

VINTAGE GIFTS
GREAT WINE GIVING IDEAS

SEASIDE CHRISTMAS
NEWBURYPORT'S FESTIVE SEASON

CHEESE CLUB
CULINARY DELIGHTS DELIVERY

northshore

DECEMBER 2020

Happy Holidays

WREATH MAKING KITS,
COOKIE DECORATING CLASSES ONLINE,
CHRISTMAS DINNER TO GO

ON THE COVER
Marblehead's
First Harbor
Company's Christmas
Tree Boat



+
Perfect
Presents
OVER
50
GREAT GIFTS
FROM LOCAL SHOPS

WINTER WONDERLAND

OUTDOOR FUN AROUND THE REGION
AND BEYOND THIS DECEMBER



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> **ON THE COVER** Marblehead's First Harbor Company's Christmas tree / PHOTOGRAPH BY EYAL OREN/WEDNESDAYS IN MARBLEHEAD/WEDNESDAYSINMHD.COM



Luscious and LOCAL

UNCOMMON FEASTS PUTS LOCAL PRODUCE
AT THE CENTER OF AN INDULGENT MEAL.

Photographs by
DOUG LEVY

By
JEANNE O'BRIEN COFFEY

Food styling by
SUZANNE LEE



Duck fat roasted turnips, turnip greens, and apples make a beautiful seasonal dish.



Justin Shoults and Michelle Mulford of Uncommon Feasts.

Opposite, grass-fed ribeye with sweet potato gratin, roasted mushrooms, spinach, and pickled rhubarb

Justin Shoults hopes you put your take-out holiday dinner from Uncommon Feasts on a plate. But he understands if you don't.

“In this day and age, eating out of a box seems okay,” quips Shoults, who is executive chef at the Lynn restaurant and market, which specializes in indulgent preparations of locally sourced food. Think deviled eggs with beets and caviar, rotisserie chicken with creamed kale, or maybe a pizza topped with pumpkin cream and truffles.

Like most restaurants, Uncommon Feasts is expecting to offer a lot of take-out this winter. And Shoults, whose prior experience includes the executive chef post at Oak + Rowan in Boston, has put a lot of thought into ensuring that to-go plates look nearly as pretty as the ones he serves in the restaurant’s 2,100-square-foot, carefully socially distanced, dine-in space. For example, he’s learned that a well-placed dot of purée can go a long way toward ensuring food stays put.

The extra attention is paying off, if gorgeous social media photos of his food in diners’ homes are any indication. “People are surprised that the food really is beautiful when it arrives,” says Uncommon Feasts founder Michelle Mulford. “It truly is the experience of having restaurant quality in their home, which I think is unusual.”

It’s also delightful. The joy of dining with your eyes as well as your palate is a welcome distraction, particularly this holiday season, when many people may be feeling lonely as they forego traditional cheerful gatherings because of the pandemic. It speaks to the love and care that Mulford wants diners to feel, whether joining them in person or away.

“This period has really highlighted that we have to stay true to what we believe in, and how we want to do things, even during a challenging time,” Mulford says. “If you’re going

to do something that’s so hard, like cooking and running a restaurant, but not do it the way that feels the most honest and inspirational to you, then what is the point?”

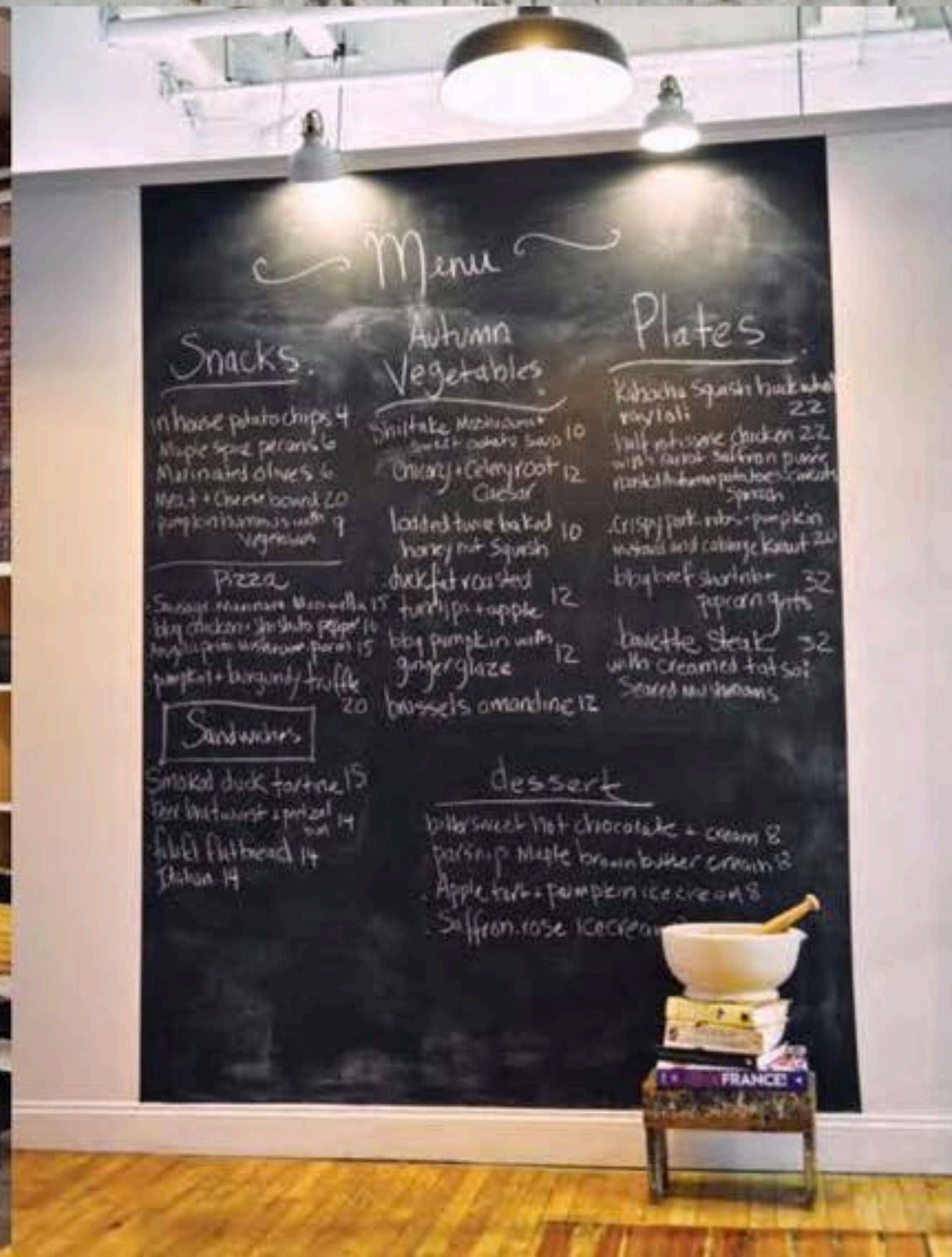
Creating community over food has been Mulford’s passion since launching Uncommon Feasts as a catering company in 2014, after working at Formaggio Kitchen, as well as cooking for actors and directors as a personal chef. In May 2019, when Mulford moved her business into her current location in the Lydia Pinkham Laboratory—a giant former factory that has become a hub for small creative businesses—the initial plan was to use the space for events. But over a short time, while staying respectful of COVID-19 restrictions, Uncommon Feasts has grown into a welcoming nexus of community, serving lunch and dinner Wednesday through Sunday in addition to continuing to cater small events. She also has a market selling grab-and-go food, wine and beer, fresh local produce, and some handcrafted artisanal items.

The chef-owner found a kindred spirit in Shoults, who joined the company in February





Barbequed pumpkin with ginger glaze garnished with toasted pumpkin seed and pickled pumpkin



as a dishwasher to make ends meet while supporting his private chef business. He quickly began doing more and more in the kitchen as the pandemic hit. "Everything fell into place because our philosophies aligned," Shoults says.

To find someone who shares her values, especially at a time when hospitality has been hit so hard, has been important for Mulford as well. "For me to have Justin, who I trust so much, in the kitchen has given me the freedom to really take care of our guests," she says.

The centerpiece of their connection is a focus on local produce—something that many restaurants pay lip service to but few strictly follow through. "Here we don't buy from a supplier at all," Shoults says. "Literally, we're buying every single vegetable from a farm."

For the chef, that means looking at each farm's weekly offerings, ordering, and then building a menu, rather than making up a menu then figuring out where he can buy ingredients—and often arranging to pick up at the farm as well. "It's definitely a different experience than I've ever had in a restaurant before," Shoults says.

Especially these days, that sourcing requires a special dedication—Shoults and Mulford rely on relationships they have developed over time with places like Kimball Fruit Farm in Pepperell and Drumlin Farm in Lincoln—as well as partnering with North Shore growers like Alprilla in Essex and The Food Project, a nonprofit in Lynn. "Michelle's given me enough time to be able to seek different farms out and bring them all together," Shoults says.

Respectful of everyone's needs, Uncommon Feasts will be offering a multicourse menu Christmas Eve for both dine-in and take-out. Because of the complexities of sourcing, the menu hadn't been set in stone at press time in November, but it promises to be indulgent. Dinner will likely start with a house-made pâté or house-smoked salmon, followed by a squash soup or winter salad, and a choice of main dishes, including meat, poultry, fish, and vegetarian. But the stars of the show are likely to be the side dishes, built on those farm relationships, Shoults says.

"We really want to show off the vegetables that we get from our farmers," Shoults says. "I think that lightens up our food a little bit." One idea he's been experimenting with—a sweet



Roasted Brussels sprouts amandine topped with last summer's pickled garlic scapes and toasted almonds.

potato gratin, topped with torched merengue and served as a perfect square—will probably make an appearance. But there are plenty of other ideas in the works, too.

A take-out multicourse celebration like this helps people create new experiences that bring friends and family together while keeping them safe, Mulford says. "We have had some people buy 10 meals and deliver them to friends, then have Zoom dinners together," she says. "So they were all eating the same thing, but just in their own homes. That was really sweet."

Whether dining in or taking out, Mulford hopes to continue providing customers with a

respite from a difficult time—and that brings her joy.

"We had a couple come in last Saturday night who were celebrating their 10-year anniversary," Mulford recalls, dining in the restaurant's casual, industrial-looking space, with the garage doors open and the candles lit. "They came up to me afterwards and told me they had never had a meal like that, and they felt so well taken care of. And so that's what we'll continue to do. Justin will do it with the food. And I'll do it in the front of house." ♦

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