



## Farmhouse Conversion

Sylvan Table earns high marks for its creative menu and homey atmosphere

By Dianna Stampfler | Photography by Alex Groffsky

Since opening last summer (2021), the Sylvan Table restaurant has become so popular that diners usually are waiting in line for the doors to open each afternoon. Tucked into the tiny community of Sylvan Lake (about 20 miles northwest of Detroit and bordering Pontiac), the rustic eatery has quickly established roots as a culinary destination.

Tim and Nicole Ryan have been build-

ing restaurants throughout the Midwest since launching their company, Ryan Construction, in the mid-1990s. Their earlier projects inspired them to follow their dream of owning and operating their own restaurant, focused on the values that are important to them — sustainability, creativity, and wholesomeness, with a welcoming and homey atmosphere.

The epitome of a farm-to-plate experience, Sylvan Table's 5-acre property is

anchored by a 300-year-old, two-story reclaimed barn (complete with two fireplaces and a glass atrium). Three acres are dedicated to growing operations for 100 different crop varieties. Three high-tunnel hoop houses and beehives help provide a bounty of natural ingredients for the continually updated, seasonal menu.

Fruit trees — apple, pear, plum, and Michigan kiwi — will eventually add to the estate-grown produce.



Sylvan Table's focus is purposefully localized, with an emphasis on neighborhood relationships when it comes not only to sourcing ingredients, but also to satisfying customers. That philosophy and environment were just what Executive Chef Chris Gadulka was looking for.

"I have heart and soul invested into this," says Gadulka, who plans on hanging his apron in this kitchen for the rest of his career. "This is every chef's dream. You usually don't get a chance to get everything you ever possibly wanted and the ability to develop the culture of

the restaurant."

Before the barn was even reassembled, Gadulka was brought in to develop the culinary program and to hire a team eager to learn skills ranging from deboning meat to pickling produce. He strives to feature lesser-known ingredients, including different types of meat — like rabbit — to make Sylvan Table relevant and keep guests returning to see what's new.

"We're not going too crazy with the menu, but going just far enough — (it's) slightly different and still amazing," he says. "We look for ways to use products

that you may not have thought of."

The evolving menu showcases dishes suitable for sharing, embracing the culture of breaking bread, sipping wine, and enjoying conversations. Starters, shareables, entrées, and desserts are lush with colors, textures, and flavors.

The grilled oysters with apple kohlrabi slaw are a light and savory start, while the hearth-braised rabbit — slow-cooked in the wood-fired oven — offers a taste of something different (and delicious), pairing perfectly with roasted Brussels sprouts (with pancetta, pepitas, apple kimchi, and honey), herb tahini multi-color carrots, and root vegetable potato dauphinois rich with asiago, double cream, and chili peppers topped with caponata.

Fresh-baked artisan breads served with a trio of seasoned butters are great for nibbling between courses. The extensive beverage list includes local and global wines, several Michigan craft beers, and a creative cocktail list.

"What a great dining experience. The food, the ambience, the company — all 10 out of 10," says Angie Shekell, who dined at the eatery in early fall. "The steak and root vegetable dauphinoise potatoes were a must-try. We'll definitely be back."

For winter, Chef Gadulka has turned to heartier items, drawing from his well-stocked pantry. Many of the ingredients are canned, pickled, frozen, fermented, dehydrated, and powdered for just such a season. In early fall, the staff (both the back and front of the house) even banded together to preserve more than 600 pounds of tomatoes, utilizing techniques familiar to their parents and grandparents, but not necessarily to them. ~



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**This page:** The restaurant's menu features locally-sourced and lesser-known ingredients. **Opposite page:** Framed by two large fireplaces and a glass atrium, Sylvan Table has 152 indoor seats plus a seasonal outdoor space.