



BACCHANALIA:

Story by Carol M Newman
Photos by Andrew Thomas Lee

In its 25th year, Quatrano feels Bacchanalia has hit its stride. “It’s the best it’s ever been—and it’s been awhile since I’ve felt this. Today Bacchanalia straddles the best of two worlds: quality of ingredients, and, when necessary, technique to make the plate more beautiful. “We don’t use a coagulate to make custard, which still shows how important the flavors are to us.”

Quatrano elaborates on her reasoning for relocating Bacchanalia. “We were in the last space for 18 years. It was just way too big. We had a 10-year lease, then a five-year lease with a three-year extension. The landlord, who I consider my friend, and I could not come to an agreement. There was no way we could continue with the new constraint: \$20 more per square foot totaled \$20,000 more per month.”

“Providing readily accessible parking was needed for those picking up supplies from Star Provisions, and we liked the west side of town. I wanted something more compact and friendly. Before, we had three kitchens, three hoods, and three dishwashers. Now, we have one kitchen where everyone works more closely together. I love the new space.”

Summer 2017 has proven to be the “craziest, hottest” that Quatrano can remember. It has also been the most unpredictable for farming. “It’s been really tricky. It’s so hot and wet. While that might sound good, it’s not. The weeds and bugs just love this weather! We are either in a drought or we have too much water. That said, we still get product.” 80-90 percent of Bacchanalia’s produce stems from Summerland Farm.

“I think the farm has changed since Clifford and I started it. In the past seven to eight years, our full-time farmers get our staff involved in planting.”

“I’m now a restaurateur who guides chefs. I want to be able to give chefs autonomy. I don’t want to dictate—that would ruin our food.”

THE 45-MILE EACH WAY, EACH DAY COMMUTE SEPARATES ANNE QUATRANO’S SUMMERLAND FARM

from her restaurants Bacchanalia and Star Provisions. She spends her drive time productively, contemplating design blueprints for the new Bacchanalia, “In another life I was an architect. I drew them out in my head and on paper.” She also fondly reflects on the stand-out qualities of her mentor, Judy Rodgers. “I think about Judy and all of the things that she was so particular about such as filleting anchovies. It would take us five hours to perform that task on Mondays to ensure we had anchovies all week. And the way she conducted herself...we all aspire to be that good.”

REDEFINING A SOUTHERN BELLE

“I’VE BEEN KEPT IN A CLOSET, SO TO SPEAK.

I’ve worked with Annie in every restaurant she’s had and have controlled all the menus at one point or another.

“Originally I was a medical technician and focused on spinal meniscus tears for back pain. I did that for a few years. I enjoyed helping people, but did not find the work satisfying. I have a degree in food chemistry from Purdue University. As a teacher’s assistant there I was given a class to teach. I finished my undergrad studies in three years.”

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“Dr. Carl Behnke, a CIA alum and an associate professor teaching courses in foodservice and restaurant operations, and hospitality education, acted as my chef-mentor. He was drastically opposite everything I had come to expect in a chef because he had such a calm demeanor. He always made time for others and never showed any anger. He would say, ‘there’s a better way to do this or that.’ We put a lot of dinners together, including several 200-300-person meals at the estate of the President of Purdue.”

Kallini, a first-generation American from Alexandria, Egypt, knew he wanted to be a chef but didn’t have a full grasp of what it took after graduation. “I started as a line cook in 2007



at a restaurant that no longer exists. It was an Asian-Fusion bistro in Lake May, South Florida, and I worked the wok line. In the middle of summer the kitchen thermometer reached 130 degrees. I arrived at 8 am and cleaned the bathrooms, followed by an hour of prep. I was on fish station, but it was not anywhere close to a poisson station!

“Following Behnke’s lead, I started at the CIA in the summer of 2008. Like every other student, I wanted to work at The French Laundry.”

“My brother and I road tripped from Indiana to South Florida, allotting money for one dining experience: it was Bacchanalia. We had the

tasting menu and it was the best meal of my life. Rob, the maître d' said, 'If you enjoy this type of experience, we can set up a stage.' I accepted the externship on the spot."

When it rains it pours. In a voicemail, Phillipe Tessier offered Kallini an externship opportunity at Per Se. "I had already accepted the offer at Bacchanalia. I could have been unprofessional and changed my plans." Instead, the following day, he called Tessier and turned the offer down. Tessier hung up on him. "That dream seemed over."

Two days later, Kallini picked up a shift at Quatrano's Floataway Café, one of Bacchanalia's sister restaurants. "They asked me to train on pastry. I wondered why. A few minutes later I found out. The pastry chef had run out of the kitchen in tears."

"My original plan at the CIA was to enroll in both programs, baking and pastry along with culinary. So I said, 'Okay, I'll go ahead and be the pastry chef at Floataway.' I simultaneously worked at Abattoir from 7am-2pm, then at Floataway from 2:30pm-2am Tuesday to Saturday."

The schedule proved brutal. During his externship, Kallini wondered how many Red Bulls he would have to drink to get him through the day? "I didn't have the pace then to deal with pressure. For the only time in my career I had a caffeine addiction. It led to an ulcer. I gave up caffeine and alcohol. I could not have any vices." Kallini, once on the rifle team at Purdue University, hoped the sport would help ease the pressure. "The sport controls my heart rate, teaches me patience, and helps me focus. I don't compete against anyone else but myself. It's probably a dangerous, even polarizing pursuit, but it's a competitive, calming outlet for me."

Kallini kept the pace for 2-1/2 years, until an opportunity came to redirect his energy. He accepted a stage at NOMA where he had applied the previous year. "I gave Annie six months notice."

In Copenhagen, Kallini roomed with a delightful woman, in a rental next to NOMA. She illuminated him on the social tenants of modesty called Jante that influence and guide Danish culture. "NOMA was everything the Danish community was not."

"I had always thought restaurant food reflected skill, technique, and economics—how to work faster and move more efficiently." At NOMA, his first-hand impression was that there were few jobs that required skill. With 80 people in the kitchen, many of them 16 to 18 years old, and just beginning their culinary apprenticeships, he realized this was not a skill-based cuisine, but one based on labor. "There were 10 people picking lemon thyme or rose petals. These are incredibly precise tasks, impossible for almost any smaller kitchen team to replicate. I

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found it somewhat frustrating. I really couldn't have fit less in that kitchen. It just wasn't the culture for me. I needed to be with a skill-based, smaller, regimented team."

When he returned to the United States, a voicemail from Matthew Orlando at The French Laundry offered him just that—a chance to work with David Breeden.

At The French Laundry Kallini emphasizes he spent his time "learning." "I never write on my resume that I worked there. I studied at The French Laundry for a brief period and plated food on the pass with David Breeden. Those few days at The French Laundry left a much greater impression on me than my entire time at NOMA."

Quatrano brought him back in at Bacchanalia. "All I wanted was a fair wage and to appreciate the food I was cooking."

"Just a little over a year ago our bread baker of 10 years left and she was hard to replace. We had to rethink the entire bread program. Her crazy levels were not sustainable long-term—think 1,000 sandwich rolls and lots of other breads per day. Annie asked me if I could recalibrate the program. I told her, 'I am really good at learning.' I had a Kindle copy of Tartine Bread and read it front to back in one night. I took home an arsenal of flour and spent two days locked in my house testing. On the third day, I returned to the restaurant with a plan. We would make three to four styles of natural fermented breads. I guess it kind of just worked out. I trained the bread baker on everything. At first he did not know how to adapt: he did not take into account humidity, starting and finishing temperatures. There were enormous variances and I had to re-teach him. We've used the same starter for 25 years, but have changed the way it's fed."

"Things are good now. As Annie mentioned, there were several kitchens at the old restaurant. The place was massive. The



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utilities and rent were nightmares. There were too many walk-ins and too many corners that couldn’t be properly cleaned, and where people could hide. It led to overstaffing. The new quarters no longer give people a place to hide. Everywhere you go you can be observed, which has led to staff being whittled out. Those who remain form a dedicated, more efficient team. We start at 4am. The back pastry kitchen kicks on the deck ovens. Breakfast service starts at 8am in the same kitchen and goes until 4pm. We get in at 1pm and Bacchanalia service starts at 5:30pm and goes until 11pm with no gap in service. My staff cleans up for all services and leaves at 2am. The kitchen sees 22 hours of use per day. It’s intense in that regard, but efficient.”

“Annie and I do have a different approach to food. For the most part I taught myself to cook out of *The French Laundry* cookbook. I am very good at adapting. Annie’s a natural cook. From her, I’ve learned to listen to what the ingredients tell me. She has an incredible palate and she knows what she wants. And she wants me to develop my own style.”