

FOOD & DRINK

THE HOTTEST RESTAURANT OPENING IN WINE COUNTRY JUST HAPPENS TO BE VEGAN. WELCOME TO LITTLE SAINT, WHERE THE DISHES ARE MEATLESS, LOCAVORE, AND PICTURE-PERFECT.

Photographs by THOMAS J. STORY

Little Saint

in

Soledad



Not

long ago in Sonoma County, plant-based, meatless, and vegan food was relegated to the hippier corners of the county. It was always there, but rarely celebrated in a place like Healdsburg, the picturesque town where restaurants typically serve what people think of as wine-country food, which is to say on the carnivorous side, with the requisite charcuterie boards and meaty entrées, presumably the better to stand up to an inky Cabernet or rich Russian River Pinot. But with the arrival of Little Saint, those days are solidly in the rearview mirror.

Little Saint is a not very little but indeed very saintly restaurant where sustainable agriculture and beautiful, better-for-you food coalesce in lovely ways. Housed in a sprawling 10,000-square-foot multi-use building, complete with a performance space, wine shop, and fancy grocery store, the restaurant also features soaring ceilings and an all-day menu that make for an inviting, come-as-you-are experience. This is the latest project from the people behind the world-renowned, three-Michelin-star wine-country destination restaurant Single Thread, with its multi-course tasting menu, *Chef's Table*-level culinary inventiveness, and formal (for wine country) hospitality. Little Saint is more casual in format, but no less calculated in execution. Much of the produce comes from the same farm that provides vegetables and flowers to Single Thread. With Little Saint, we've moved along from the hippie associations and are now solidly in the era of haute oats for all.

Jokes aside, making excellent vegetables insanely delicious takes more skill than making decent meat taste good. Salty-fatty umami and seared animal protein is pretty much all it takes to make most omnivores happy. At Little Saint they deliver all the satisfaction we've come to expect from a top restaurant in vivid dishes that crackle with freshness, texture, and terroir. Here we share recipes that showcase the artistry of chef de cuisine Bryan Oliver and his team, who coax layers of flavor from well-sourced vegetables and herbs, spiced aggressively, enriched with nuts and oils, to yet again illustrate how meatless can be more.

This page: The spacious and airy dining room at Little Saint. Opposite page (clockwise from top left): The patio at Little Saint; chef de cuisine Bryan Oliver; the vivid Beet Bloody Mary.



Stuffed Collard Greens with Beet Merguez and Sunflower Seed Dukkah

“We don’t often strive to create analogs for meat, but in some cases where the vegetables are allowed to shine and the flavors are coherent and delicious, we’re happy to bend our own rules,” says Bryan Oliver. “This time of the year, Little Saint Farm is abundant with pristine collard greens, which provide the perfect medium to wrap around a beet-forward version of classic spicy merguez sausage. Topped with another Little Saint pantry staple item, sunflower seed dukkah—an Egyptian spice blend of nuts and seeds—this dish is loaded with a variety of textures and flavors that are sure to satiate any carnivore’s cravings.”

SERVES 4–6



Yellow Beet Merguez

2 Tbsp. rice bran or grapeseed oil
1 medium yellow onion, julienned
2 garlic cloves, crushed
2½ cups cooked brown rice
2 cups cooked, diced yellow beets
2 cups cooked white quinoa
¼ cup rice flour
¼ cup potato starch
3 Tbsp. smoked paprika
2 Tbsp. dry harissa spice
Salt to taste

Stuffed Collard Greens

24 collard green leaves
2 Tbsp. olive oil
1 medium yellow onion, diced
2 garlic cloves, grated
16 oz. canned crushed tomatoes
1 Tbsp. chopped rosemary
Sunflower Seed Dukkah
½ cup sunflower seeds, toasted
2 Tbsp. golden sesame seeds, toasted
1 tsp. flaky salt
1 tsp. coriander seed, toasted and ground
1 tsp. cumin, toasted and ground
Garnish
12 mustard blossom clusters
Extra-virgin olive oil

For the Beet Merguez Filling:

1. In a medium skillet, heat rice bran oil over medium heat, then sauté onions and garlic until lightly caramelized and translucent, 5–7 minutes. In a food processor, combine the cooked onions and garlic with half the brown rice and purée until it forms a tacky paste. Set the paste aside. Add the cooked beets to the food processor, and pulse until they take on a coarsely ground texture, ensuring that the mix doesn’t become too fine. In a large mixing bowl, combine the pulsed beets with the remaining rice, rice paste, quinoa, rice flour, potato starch, paprika, and harissa spice. Mix until well combined and season with salt to taste. Reserve in the refrigerator until needed.

For the Stuffed Collard Greens:

2. Preheat an oven to 375 °F. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Fill a large bowl with ice water. Season the boiling water generously with salt. Blanch the collard green leaves in small batches for 2–3 minutes, placing directly into the ice bath afterward. Remove the greens from the ice bath when cool and trim the stems down to where the leaves begin, removing any thick ribs that may impact the rolling process.
3. Divide the merguez filling into 24 balls and gently roll each into an oblong shape. Place one oblong merguez ball on the center of each collard green leaf. Fold the edges of the leaves towards the center and roll upward from the bottom—they should look like dolmas, or stuffed grape leaves. Place the rolled collard greens, seam side down, in an even layer in a large baking dish or Dutch oven.
4. In a medium saucepan, heat oil over medium heat. Sauté onions and garlic until translucent. Add crushed tomatoes and chopped rosemary, cooking for 10–15 minutes to make a simple tomato sauce.
5. Top the stuffed collard greens with a drizzle of olive oil and the tomato sauce. Bake the greens, covered, in the oven for roughly 30 minutes or until the starches in the merguez have cooked through.

For the Sunflower Seed Dukkah:

6. Lightly pulse the toasted sunflower seeds in a food processor to make a very coarse blend of broken seeds and finer particles. In a mixing bowl, stir the pulsed seeds with the remaining ingredients. Store in an airtight container at room temperature.

To Assemble:

7. Top the baked, stuffed collard greens with the sunflower seed dukkah and a light drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil. Garnish the dish with mustard blossoms and serve as is or alongside a simply dressed green salad.

Split Pea Porridge with Almonds, Sugar Snap Peas, and Lemon Basil

“At Little Saint, one of our main courses typically tends to fill the role of a creamy, hearty dish along the lines of polenta, risotto, or in this case, a riff on split pea dal,” says chef de cuisine Bryan Oliver. “Here, green split peas are cooked down with onions, garlic, ginger, fragrant lime leaves, and almond milk, transforming these humble ingredients into a richly satisfying porridge which we top with blistered snap peas, pea tendrils, and the farm’s first shoots of lemon basil to evoke the essence of spring’s bounty.”

SERVES 4–6

Split Pea Dal

1½ cups green split peas

¼ cup rice bran oil

1 medium yellow onion, julienned

3 cloves garlic, grated

1-inch piece of ginger, minced

1 Tbsp. coriander seed, toasted and ground

2 makrut lime leaves (can substitute 1 Tbsp. lime zest)

2 cups almond milk

4 cups vegetable broth

8 oz. pea tendrils

Snap Peas

2 Tbsp. rice bran oil

2 cloves garlic, grated

1 medium shallot, sliced thin

1-inch piece of ginger, minced

1 lb. sugar snap peas, stems and strings removed

Garnish

¼ cup toasted salted almonds

12 medium basil or lemon basil leaves

2 limes, each cut into 6 wedges

Pea blossoms (optional)

For the Split Pea Porridge:

1. Using a fine mesh strainer, rinse the split peas under cold water to remove any dirt or impurities. Leave



the split peas in the strainer to drain thoroughly. Meanwhile, heat the oil in a large saucepan or Dutch oven over medium heat. Add the onions, garlic, ginger, and cook 5–8 minutes, or until translucent. Add coriander, lime leaves (or zest), split peas, almond milk, and broth, and bring the mixture to a boil. Reduce heat to low and cook 35–45 minutes, stirring occasionally with a wooden spoon to ensure the mixture doesn’t stick. The porridge should take on a creamy texture as the almond milk reduces and the starches in the split peas break down. As the split peas are finishing cooking, add in the pea tendrils to wilt for 2–3 minutes. Finish the porridge by seasoning to taste with salt and adding a small quantity of water or broth to achieve your desired consistency.

For the Snap Peas:

2. Heat the rice bran oil in a large sauté pan over medium heat. Add the garlic, shallot, and ginger and cook, stirring, for 1 minute to color lightly. Add the snap peas and sauté 3–5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until just cooked, being careful not to burn the garlic. Deglaze the pan with 1 Tbsp. water to steam the snap peas briefly before serving.

To Assemble:

3. Spoon the split pea porridge into a wide-bottomed bowl or serving platter and evenly distribute the sautéed snap peas over the top. Garnish with toasted almonds, lemon basil, and pea flowers. Limes can be served in a separate dish on the side. This dish can be eaten as is, but is even better accompanied by fresh flatbread or steamed basmati rice.

Red Lentil Hummus with Harissa and Toasted Almonds

“Hummus is a staple on the menu at Little Saint, where a variety of dips and spreads are intended to be paired with raw vegetables, pickles, and our wood-oven-baked flatbread. With this version of our red lentil hummus, we make harissa paste utilizing some of our farm’s peppers that we have preserved from the summer growing season, allowing us to capture and highlight some of the flavors of summer in spring.”

MAKES ABOUT 4 CUPS



Red Lentil Hummus

1 cup split red lentils

¼ cup tahini

2 Tbsp. coriander seed, toasted and ground

1 Tbsp. cumin, toasted and ground

2 garlic cloves, crushed

Juice of 1 lemon

1½ cup ice water

1 Tbsp. olive oil

2 tsp. salt

Harissa-Almond Oil

½ cup almonds, toasted and coarsely chopped

1 Tbsp. harissa paste

½ cup olive oil

Zest of 1 lemon

1 tsp. salt

1 Tbsp. golden sesame seeds, toasted

For the Hummus:

1. In a strainer, rinse the lentils under cold water to remove any dirt or impurities. Put lentils in a medium saucepan and cover with roughly 4 cups water. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to low, and cook for 20 minutes or until the lentils are soft and begin to fall apart. Strain the lentils in a fine mesh sieve and allow to cool for 15 minutes.
2. In a medium bowl, combine the remaining ingredients and mix in the strained lentils, making sure to evenly distribute everything. Put the mixture in a high-powered blender or food processor and puree until smooth, scraping down the sides when necessary. Store in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.

For the Harissa-Almond Oil

3. Combine all ingredients in a small bowl until evenly incorporated.

To Assemble:

4. Scoop the hummus into a wide bowl. Use the back of a spoon to create a circular well, then fill the well with the harissa-almond oil. Serve with pita and raw vegetables as an appetizer or as a component to veggie wraps or falafel.

Beet Salad with Mandarin Achar, Pistachios, and Mint

"The pairing of beets with pistachios and citrus is a classic blend of flavors in the California cuisine repertoire, and we take a twist on this combination with the addition of Indian-style pickled mandarins that are bursting with salinity, spice, and heat. Roasted baby beets are tender, sweet, and earthy, allowing the bright flavors of spring mint from the farm to round out the dish. We make our own pickled mandarin for this dish using California mandarins, but store-bought pickled lime can be used as a substitute for similar results."

SERVES 4-6

Roasted Beets

2 lbs. Chioggia beets
1 lb. golden beets
½ cup red wine vinegar
3 Tbsp. olive oil
3 Tbsp. salt
3 bay leaves
6 sprigs lemon thyme

Pistachio Pudding

½ cup pistachios
1 Tbsp. coriander seed, toasted
3 Tbsp. rice bran oil
Salt to taste

Garnish

2 Tbsp. pickled lime
3 Tbsp. golden balsamic vinegar
1 tsp. salt
3 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
3 mandarins, peeled and segmented
¼ cup pistachios, toasted and salted
½ cup mint leaves
1 cup mizuna leaves
16 viola flowers, optional
Zest of 1 lime

For the Roasted Beets:

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Trim tops of the beets and rinse under cold water to remove any residual dirt, scrubbing if necessary. In a small bowl, whisk together the vinegar, water, olive oil, and salt. In two separate pans or baking dishes, lay the beets in an even layer with the bay leaves and thyme. Pour vinegar mixture evenly over beets, cover pans tightly with foil, and bake 60 minutes or until a small knife can pass through the beets with no resistance. Remove from the oven and let cool. Peel the beets and cut them into 2-inch wedges.

For the Pistachio Pudding:

2. In a small to medium saucepan, cover the pistachios in cold water and bring to a boil. Drain the pistachios then repeat the process. Once the pistachios have been

blanched and drained twice, cover with 1 cup water and the toasted coriander, and bring to a boil again. Pour into a high-powered blender or food processor. Purée the pistachios and their water into a smooth butter, adding the rice bran oil slowly to emulsify into a pudding-like consistency. Season with salt.

To Assemble:

3. In a mixing bowl, toss the cut beets with the chopped pickled limes, golden balsamic vinegar, salt, and olive oil. Let sit 15-20 minutes to infuse flavors. On a large serving platter, spread a circle of pistachio pudding and spoon the marinated beets over the top. Scatter the mandarin segments and toasted pistachios over the beets. Garnish the salad with mint leaves, mizuna, viola flowers, and lime zest.



Perfect Pairings

The Sunset Wine Club features the best bottles in the West, perfectly paired with these recipes and delivered straight to your door. Join at [sunset.com/wineclub](https://www.sunset.com/wineclub)



2017 St Finley Estate Cabernet Sauvignon California

Pair with: Stuffed collards
This wine is layered with black currant and dried herbs that perfectly meld with the flavors of the greens.



2021 Tortoise Creek Pinot Noir California

Pair with: Roasted beets
Gorgeous flavors of blood-orange peel and turned earth in the wine mirror the flavors of the dishes. The lively acidity matches the refreshing lemon basil.



2018 Top Source Red Wine Columbia Valley

Pair with: Split pea porridge
This Syrah-based wine adds a punch of cracked pepper to the sweet and savory dish. The garlicky split peas are a great counterpoint to the wine's ripe red fruit.