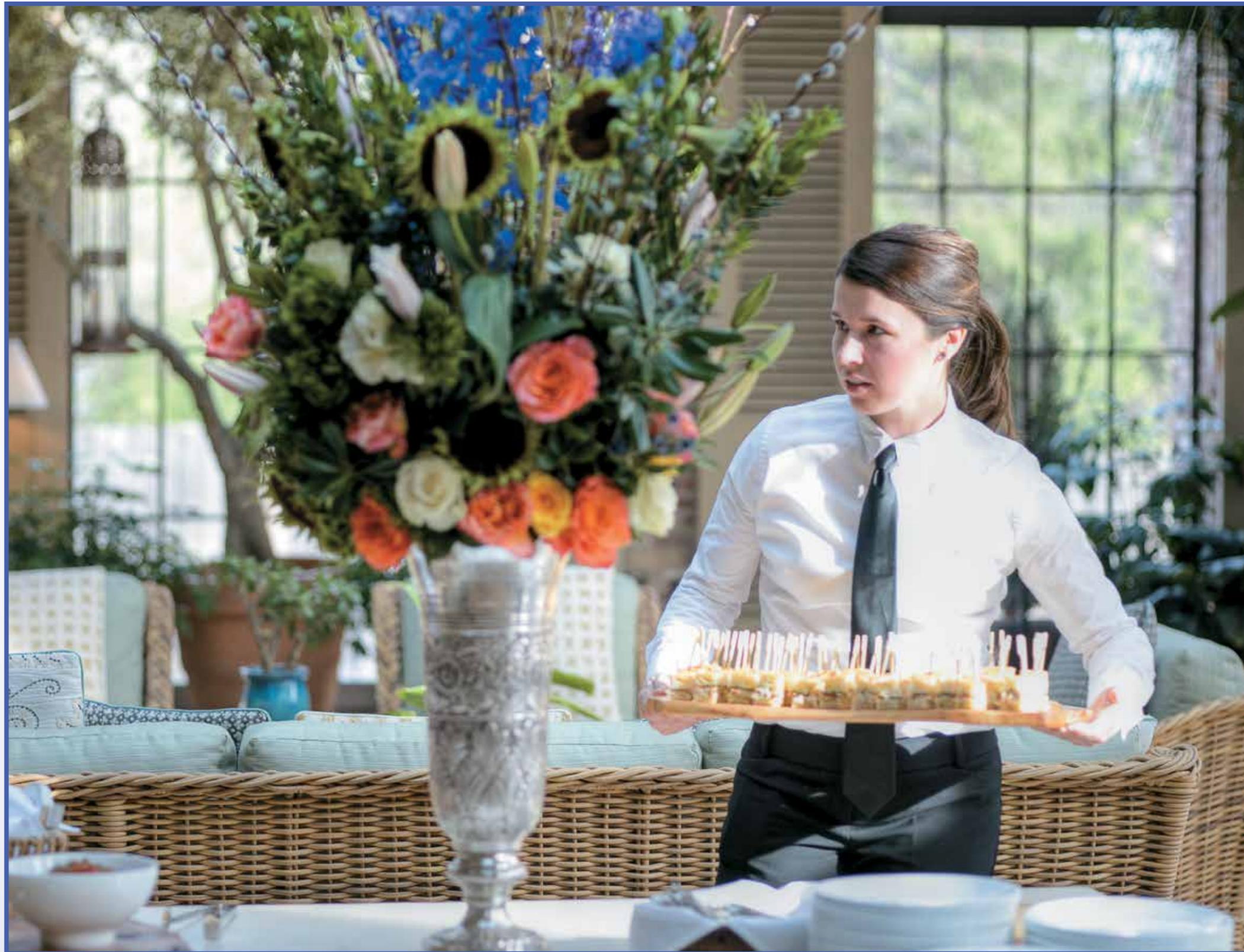
Apiary sets Lexington's culinary scene abuzz

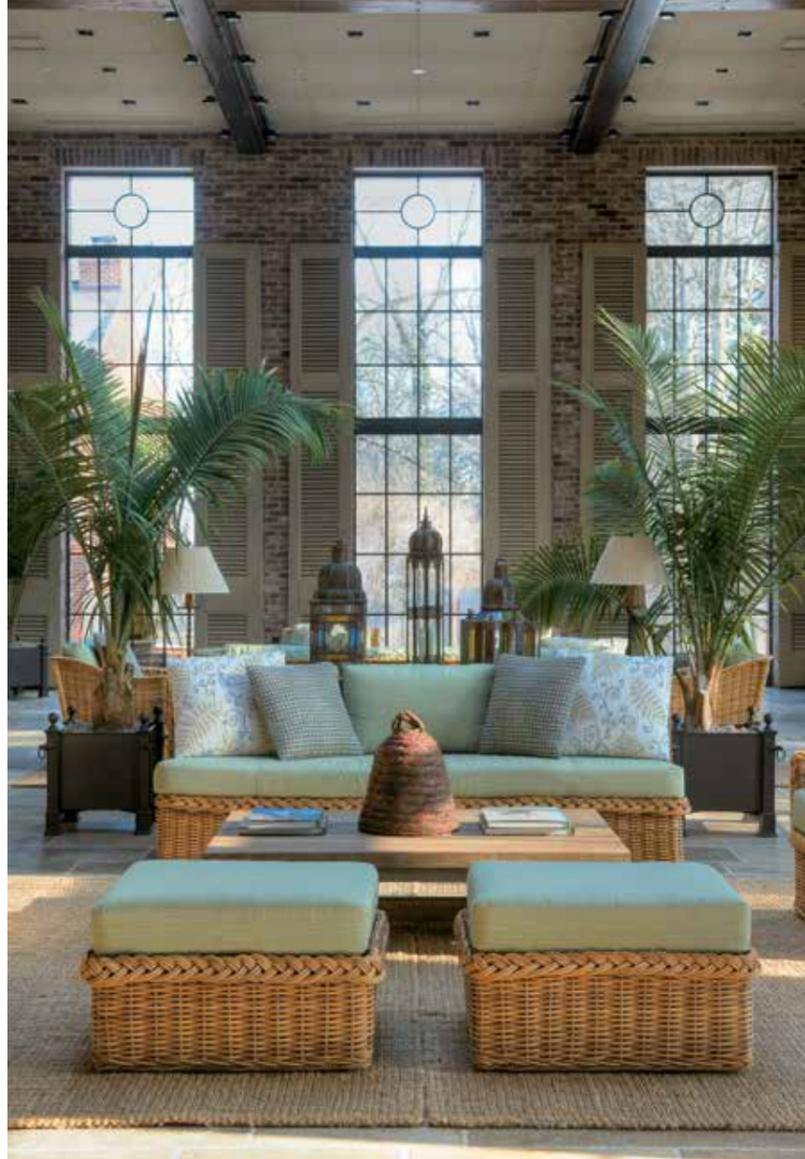
Apiary co-owner and chef Cooper Vaughan moves from plate to plate, judging the results of the staff's culinary research and development. "We like to test old and new recipes and perfect things we've already done," he said. "We're always improving, always updating."

Apiary has been one of Lexington's top catering companies since 2008. But just a few months ago the doors opened on the final phase of a long-term project for Vaughan; his wife of nine years, Mandy; and his parents, Neal and Derek, who are also co-owners: an 8,100-square-foot event space they hope will not be just another place to throw a party but rather an epicurean "destination" for Lexingtonians.

When the Vaughans took over the property, the building was just a concrete block that sat forgotten on the edge of what is now Jefferson Street's booming

From the decor to the food and service, Apiary delivers a memorable experience.





COURTESY OF MATTHEW CARTER INTERIORS

Designer Matthew Carter helped create the glamorous, contemporary interior.

dining district — it was the remains of the Star Light & Magic theatrical special-effects company, which had been gutted by fire. “When I initially came into this space, it was like, ugh,” said Vaughan with a laugh. “We had been looking at so many locations, and I just wanted to come into something that had a charming this and a charming that,” he added. “Then this idea came about.”

The idea was to marry industrial and natural, urban and rural to create not just another eatery but also a place that would offer the finest in food and wine in an extraordinary environment with unmatched service. “I came in with the idea that I was going to try to offer this experience as a restaurant,” said Vaughan. “But we couldn’t find the right fit, and we didn’t think the town could support that yet. This high-end stuff — there is certainly more expense going into it,” he added, “but the reward of being involved in that level of the craft is really inspiring to us.”



Cooper and Mandy Vaughan

In 2008 Apiary began as just a kitchen catering off-site events. Soon after, an enviable lineup was gathered that would expand the kitchen — still the stainless-steel heart of the hive — into an extraordinary event space. That team included architect Brent Bruner of Lexington’s EOP (a firm known for such marquee projects as Rupp Arena and the Lexington Convention Center), builder Greg Martelli of Fox Hill, interior designer Matthew Carter, award-winning garden designer Jon Carloftis, and local metalworkers Maynard Studios, which forged intricate and elegant ironwork throughout. The result is a level of craftsmanship not often seen in modern construction.

A tour of the new Apiary might begin in the bar area, which is also used for occasional tasting dinners. The room has a timeless feel, thanks to the architectural use of reclaimed materials. Brick beams were salvaged from old tobacco warehouses in Lexington (Vaughan’s parents also own the G.F. Tobacco Company) while stone for a fireplace was gathered from Vaughan’s uncle’s farm. Similarly, brick pavers lining the floors came from the historic Hamburg Place farm. “They had used them for their stallion barns,” said Vaughan. Even the mirror behind the bar was salvaged. “It’s hand-blown glass from Germany,” noted Mandy Vaughan, who is also Apiary’s proprietress. “It was all hand silvered and aged by R Squared in Charleston, South Carolina.”

The bar blends seamlessly into the Winter Room, a comfortable cocktail area, which leads into the main space known as the Orangerie Room. “The whole idea of this space is engaging the outside,” said Vaughan, noting the skylights and the 15-foot-tall windows that allow endless views of the French limestone terrace and the gardens. “It’s an agrarian experience living in downtown.”

The lavish gardens are integral to the Apiary experience. Merging a living garden with a



sleek metal interior was a challenge met by Carloftis. “It had to have an urban feel rather than a country garden in the downtown,” said the designer who is known for the Kentucky Experience and the Alltech Experience gardens at the 2010 Alltech FEI World Equestrian Games, among many other commercial and municipal spaces throughout the state. “And because it is a public space, it had to look good all year.”

To achieve that, Carloftis planted plenty of evergreens, such as hollies, boxwood, and upright junipers. To add interest, he incorporated the bright orange climbing shrub known as trumpet vine (“because we all agreed orange was great in the garden,” he noted). Obelisks take things higher for more growing space.

The outdoor space also includes raised beds that will not only produce a wide variety of vegetables and herbs for use in the kitchen but also extend Apiary into community outreach. While designed by Carloftis, the bed will be maintained by Seedleaf, a Lexington-based non-profit organization that sponsors city gardens to help feed needy families. And to help keep it all “green” the landscaping and organic produce will be irrigated by recycled rainwater collected in a 12,000-gallon underground cistern.

“Everyone who goes inside will agree that this [space] is a game changer,” said Carloftis of the finished Apiary. “The detail, beauty, and workmanship that have gone into



Top, preparations are complete for a private party. Vaughan describes the gardens as “an agrarian experience living in downtown.”

it brings a new sophistication, not only to Jefferson Street but to Lexington and to Kentucky.”

Vaughan’s unrelenting attention to such detail and commitment to quality have been cultivated over a 20-year career. A Lexington native, he originally wanted to be a chef and went to study at Le Cordon Bleu in London. When he returned to the Bluegrass, he pursued a cooking career but found himself drawn more to “the front of the house,” which led him to attend Transylvania University. With a degree in hotel/restaurant management in hand, Vaughan headed to eastern Tennessee for a job at the luxury resort Blackberry Farm. There he met his wife, Mandy, who also worked in

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management and hospitality. “That was a very pivotal point for both of us,” said Vaughan. “The level at which they did things at Blackberry and their focus was extraordinary — it was their aim to be the best with both food and with service, and they achieved that as a team.”

After moving on to manage Fossett’s Restaurant in Charlottesville, Virginia, for a year, the couple returned to Lexington, and Vaughan went to work for Dupree Catering and Events as an assistant manager and event coordinator. “I took a lead role there,” said Vaughan, “and I began to realize there was an opportunity in this [catering] arena to do things that would be difficult to do as a restaurant.”

At Dupree, Vaughan met chef Yalnazov, and a vision for Apiary began to form. Though setting down roots in Lexington wasn’t always part of the plan. “My dreams were for the exotic,” said Vaughan. “I wanted to run a fancy fishing lodge in some place like Central America. But I love Lexington; I have a connection here. And after Mandy and I got married, it seemed like the right next step” he added. The couple now lives downtown with their 5-year-old twin sons, Emory and Cannon, and daughter Faustine, 18 months.

Since its inception Apiary has been slowly building a reputation for impeccable food and flawless presentation, whether catering a large wedding, a farm picnic, or an intimate dinner for, say, a group of foxhunters.

“Cooper is incredibly creative; every meal is a surprise and a delight as it is never the same,” said Lilla Mason, a joint master of foxhounds at the Lexington-based Iroquois Hunt Club, for which Apiary is the exclusive food and beverage provider. “One of the most memorable dishes was the bouillabaisse at our last hunt ball,” added Mason. “It was a beautiful soup with fresh Gulf fish and shellfish, with a saffron broth poured tableside. Typical of Cooper, not only was it brilliantly presented, as waiters poured the broth in unison at each table, it was so good that all table conversations ceased. You just wanted to savor each mouthful,” Mason



The detailed attention to the food makes dining at Apiary “a surprise and a delight,” according to guest Lilla Mason.

catering to their every whim

said. “People are still talking about it.”

Good thing, because word of mouth is what keeps Apiary busy throughout the year. The young company has done little to no advertising but has nonetheless maintained steady bookings — some even far into the year. With the announcement that the Breeders’ Cup World Championships would be held at Keeneland Race Course this year (Oct. 30-31), appointments, said Vaughan, skyrocketed. “That’s the kind of scenario that generates a lot of business. That’s a time where everyone is entertaining,” he noted.

The Breeders’ Cup has secured the venue and the talents of the Apiary team for the entire week leading up to the World Championships, and will be hosting its VIP guests at Apiary each evening. “World-class experience is a hallmark of how we treat our guests



Apiary’s exterior discreetly hints at the delights that await inside.

from around the globe,” commented Bob Elliston, Breeders’ Cup chief operating officer. “Having experienced Cooper and Mandy’s first-class culinary and service focus, along with this extraordinary event space, we anticipate this will be one of the most sought after destinations all week.”

Apiary’s new event space hosted its first party in February, and the Vaughans and the entire staff are looking forward to what lies ahead for the unique venue and their brand.

“My dream is to become a company that can create events,” said Vaughan. “I don’t want to sit here waiting for you to call me. Suddenly, I’ll decide I want to create something and call you,” he explained. “I know we have that capability — whether it be here at Apiary or a secret supper down by a creek somewhere. I just love that idea of creating experiences.” **KM**



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