

## Custom Weekends: Pretend You're in Napa, Eating at the French Laundry

**Hanover, PA**

**By Jason Fagone**

The lemon verbena in my salad dressing had been picked an hour before we sat down to dinner. The cheese on our cheese tray came from Trent, a cheesemonger at the upper reaches of the Blue Route. The tomatoes ringing my pan-fried soft-shell crab were from a Gettysburg woman the staff simply calls “The Tomato Lady.” The pig that comprised my slow-roasted pork loin had been killed the previous day and butchered that afternoon. Our meal was as fresh as a cut lawn, and way more delicious, full of the farm-to-plate touches (fiddlehead ferns, house-smoked bacon) that foodies have come to expect from top chefs these days — just not in Amish Country, home of shoofly pie and the all-you-can-eat diner.

That’s why the Dining Room at Sheppard Mansion is so surprising, from the obsessive sourcing of ingredients to the personal story of chef Andrew Little. A beefy dude with straw-colored hair, Little used to be a web developer and a serious tuba player. Then he read Anthony Bourdain’s *Kitchen Confidential*. It changed his life. Little went off to the Culinary Institute of America, and now this local boy — he grew up five blocks from the inn — is creating an ambitious and refined South-Central Pennsylvania cuisine. (“Don’t laugh,” he says.) He makes a bread roll, for instance, that tastes like the best soft pretzel you’ve ever had. His relish tray, full of fresh veggies lightly pickled, is a riff on the well-known Amish fetish for brine.

So for those of us who can’t swing a reservation at the French Laundry — basically, all of us — the Sheppard Mansion is well worth a pilgrimage. And hey, you can even stay there overnight, in one of several rooms dating back to 1913. Ours was the perfect blend of old and new, with a clawfoot tub and a wi-fi connection. We’ll be heading back for a weekend as soon as Little perfects that new dish he was telling us about. Duck testicles. “Yeah,” he says. “We’re gonna see what happens.”

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Farm to Table: Chef Little's tomato salad.

### STAY

Sheppard Mansion, 117 Frederick Street, Hanover, 717-633-8075, [sheppardmansion.com](http://sheppardmansion.com). Rooms are \$140 to \$250 per night. EAT Breakfast is included and free; dinner entrées at the in-house dining room (make reservations through the number above) run from \$20 to \$31.

### DO

Go antiquing in Hanover, or visit the Civil War battlefield in Gettysburg, a half-hour away. There’s disc golf and swimming aplenty at nearby Codorus State Park.

### TRAVEL TIME

About 2.5 hours; less if you speed on the Turnpike