





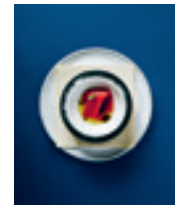
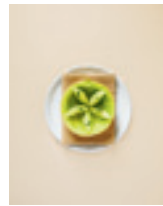
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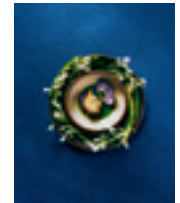
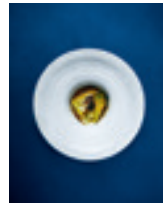
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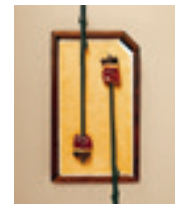
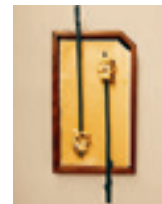


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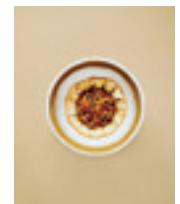
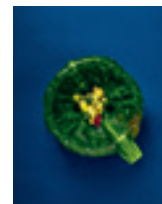
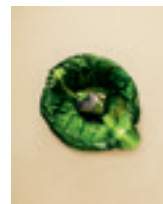
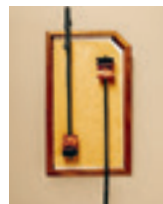
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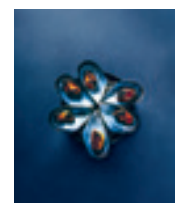
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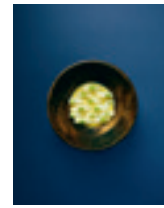
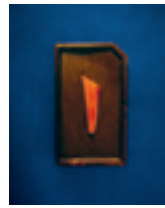
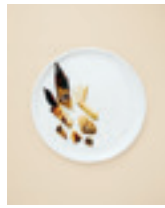
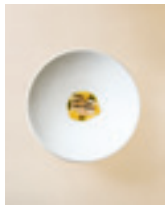
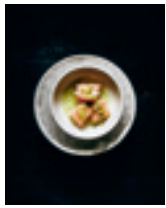
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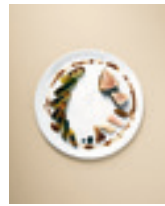
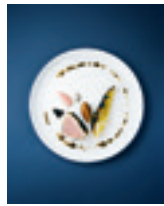
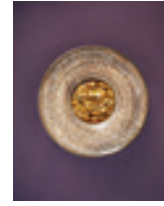
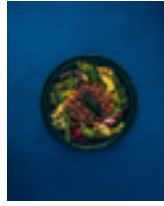
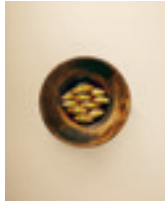
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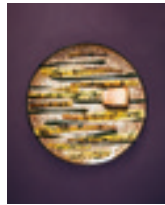
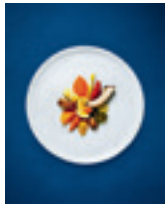
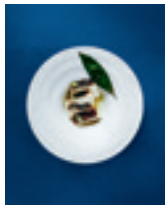
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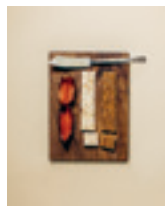
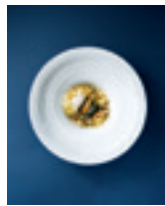
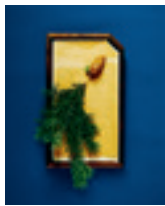
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FOR DANIELA!

**Duh! The biggest inspiration in my life,  
the best chef ever, the funniest comedian  
of all time, and the most beautiful girl  
I have ever seen. She encouraged me to  
make this book and makes me the happiest  
man in the world every day.**





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## INTRODUCTION

### BLAINE WETZEL

First of all, I feel grateful.

Over the past ten years, I have been able to cook in what I believe to be the most ideal situation for a chef. When I started cooking in a little restaurant in Iowa, I never thought that my view of a grocery store parking lot would one day turn into the most beautiful sunsets, bright green trees, sparkly, shining water surrounded by mountains, and, occasionally, a few families of whales, seals, and soaring eagles passing by. And the local ingredients are as unbelievable as the landscapes. Since arriving on Lummi Island, I have worked to create a dream restaurant for both our team and our guests. The Willows Inn has slowly evolved in that time, but even as we make changes, we always maintain the integrity of this hundred-year-old inn.

This island is such a special place, with overwhelming natural beauty, that it still takes my breath away every day. It is full of century-old apple and stone-fruit orchards and small farms with carefully tended livestock, all cherished and supported by the small local community. The Willows Inn farm, Loganita Farm, provides us with ingredients that have been handpicked and nurtured from seed, and foragers on the island find amazing collections of mushrooms, blossoms, and nuts that continue to surprise me. The surrounding sea provides a vast array of fish and shellfish that offer flavors you can't find anywhere else. There is a rich history of craftsmanship here and talented Native and local artisans that create handmade utensils, knives, and stunning pottery that help us showcase those ingredients. All of these dedicated people and perfect surroundings come together to create the magic that is The Willows Inn.

Most people explore Lummi Island when they come to The Willows for the first time, driving around to see the sights before finding their way to the restaurant. I always want the menu to be the same: an exploration of the flavors of the island.

My style of cooking, the menus at The Willows Inn, and to some extent, the recipes in this book are all a snapshot of a moment in time on the island, a culinary reflection of this place, through my eyes, on any given day. That is what we share with our guests with every dish. These recipes are created to showcase the natural flavors of our ingredients. We cook with ingredients almost exclusively from Lummi Island and many of the flavors that make the restaurant unique start from a pantry of seasonings that we create, from vinegars and salts to sauces, ferments, and dried spices.

Each day, I like the menu to be a dramatic description of the island, grouping dishes into move-

ments, series, or spreads that fill the table and share a theme. For instance, in the fall, during the height of mushroom season, I often serve four or five types of wild mushrooms, cooked similarly, to showcase the subtle and natural variations in their tastes and textures. Or, I will repeat the same presentation and technique with completely different ingredients to highlight their specific characteristics. Formatting the menu like this allows me to celebrate the families of ingredients that are in season at the same time and breaks up the menu in a way that's similar to songs on an album.

It wouldn't be possible to produce many of the dishes on our menu or in this book without Loganita Farm, which allows us to grow many of the specialty ingredients included. With their supremely skilled team, which has worked with me since day one, we have been able to build a farm program that supports the operations of the restaurant in a way that is nearly unmatched elsewhere. We are able to choose the best seed varieties and harvesting techniques, and adjust the size and flavor of the ingredients for each specific dish.

The rush of inspiration that comes each morning, when the farm order arrives, freshly pulled from the ground and still warm from the sun, is hard to describe. The smell, the feeling of snapping off a leaf, or the flash of freshness after taking a bite—these are the sensations that I love to share.

As our farm manager, Mary, always says, “a farmer's best year is their next year,” and that has proven to be true! While our restaurant and inn have grown over the years, so has the farm. We've expanded the team and grounds to include a second plot that allows us to grow varieties that need more time and space, or those that take several years to harvest. Heated water lines help bring spring to our seed houses a little earlier in the year and warm hoop houses help us extend the warmth of summer just a bit longer.

Each year at the farm builds on the last, and the outline for the menu really begins with the land. We always want to have new menus and dishes from one year to the next and that starts with growing different plants at the farm. But we don't want to just guess which new plants might taste good, so we are constantly planting the farm with experimental varieties and testing for next year's menu. Everything we grow is an heirloom or an unusual variety that you rarely see elsewhere. Seed breeders make next year's seeds available in January, and the rare heirloom seeds we use sell out immediately to preorders, which means we have to plan essentially a year in advance and place our orders early. Think about that: all seeds for the entire year ordered by January.

In November, we review all the plants we grew at the farm that year, critiquing each and deciding on

the experimental types for the next year. We have to plan the farm foot by foot, week by week, before the year even starts. This is when the menu is born: a rough outline of what we'll serve is created before the year even begins. We plant the farm with specific dishes in mind so that all of the ingredients for a recipe coincide and are available at the same time.

With experience, we have even learned to time the planting and harvesting of vegetables to coincide with the seasons for different fish and shellfish. It doesn't get much better than the first tuna of the season arriving the same day as the first caraflex cabbage is brought in from the farm and we're able to put our albacore and cabbage dish on the menu that very night.

Choosing, growing, and tasting new plant varieties can be like traveling to different parts of the world and even through time. It has been an amazing part of being a chef and something that I never expected. At the very foundation of different cuisines are the specific plant varieties from those parts of the world. The contrast in flavors, textures, and appearances between an Asian variety of cucumber and a Middle Eastern one is transporting, and there are hundreds more examples of that. Having my own farm has opened up a world of flavors and ingredients that I never knew existed, even as a trained chef. The varieties of herbs, berries, and vegetables that are commonly available only scratch the surface of what exists.

Being able to explore the world through our farm has been one of the most exciting aspects of my career. My wife, and the most talented chef, Daniela Soto-Innes, also has her own section to grow Mexican vegetables, herbs, and peppers for her to use in the kitchen. And yes, her cooking is way better than mine.

Without a doubt, the largest factor in our success is our team of talented chefs and service members from all over the world. Anyone who is interested in food or restaurants cannot help but be inspired by The Willows Inn. It is a very uncommon restaurant and I am lucky to work with the best and brightest of the industry who bring this special place to life. A chance to work in the most idyllic setting and be truly connected to our menu, our ingredients, our guests, and the island in the most fun and creative way is a joy I love to share. The Willows Inn is only possible because of this team of passionate individuals that works endlessly to present the very best version of Lummi Island to our guests each day.

And, also, the schedule—OMG!!!! The three months of the year that The Willows Inn is closed for winter is very unusual in the restaurant world and it has been so important to keeping the whole team fresh and inspired.

Our extended family, especially our artisan suppliers, are the other key to our success. Our

passionate fishermen and foragers, ceramicists and artists, are relentless in getting us the best that the region has to offer. Many times, we work with only one person for a particular product or ingredient and over the years, we have developed access to a quality that is unavailable otherwise.

Our fish and shellfish are often delivered, straight off the fishing boat, to the beach in front of the restaurant. When the boat returns after days on the ocean, the kitchen always brims with excitement to see what our fisherman has found for us. He takes the time to process all of our fish using the Japanese ikejime technique to ensure the best possible texture. We actually have trouble with fish being too fresh and have to wait for it to relax for a day before it's ready to be cooked.

The fishermen of Lummi Island also practice the most sustainable form of salmon fishing possible. Developed by the Lummi people, reefnet fishing is a method of drawing salmon to the surface without stress or bycatch. Reefnet boats bring thousands of handpicked sockeye salmon to the restaurant each summer, and to me, the sensation of biting into the smoked sockeye salmon we serve at The Willows Inn is one of the best things on earth.

The ingredients of this area mean more to the Lummis than any of us. Their knowledge and traditional practices have provided amazing insight into how to utilize wild ingredients from the island. The ancestral techniques required to cook with skunk cabbage or the different local seaweeds are not easily found on YouTube, so being invited to observe important ceremonies and festivals has been incredibly inspiring to me and the staff here at The Willows Inn. In fact, we often use traditional Lummi recipes for initial inspiration or direction in how to approach the wild plants here on the island.

This book is an attempt to capture the result of all of this, what we do daily at The Willows Inn. I have arranged this book into sections and it loosely follows the format of the menu at the restaurant. Our menu changes dramatically throughout the seasons and from year to year. By formatting the menu into series of dishes with similar themes, we change significant portions of the menu at the same time—it makes it fun to be a guest or to work at The Willows Inn. I never imagined that I would get the opportunity to work next to hundreds of the most dedicated people in our field, all of whom made it possible to grow The Willows Inn, brick by brick, into what is now our dream restaurant and one that has held my interest for a decade now.

That said, this book represents only a small portion of the dishes that we serve at The Willows Inn and is intended to showcase some of where we are right now and to share how I like to cook.

I continuously draw inspiration from Lummi and I hope it inspires you, too.





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## A NOTE FROM THE FARM

MARY VON KRUSENSTIERN

Farm Manager

Loganita Farm, Lummi Island

Loganita is a one-acre, organic farm solely dedicated to growing ingredients for The Willows Inn on Lummi Island. Located a half mile from the restaurant, the farm perches above Rosario Strait, on a fertile piece of open land, protected by groves of trees. Our close proximity to the restaurant allows us to deliver vibrant produce to The Willows Inn kitchen multiple times each day: fresh herbs, specialty greens, and colorful winter squash delivered from the farm early in the morning are on a guest's plate that same night.

We work closely with The Willows Inn chefs throughout the year and at the end of each season, we sit down and review what worked well, and what didn't. We talk about produce we needed more or less of and discuss what we'd like to do differently to continue to evolve both of our operations. The chefs always have menu ideas for the following season, and we aim to translate those concepts into a tangible crop plan that makes their vision for the next season possible. The close relationship between the farm and the kitchen gives the chefs a degree of control and specificity over the produce they serve and informs the artistry of each and every course at The Willows.

At the farm, almost exclusively, we grow unique varieties of produce—tiny alpine strawberries, succulent ice plant, gray-blue oyster leaf, sturdy stalks of celtuce, and additional varieties we can't wait to try—and this is thanks to working with very select seed companies. Most of the produce we grow is so unusual, and harvested with such a degree of specificity for sizing, flavor, and more, that The Willows simply would not be able to source a similar product from a standard farm stand or larger supplier.

Each farm day begins with a daily harvest comprised of a variety of tender herbs, greens, and sensitive crops that need to be picked daily to ensure freshness. We work off of a punch sheet from the kitchen that's based on the specific dishes that will be on the dinner menu that evening. The farmers start harvesting early in the morning and deliver to The Willows midday then watch as the chefs open the bins and get right to work prepping the ingredients that will inform the prix fixe menu that evening.

After our delivery, we get down to the work of farming: planting, cultivating, laying drip line, replanting in the seed house and field, and all the tasks required to make the farm functional and abundant. In order to have a consistently diverse array of crops, we continuously plant seeds in the

greenhouse and fields throughout the season. Over the course of the day, chefs visit the farm and walk the rows and we receive phone calls with subtle adjustments to their order. The success of our collaboration is borne out of continuous conversation and adaptation.

A successful farmer is always thinking ahead. As we harvest the last of a particular crop, we also deliver samples of what is nearly ready for harvest. The Willows Inn chefs are equally focused on the future and throw themselves into experiments for the next dish they're in the process of inventing. Much of what appears on the plate has been years in the making—the result of several seasons of vegetable trials, experiments, and conversations between the kitchen and farm.

Because we are at the mercy of nature, our annual plan always has an element of unpredictability: an early June rain challenges an eggplant crop, birds get the better of tiny seed sprouts, or we have a bumper crop of summer squash that comes into season a few weeks earlier than anticipated. As the farm adapts to these variables, the chefs fine tune the menu to reflect what is freshest, and in this process, the relationship between the restaurant and the farm continues to grow, develop, and streamline. Over the years, we've learned a lot about farming for a restaurant, as well as how to really utilize the farm well. We're constantly evolving what we do, both on the farm and in the restaurant, and look forward to many more delicious years of experimenting and collaborating between our teams.

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## ISLAND SERVICE

MEREDITH O'MALLEY

Restaurant Manager  
The Willows Inn

As guests arrive on the property, their senses are heightened. They hear the soft crashing of the waves, birds soaring in the sky, the ambient noise of guests enjoying lunch on the deck. Facing east, they see The Willows tucked back into a wooded area surrounded by native landscaping and with smoke billowing out of the smokehouse. Turning their attention west, they'll notice a small chain of islands with the Canadian Cascades looking down upon them in the distance.

For most guests, a trip out to Lummi Island is a retreat—a retreat from the chaos of daily life, a time when their watches turn to island time as soon as they are crossing on the ferry. They take note of what makes Lummi Island special: our lack of a gas station or proper grocery store, wildlife sightings on the way to The Willows, narrow roads shared with pedestrians. All of it makes the island seem like a strange anomaly of reality, a place that more closely resembles the past. But most of all, guests notice the untouched beauty of the island and its surroundings.

The aesthetic and “feel” of the restaurant translates directly into our style of service, which is meant to be the perfect complement to the island's beauty and never a distraction from it. We avoid moving too quickly or overcrowding as to avoid causing any kind of alert. We don't deliver lengthy explanations of dishes. Instead, we share stories in an enthusiastic way to quench our guests' excitement, but not so much that it becomes overwhelming. Our conversations are never rushed but genuine and warm as if we're speaking with an old friend. Returning guests are comforted by familiar faces, year after year, but are pleased to meet new members of our family all the same.

We pair the menu with nearly all local wines. Even in the glass, guests can taste the efforts of the land and people in the region. Our cocktail program is a direct reflection of the island and takes advantage of farmed and foraged items. The phrase, “what grows together, goes together” truly epitomizes our approach to food and wine pairing.

The interior of the property resembles a home where people feel instantly comfortable. Our service style aims to share that same message. Familiar, warm, and at ease. Some guests arrive in suits and formal gowns, while others wear flip flops riddled with sand from their pre-dinner walk on the beach. Neither guest feels uncomfortable with their decision, as both are perfect attire for dinner on Lummi Island. For most, visiting Lummi is an

anticipatory event that is often coupled with high expectations. The natural aesthetic of the island with its beautiful sunsets, the simple presentation of outstanding ingredients, and the relaxed nature of our service dance together to create a memorable experience for all.













