



BY DIANNA STAMPFLER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL BUCK

Same vines, new vibe

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— Matt Moersch

A LOT HAS CHANGED at 185 Mount Tabor Road in Buchanan since the first grapevines were planted there in 1968. Incorporated as Tabor Hill Winery in 1972 and housing an award-winning restaurant since 1982, one of Michigan’s oldest wineries has begun its next phase of life under new ownership while celebrating a direct line to its historic past.

Rick Moersch was a local high school biology teacher in the late 1970s when he was brought in to the Tabor Hill operation, working his way up to general manager. He left in 1992 to open his own Heart of the Vineyard Winery (now Round Barn Winery) right next door in Baroda with his wife Sherrie and sons, Matt and Chris. Today, Moersch Hospitality Group expanded its portfolio as the owners of Tabor Hill Winery & Restaurant.

As Michigan’s first winery restaurant, the original Tabor Hill was an elegant white tablecloth destination where families went primarily to celebrate special events. Matt Moersch hopes longtime patrons, as well as new guests, will find the more modern décor,

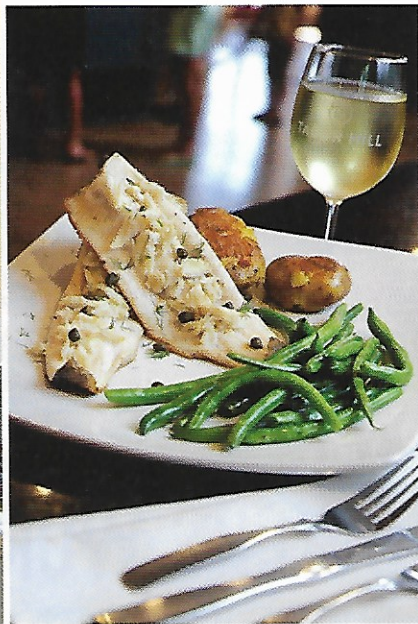
relaxed atmosphere and fresh menu an invitation to enjoy everyday meals together with family and friends.

“We have done a lot of work both inside and out to give the restaurant a modern vibe,” Moersch said. “New lighting, refinished floors and wall décor now create a contemporary and comfortable setting.”

One thing that remains constant is the view from the dining room, which remains as stunning as ever. Some would even boast it is one of the best views in the Midwest, with the 120-seat restaurant and seasonal patio perched overlooking rows of vines.

With a passion for fresh and inventive cuisine, executive chef Ryan Thornburg — who attended the American Culinary Federation — has taken a distinctively local approach in developing Tabor Hill’s new menu.

As the former chef at Tosi’s Restaurant in Stevensville and The Bistro at the Boulevard in St. Joseph (as well as being co-founder of Thornburg and Company, producers of artisan preserves, syrups and honey), Thorn-



Left to right: The modern dining area; seared rainbow trout with chardonnay; view of the exterior. Facing page, far left to right: Tabor Hill chef Brad Thornburg prepares a dish; Dirk Sorrells tends bar; the grilled beet salad with rosé 2017.

burg is acutely aware of how valuable it is to be uniquely positioned in the heart of southwest Michigan's "fruit belt," where an abundance of superior agricultural products can be harvested and sourced to develop his palate-pleasing dishes.

"There is a direct emphasis on using local and regional ingredients and taking familiar comfort foods and trying to reinvent them," Thornburg said. "We've also taken a modern approach with a lot of small plate options for people to share."

These tastes include crispy risotto cakes, roasted duck tamales and chickpea fritters. Cheese and charcuterie boards feature up to five selections like Krackow Country Ham Salami, Honey Lavender Goat Cheese and Bridgewater from Zingerman's Creamery in Ann Arbor, among a rotating list of others.

Thornburg said the Raspberry Chicken is one of the restaurant's signature dishes, based on its longevity on the menu. Pecan crusted and served with mashed potatoes and seasonal vegetables, it pairs perfectly

with Tabor Hill's Sauvignon Blanc or classic semi-dry demi-sec — the winery's most consistent award winner.

"I think the seared rainbow trout is quickly becoming a signature dish, too," said Thornburg, who tops the fish with capers, lump crab and a Riesling beurre blanc, plated alongside smashed Yukon potatoes. Either a lightly oaked chardonnay or an estate-grown dry riesling make fine complements to this dish.

Sunday brunch offers Black Walnut Crème French Toast (made with the winery's velvety Black Walnut Crème liqueur), corned beef hash & duck eggs and chicken & biscuit waffle, among other mouth-watering selections. A nice bloody mary made with Round Barn's DiVine Vodka or a mimosa with Tabor Hill's Sparkling Spumante surely are in order.

"Tabor Hill has been a nice addition for us with the contemporary casual dining restaurant and the legacy that came with it," Morsch said of the newly rebranded operation.

"This has been a real homecoming for all of us."

The Tabor Hill Restaurant is open year-round for lunch and dinner five days, Wednesday through Sunday. Live music is offered every Friday and Saturday afternoon and early evenings.

In addition to its award-winning Tabor Hill wines, the full-service restaurant serves beer and distilled spirits from Round Barn Winery, as well as a monthly wine feature from both Round Barn and Free Run Cellars, the family's boutique winery in nearby Berrien Springs.

For more information about Tabor Hill Winery & Restaurant, including hours, wine lists and menus, visit taborhill.com. ≈

Dianna Stampfler lives in Walloon Lake, but she enjoys eating and drinking her way around her home state of Michigan.