



Healthfully Whole

NOURISHING BODY AND SOUL AT FARM & TABLE

By Laura Jean Schneider

“Wellness is the groundwork for everything we do here,” Cherie Montoya of Albuquerque’s Farm & Table restaurant told me in a recent interview. “We have a firm culture of taking care of people.” As our conversation continued, I began to see exactly what Montoya meant. With thirteen years of experience in the nonprofit sector, she applied her takeaway from that period of her life to her vision for her one-of-a-kind restaurant, believing that “the only way anything big happen[s] is [through] collective collaboration.”

Montoya did not intend to start a restaurant, although she did put herself through college by selling organic juices and smoothies from a drink cart. She was just looking for a way to put land her father saved from development to good use. Now, in addition to productive alfalfa fields on the eleven-acre plot, Montoya leases two acres to a local farmer who provides fresh, year-round produce for Farm & Table via Sol Harvest Farm.

Her commitment to the local economy includes partnerships with sixty-five New Mexico producers, and she estimates that local foods make up to ninety percent of their menu at any given time. Now in its fifth year, the restaurant has proved both viable—something she was initially told was impossible—and unique. Situated directly on the farm, diners have the opportunity to set foot on the soil their dinner comes from. Montoya firmly believes in a people-based, not product-based, restaurant industry. From the farmer in mud boots to the dishwasher, to the servers who have to memorize the stories behind complex menus nightly, at Farm & Table “we learn from everybody,” she adds humbly. She explains that while innovators often come up with the big ideas, it’s the worker-bee people who bring them to fruition.

It’s clear that Montoya extends a feeling of family to her patrons. The non-hydrogenated oil she uses at her restaurant might cost

eight times what hydrogenated oil does, but it’s part of her commitment to producing the kind of meals she’d serve to her own grown children. How has she managed to implement a burgeoning restaurant model with such high standards and succeed?

Vision. “It was an experiment,” Montoya admits, and it takes an incredible amount of hard work to keep everything running smoothly. She’s had four chefs in five years, been through a divorce, and feels the effects of New Mexico’s drought. It’s “challenging, but we love the challenge,” she said, emphasizing her goal of avoiding stagnation at all costs. When I asked what she felt was most responsible for her success, she listed the importance of trusting others and advised to “let go of ego and listen.”

Montoya took her own advice to the community level two years ago, after a suggestion that she host the Indian musician Nimo. While she admitted it was intimidating at



Opposite page: Much more than a restaurant, Danny López leads meditation. Photo by Cherie Montoya.
 Above: Also at the farm, Brian Beau Matzke (Dayal Prem Singh) leads a yoga session. Photo by Danny López.

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first, she committed to the idea, building a custom performance stage, and opening the concert and potluck dinner to the public free of charge. The result was, in Montoya's words, "life-changing." Since then, she's wanted to make that space available to her North Valley community. "People are wanting genuine experiences," she shared, from salads to soul. Montoya has gathered a group of local wellness professionals who will use the stage space as a locus for inner wellness work. Beginning in May, yoga will happen the first Saturday of every month until October. A meditation circle is in the works for Wednesdays. All events will be free.

A culture of regeneration at the restaurant comes naturally. "It's about giving back," said Montoya. Hard-to-compost materials, like bones leftover from locally sourced meat, are taken to Soilutions, a composting facility in Albuquerque, then purchased back in compost form and worked into the farm's soil.

Velocity is another word Montoya used. While she's been asked to open other restaurants and venture from the farm, she's committed to the trajectory of Farm & Table. "I feel I've just scratched the surface," she shared, and she wants to see what's ahead. Likening the process to gardening from seed, she feels that if one can make it from the growing season to the harvest season, one can make it for the long haul. By nurturing body and soul, Montoya's farm and restaurant provide a holistic experience like no other. If you're revamping your personal wellness plan, Farm & Table might just be the place to start. 🌱

Yoga: Saturday mornings at 9:30am
 Meditation: Wednesday evenings at 6pm

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