

A FOOD TREK



Clockwise from top left, Friday Night Flights at Whole Foods; Babalu and guacamole made tableside; pork chops and grits at Honeywood; a game of cornhole outside Shake Shack



TO THE SUMMIT



From tapas and pizza to prime rib, Lexington's newest food destination offers something for every taste

By Louis Guida
Photos by Mark Mahan



A FOOD TREK TO THE SUMMIT

ATHENIAN GRILL • ATOMIC RAMEN • BABALU TAPAS & TACOS • BLAZE PIZZA



A variety of beer and snacks draws in the Friday evening crowds at Whole Foods.

Friday about 6 p.m. Early summer. Hot, and threatening rain. You find yourself in Lexington, Kentucky, metro population 500,000, de facto capital of a Bluegrass region famed the world over for its racehorses and bourbon.

It's the end of a workweek. Thirsty and thinking about food, you're with friends, walking the city's historic downtown

where Henry Clay once held forth. Your go-to places are nearby, but one of you says, "Let's check out The Summit."

So you drive six miles south through rush-hour traffic and suddenly there it is: The Summit at Fritz Farm, an urbanized complex of buildings, streets, and sidewalks commanding a corner of the busiest commercial intersection in the city, Nicholasville and Man o' War.

Opened last year on what had been a family-owned farm, The Summit is a \$165-million, 54-acre development that includes retail and restaurants in

an outdoor setting, apartments, office space, and a boutique hotel. It was developed — and is managed and leased — by Bayer Properties, a Birmingham, Alabama-based company established in 1983 that owns and/or operates retail and office properties in eight states.

"The Summit at Fritz Farm is an all-out experiential destination that celebrates the Lexington lifestyle through a collection of shopping, dining, and signature events," says marketing manager Stephanie Bork. "Our diverse restaurant mix [there are 24 eating and drinking spots]

BLUE SUSHI SAKE GRILL • CORELIFE EATERY • CRANK & BOOM CRAFT ICE CREAM

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CRÚ FOOD & WINE BAR • EDLEY'S BAR-B-QUE • GRIMALDI'S BRICK OVEN PIZZERIA

showcases an array of nationally recognized eateries by local accomplished restaurateurs along with several concepts, each offering its own specialty. It has something for foodies of all ages.”

You drive down to enter the development — getting the paradox of a subterranean summit — and make your way to a parking spot near Whole Foods, one of The Summit's anchors. Your expedition, improvisational by choice, begins with the market's weekly Friday Night Flights: tastes of five different beers from one brewery (which varies each Friday) paired with five different snacks. Beers and snacks are set up at stations throughout the market. Tonight, the beers — citrus-infused wheat, IPA, peachy wheat, lager, and stout — are from Mill Creek Brewing in Nashville. The snacks, made in-house, are fresh tomato bruschetta, roasted chicken drumsticks, Gouda with lemon crisps, plantain salad, and fruit pies. It's \$7 per person, including a reusable small plastic (Weizen-style) tasting “glass,” which you can hold on to and return with another Friday night and receive \$1 off your flight.

From Whole Foods you walk a few yards down the street to Babalu Tapas & Tacos for guacamole. Named for the signature song of Desi Arnaz's character Ricky Ricardo on the old “I Love Lucy” TV show, Babalu describes itself as a “restaurant concept” inspired by Latin cuisine and music such as the guaracha, cha-cha, and Latin jazz. It began in Jackson, Mississippi, in 2010, and now has nine locations, in Kentucky and states farther south.

This Friday, Babalu isn't seating at outdoor tables because of expected rain.



The Barn focuses on Kentucky food brands in its “artisanal” food hall.



Celebrated Kentucky chef Ouita Michel operates Honeywood.

HONEYWOOD BY OUITA MICHEL • J. ALEXANDER'S • KENTUCKY FOR KENTUCKY

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LA PETITE CREPERIE • PASTURE BY MARKSBURY FARM • SHAKE SHACK



COURTESY OF THE SUMMIT



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From left, offerings from Blue Sushi, Atomic Ramen, and Ted's Montana Grill hint at the variety of foods available at The Summit.

But the outside section of the bar, under a building projection, is available, and you find places there, looking into the kitchen. The guacamole is made tableside — bar-side in this case — and comes with house-made chips. You add a jalapeño extra.

After Babalu, you wander The Summit's sidewalks and take in the scene. Stores (there are about 40 in all) are still open. Crowds swell here and there. You check out a Pottery Barn sale and the preppy looks at Brooks Brothers and try on a few lenses at Warby Parker, one of what The Summit calls its "first-to-market" brands, meaning it's the only location in Kentucky for the trendy, New York City eyewear shop that takes its name from two Jack Kerouac characters.

Between Warby and Shake Shack, another New York City-headquartered, "first-to-market" brand here, a few millennials play cornhole on artificial grass. You walk through The Barn, which The Summit describes as "Kentucky's first and finest artisan food hall." With the ambiance of a kicked-up-a-notch food court, it houses booths from

seven local eateries, including Athenian Grill, Crank & Boom ice cream, Pasture by Marksbury Farm, and Smithtown Seafood among other favorites. After that, you move on, past glossy exteriors of Arhaus, Anthropologie, Edley's, Grimaldi's, FRYE, Blue Sushi Sake, and more.

Your passeggiata ends with sensory overload but revives your thirst and appetite, and you land at Honeywood, the latest addition to celebrated Bluegrass restaurateur Ouita Michel's culinary empire. Sited at the center of the center, it's The Summit's only single-location restaurant. Michel, who also owns Smithtown Seafood in The Barn, is a six-time James Beard Foundation nominee for best

Southeast chef who's been written up in a long list of national publications, from The New York Times to Vogue.

Honeywood reflects Michel's passion for and commitment to local ingredients and agriculture. "I feel like it's introducing local food to new groups of people," she says. "It's already driving about a quarter million dollars in local food purchases a year. The Summit is meeting our expectations. We love being there."

You take a large table outside at Honeywood and order draft beers, a black-eyed pea fritter special, and shrimp hoecakes from the regular menu. The drinks come and then a thundershower, so you move inside to eat.

When you've paid the bill, the shower is over and it's dark outside. Stores and more than one restaurant are closed. But your graze and hop hasn't quite run its course. You walk toward a red neon outpost and find J. Alexander's still open. It's 30 minutes until the kitchen closes and only a few tables are occupied. (There was a dinner rush a couple of hours earlier, your host



COURTESY OF THE SUMMIT

A burger from Pasture by Marksbury Farm

SMITHTOWN SEAFOOD • STARBUCKS • STEEL CITY POPS • TED'S MONTANA GRILL

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TEXAS DE BRAZIL • WHISKEY BEAR BAR • WHOLE FOODS MARKET • WORLD OF BEER

says.) J. Alexander's is part of a holding company that traces to Nashville and 1991 and operates more than 40 restaurants, including 19 J. Alexander's, under five different brand names in 16 states. The food across the brands is mainly classic American.

You're winding down and not too hungry or thirsty. Your server is talkative and consequential. Could you have just a taste of the prime rib? She tells you to order a kid's portion and with it a pizza because the wood oven it's cooked in was made in Italy. You take her advice. With your check comes a finale out of The Summit central casting: a large piece of carrot cake — a J. Alexander's specialty, your waitress says — compliments of the house.

With that, you head back to your Whole Foods parking spot. Your night — The Summit part of it, at least — is over. The sky is deep blue, clear, and starry. There's a half moon out. And the open road back to downtown Lexington awaits. **KM**



From top, a view of J. Alexander's; customers linger at The Barn and Whole Foods Market as evening descends.

*Le Deauville
Restaurant*



Happy Hour:
Monday-Saturday 5:00 to 6:30 pm
1/2 price appetizers and drinks

For Dinner:
Open Monday 5:00 to 9:00 pm
Tuesday-Thursday 5:00-10:00 pm
Friday & Saturday 5:00 to 11:00 pm

Outdoor Seating 

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