



# LUNCHING AT THE LEANING PEAR

By MAURI ELBEL Photography by DROR BALDINGER

Soft sunlight pours through floor-to-ceiling windows and bathes blonde cedar walls while friendly chatter and mouth-watering scents fill the air at The Leaning Pear.

A cup of tomato bisque swimming with blue cheese crumbles arrives in front of me. Once it has vanished, a generous golden crab cake drizzled with cilantro-buttermilk dressing accompanied by a heap of chayote slaw takes its place. The bites are delectable; the space is lovely. It's a food-design marriage that blends to create an unparalleled lunchtime experience in Wimberley.

But that was the point. Owned and operated by Texan natives Rachel and Matthew Buchanan, who brought what they learned from their culinary exploration in Perugia, Italy and professional training at the Culinary Institute of America in New York back to the Texas Hill Country, The Leaning Pear was designed to embrace a philosophy centered around creating unique dishes made with local, seasonal ingredients in an inspiring setting.

"The open space, warm light and rustic-yet-contemporary feel all make it a place where our guests feel comfortable to enjoy good food, good conversation and the making of good memories," says Rachel.

The duo has always thought of The Leaning Pear as a community restaurant and they wanted a space that would further their idea of Wimberley, explains Rachel. More than six years after opening its original location in one of Wimberley's oldest structures, the Lowery House at 111 River Road, The Leaning Pear expanded with a new building. Just a stone's throw away, the popular restaurant sits back closer to Cypress Creek atop a natural bluff overlooking the lush creek meadow.

Designed by Overland Partners, The Leaning Pear celebrates the rustic character of its original site and the eclectic spirit of Wimberley through its new clean-lined, environmentally sensitive design.

"Overland Partners did an amazing job of taking our magazine clippings, random pictures and vague descriptions to put into reality what we had only envisioned in our mind and hadn't really figured out how it would all come together," Rachel says.

Materials are representative of the Texas Hill Country, including the limestone harvested from Rachel's grandparents' ranch. Cedar and corrugated metal siding continue from the exterior to the interior with ample windows ushering in views of the surrounding property.





“They (Overland Partners) understood our local, seasonal, sustainable food philosophy and designed a structure that not only represented that, but also serves as a message to the folks who walk through our door each day,” she says.

In designing the space, Overland Partners created a concept that followed the food.

“It was Rachel and Matthew who really shared with us their dream of having a place that speaks to the native-inspired cuisine, elevated and modernized to fit its place and time,” says Michael Rey, principal at Overland Partners. “The architecture simply supports this with fitting into the land, being as sustainable of a design as possible, and giving a warm, comfortable place to call home to The Leaning Pear’s patrons.”

Entering the space, dividing walls provide space enclosures and separation while maintaining a warm vibe and visual interest. Broken down into multiple zones, the dining space allows patrons to have a variety of experiences and gives the chefs in the kitchen the ability to interact within the space while providing the separation needed for servers to take orders and hosts to greet entering guests.

One of the initial goals behind the design concept included creating a larger kitchen that would allow The Leaning Pear to expand the menu and serve more patrons. Another objective was to relocate the dining experience closer to the river, taking full advantage of the idyllic site.

“This directly translated into the key architectural concept of a series of terraces that cascade down from the gentle hilltop towards the river ending with a perched outdoor experience amongst the trees overlooking the river’s edge,” Rey explains.

The buildings rest upon one of the terraces and the last one, close to the river and trees, has two small open-air, screened-in structures. Nestled against a variety of large trees on one side is

a great room called the treehouse and the other, bookending the large outdoor terrace, is a small bar. The terraces are made of heavy materials including stone, concrete and planting materials in the landscape while the structures, rails and other building elements are comprised of lighter materials including wood and metal which touch lightly on the new landscape and bring together the overall design.

“Conceptually the floor levels of the restaurant and outdoor terraces were always perceived as an extension of the landscape, cascading down the hill towards the river,” says Rey.

Another key concept was to create a highly sustainable structure, taking full advantage of the rainwater capturing system to feed the on-site gardens the restaurant utilizes daily.

“The roof is mainly seen as an opportunity to capture the rainwater and utilize each drop,” says Rey. “It also has an experiential goal for the patrons who sit inside and get a sense of warmth from the northern light, the wood-lined ceilings in the dining area and opening up from the outdoor terrace to the river view below while providing shade from the southern light.”

All materials utilized are all-natural, and when possible, 100 percent recycled, according to Overland Partners. For example, recycled aluminum panels and cedar make up the interior and exterior siding. Low-e glazing was used on the glass with a thermally broken curtain-wall system. Recycled steel creates the structure, recycled metal forms the roof panels and sealed and stained concrete were used on the interior flooring. Dry stacked stone was used for landscaped walls and interior elements like the fireplace. All the finishes used are environmentally sensitive and emitted low-VOC to zero-VOC when possible. Full-cut off lighting avoids polluting the Texas Hill Country night sky. Overland Partners also limited the air-conditioned space to the smallest footprint of the building as possible, utilized local materials and labor, and on the site, worked with the existing grade limiting the cut/fill across the site and saving all the trees provided.

“The project is meant to fit the property; not the reverse,” says Rey.

Throughout the process, Overland Partners and the Buchanans worked together to ensure all areas of the project would be accessible to everyone, including the various terraces and outdoor areas.

“We are proud of how this project is friendly to all ages while still maintaining a sense of adventure through its proximity to the river and perched amongst the trees, hence its famous treehouse dining area on the lower terrace,” Rey says.

While this proved to be an exciting challenge that the entire team owned and carefully managed in order to execute, it’s also what makes The Leaning Pear stand out.

“Anytime you build carefully to preserve the unique characteristics of the site, it takes a bit of extra time,” Rey says. “But the advantages are tenfold.” ❖

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