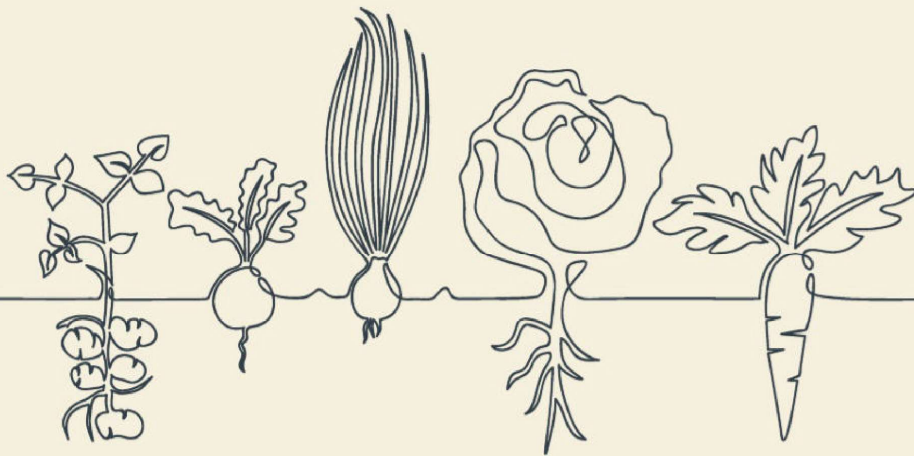




Welcome to  
Black Cat, where  
fine dining meets  
500-some acres  
of soil, sweat, and  
story.

# the Farm



*by* LACY MORRIS

*photography by* JONI SCHRANTZ



## the Farm

# From Seed to Supper

The story of Black Cat, where nearly every bite is grown, raised, milled, and crafted on Colorado soil.



hef Eric Skokan is standing in a row of strawberries, plucking the ripest ones into his palm. The morning sun is climbing, the air still cool, and he's thinking about an appetizer—how to let the berries speak for themselves. “I’m pinching myself,” he says. “I can’t believe I get to do this.”

This is a typical morning at Black Cat Farmstead, set on 500 (or so) acres of high-desert prairie and fertile bottomland—also home to Eric, his wife, Jill, and their kids—just

outside Longmont. In addition to being one of the most immersive dining experiences in Colorado, it’s a working organic farm, a breeding ground for heritage livestock, a living pantry, and a culinary playground. Guests dine in glass-walled cabanas. Ingredients are harvested hours—sometimes minutes—before they make their way to your table. But before the menu, before the dish, and before the accolades, there is this: soil, sun, and a chef in the rows.

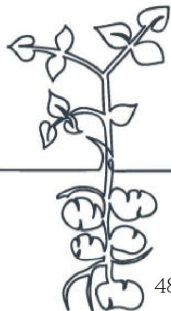
Eric didn’t grow up dreaming of owning a farm. The idea first took root while traveling through the Basque countryside, watching a woman named Marguerite harvest herbs outside her kitchen, carry them inside in her apron, then shortly after deliver a plate to Eric’s table. “I leaned over to Jill and said, ‘This is it. This is what I want to do,’” he recalls. That spark turned into a garden. Then a farm. Then a philosophy.

“We started with this little plot in Boulder County,” says Eric. “The carrots were happy, but it was hemmed in by parking lots and a factory. Not exactly picturesque.” He and Jill spent four years looking for the right piece of land—one with good water, natural beauty, and a sense of solitude. “When we found this place in 2012, it was rundown, neglected—but we saw the bones. We could feel the potential,” Eric explains. “We moved in partway through the

renovation. No insulation. Drywall dust everywhere. The kids hated it. But Jill and I—we could see the potential of the diamond to shine.”

The couple have since grown it into a self-sustaining operation with more than 250 heirloom vegetable varieties, 350 fruit trees, and 73 acres dedicated to ancient grains. The land—and those who tend to it—produces almost everything served at Black Cat and its sister restaurant, Bramble & Hare. Eric calls it his “500-acre food laboratory,” where the menu is written by the seasons and every dish is rooted in its place. “Whatever I can dream up, I can grow it. I can learn it. I can experience it,” he says. “That sense of discovery—it’s powerful. I used to think I knew food, but the farm taught me otherwise. Now my goal is to make food taste more of itself. Shine a light on a perfect beet, and let it do the talking.”

The cabanas, the dishware, the hand-made bread (stemming from five years of finessing the process of growing, harvesting, and milling his own wheat)—each piece adds its own magic. But it’s the land that gives it meaning. The fields. The herds. The chef that’s equal parts farmer. “It’s not lost on me how rare this is—for a chef to cook like this, in a place like this,” he muses. The dishes may be refined. The setting is serene. But make no mistake: Every meal here begins in the dirt. ●











## the Farm

✱ From top left: Delice Mon Sire cheese, fresh apricot, and summer truffles sit atop crisp rye toast for a rich, earthy bite. Young garlic custard baked into a cracked eggshell, with saffron gelee, spring peas, and vinaigrette. Crispy fava bean leaves and pistachio tarator, carrots and cilantro flowers offer brightness and crunch. Beef carpaccio tops crisp bruschetta, finished with horseradish and grilled spring onions. Served with sparkling rosé.

### Beef Carpaccio Bruschetta

#### INGREDIENTS

- 3 oz. beef tenderloin, frozen
- ¼ c. sunflower oil
- 2 tsp. champagne vinegar
- 1 Tbsp. prepared horseradish
- 2 spring onions or scallions, roughly chopped
- 8 thin slices of sourdough bread
- olive oil to taste
- salt to taste
- fresh horseradish for garnish

#### DIRECTIONS

Remove beef to begin to soften.

In a small container with a tight-fitting lid, combine the sunflower oil, vinegar, and prepared horseradish. Season to taste with salt. Shake to combine and reserve.

In a medium mixing bowl, combine the onions and bread. Drizzle lightly with olive oil and season with salt to taste. Cook the onions and bread over a grill or in a sauté pan until lightly browned. Remove from heat and allow to drain on a paper towel.

Shave the partially frozen beef as thinly as possible. Season with salt to taste.

To assemble, place a small amount of grilled onions on the bruschetta pieces. Top with beef and garnish with horseradish. Serve immediately.

“  
I don’t  
want to  
manipulate  
ingredients—  
I want  
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## the Farm



# The Heart of the Farm

What began as a shared dream grew into something far greater: a way of life, a place to raise their children, and a space to feed a community that feels like family. While Eric leads the kitchen, Jill is the force behind everything else—ensuring their vision stays rooted in purpose. Together, they’ve created something that nourishes in every sense of the word.

**A**sk Eric how Black Cat Farmstead came to be, and he won't start with a dish or an animal or a grain. He'll talk about Jill.

For more than two decades, she's been his steady counterpart—balancing his visionary ideas with grounded resolve. “I come up with something wild, and she figures out how to pull it off,” he says. “Over and over again.” The way he sees it: “Jill is good at everything I’m not.”

Now celebrating 22 years of marriage, the Skokans have poured their energy into building something that reflects their shared values. While Eric works in the fields and leads the kitchen, Jill handles the backbone of the operation: permitting, logistics, hiring, payroll, and the hundreds of unglamorous decisions that keep a complex business running smoothly. It's a division of labor that feels organic—instant even. “We never sat down and mapped it out,” Eric says. “We just found the roles that matched who we are.”

### Rooted in Mentorship

But more than that, they've cultivated a culture. Every year, the Skokans welcome





cooks and farmers eager to learn. "What's cool is that it means they can do it in a

really intense way,"

Eric says. "They're

like, 'I don't need

to go to culinary

school. I just need

to go to Black Cat

for a season.'" It's a

hands-in-the-dirt

education—one

that teaches mind-

fulness, precision,

and respect for

ingredients from

the ground up.

"Some of the folks who've worked here have gone on to do amazing things," he adds. "It's incredibly rewarding to see them carry a piece of this place into their own work." One of the greatest joys, he says, is watching a former staff member take what they've learned and infuse it into a new venture, kitchen, or community.

Jill helps guide that growth. She mentors staff, checks in with managers, and creates a sense of structure that allows creativity to thrive. While Eric may be the face of Black Cat's food, Jill is its rhythm. Her influence is everywhere—from the tone of team meetings to the quiet grace of a well-run service. "She brings this calm, steady presence," Eric says. "It's the heart-beat of the whole thing."

### Built on Trust

Their children, now grown, continue to help out on the farm when they can. And over the years, the line between family and staff has often blurred—in the best possible way. Meals are shared, stories exchanged, and seasons passed side by side. It's a place built not just on soil, but on trust, care, and collaboration.

"If I weren't doing this with Jill," Eric says, "there's no way I'd still be doing it at all. The way we support each other—and the way we get to mentor and lift others up together—that's what keeps it meaningful." ●



“We’ve built this place together, and seeing others grow alongside us is the greatest reward.”



## the Farm

Pulled straight from the farm's fields, these freshly harvested ingredients—from left, parsley, spring onions, cilantro blossoms, radishes, sugar snap peas, carrots, and arugula—will soon appear on

diners' plates just steps away. At Black Cat Farmstead, the journey is measured in feet, not miles—flavors are bright, herbs are fragrant, and every bite carries the unmistakable imprint of the land.





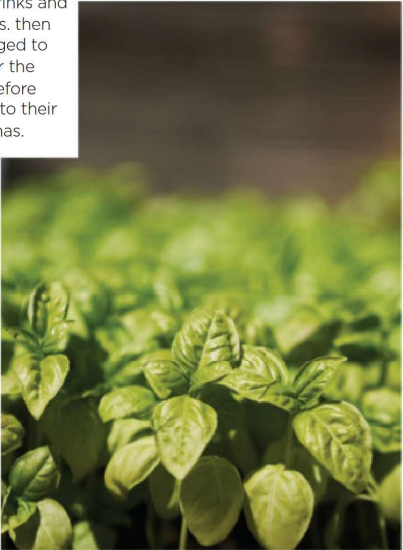






**FARM GREETINGS**

Upon arrival, guests are welcomed with seasonal drinks and light bites, then encouraged to wander the farm before settling into their cabanas.







## the Farm

# Hand-Built Hospitality

Crafted with glass walls and wood-fired stoves, Black Cat's seven cabanas beautifully (and barely) blur the line between dinner and the dirt it came from.

Each of Black Cat's seven cabanas is a study in intention—designed to disappear into the land rather than rise from it. With reclaimed wood, glass walls, and working wood-fired stoves, they offer panoramic views of the fields while keeping guests grounded in the season.

Inside, they're outfitted entirely with vintage dishware collected on "field trips" Eric and Jill take on their days off. A history major in college, he clearly has a reverence for the past—and a tendency to go down rabbit holes. "Did you know there's an olive spoon?" he says with a grin. "There's literally a spoon designed to take olives out of the jar. And a strawberry fork. Of course there is, right? If one is serving strawberries, then one needs a strawberry fork."

That same thoughtful obsession extends to the materials used to build the

cabanas. Eric studied the BTUs between single-pane and thermal-pane glass before making a decision. "Even though it would be much easier to level everything and build it brand new, that doesn't speak to us," he says. Instead, they repurposed what they had—going so far as to insulate the roofs with wool from their own sheep herd. The result: "They're warm and cozy in the wintertime and cool in the summertime."

Each cabana includes a Bluetooth speaker, allowing guests to curate their own playlists and set the tone for the evening. It's immersive but unfussy. Personal without being performative. That blend of thoughtfulness and restraint is classic Eric—a chef whose curiosity drives every decision and whose passion shows up in every nail, window, and plate.

True to Black Cat's ethos, these aren't just places to eat. They're a reflection of the farm's deeper values—resourcefulness, familiarity, and care in every detail. Each structure tells a story of place—and the people who shaped it. ●

**Black Cat Farmstead is open Wednesday through Saturday. Reservations are required. [blackcatboulder.com](https://blackcatboulder.com)**









## the Farm

### Chilled Artichoke Soup

#### INGREDIENTS

- 3 large artichokes
- ½ lemon, plus juice to taste
- 3 Tbsp. sunflower oil
- 6 cloves garlic, peeled and diced
- 1 medium onion, peeled and diced
- 1 medium potato, peeled and diced
- sea salt
- ¼ c. cream
- ¼ c. chickpea flour or potato starch
- 1 c. white wine
- oil for frying

#### GARNISHES

- shaved black summer truffles
- prepared sundried tomatoes
- mint, basil, and parsley leaves
- chive blossoms
- olive oil

#### DIRECTIONS

Cut away the tough, outer leaves of the artichoke and reserve. Rub the exposed, freshly cut parts of the artichoke with the lemon to prevent discoloring. Cut the leaf tops off of the artichoke and, again, rub the cut edges with the lemon. Using a vegetable peeler or a small sharp knife, peel the base and stem of the artichoke. Cut the artichoke in half lengthwise, remove the choke and discard.

In a small saucepot over high heat, brown the artichoke halves in sunflower oil. Add the wine and 1 cup of water. Season with salt, reduce heat, and simmer until tender. Remove from the pot and allow to cool on paper towels. Reserve.

In a large saucepot over high heat, sauté the artichoke trimmings, garlic, onion, and potato until they begin to color. Add enough water to cover. Boil until the water has reduced by three-quarters. Working in batches, transfer the artichoke mixture to a blender or food processor and puree until it resembles a pulp. Pass it through a fine strainer to remove the tough fiber and return to the saucepot. Add cream and mix well to combine. Season to taste with salt and lemon juice. The soup can be reserved either hot or chilled, depending on the weather.

For the crispy artichokes, heat oil for frying to 350 degrees. Slice the reserved artichoke hearts thinly and toss with the chickpea flour. Working a few at a time, fry artichoke pieces in oil until crisp, about 3 minutes. Remove to a paper towel to drain and season with salt.

To assemble, divide the soup among 4 soup plates or bowls. Top with crispy artichokes, truffles, tomatoes, flowers, herbs, and oil. Serve immediately.

## The Lay of the Land

A snapshot of what grows and gets planted here.

**500** acres farmed

**250+** varieties of heirloom vegetables

**95%** of ingredients sourced onsite

**8,000+** pounds of carrots harvested per year

**40+** varieties of greens planted each season

**24** different varieties of herbs

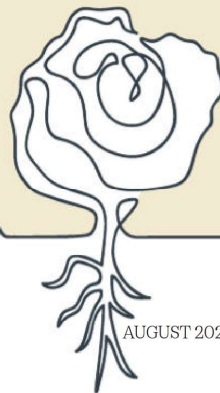
**10,000+** basil seeds planted annually

**20** types of beans and legumes in rotation

**73** acres dedicated to ancient grains

**350+** fruit trees on property (apples, pears, plums)

**15,000+** garlic bulbs planted each year





## the Farm



# Bread, From Scratch

Fueled by curiosity and caffeine, Chef Eric's bread program is a late-night labor of love.

**B**read at Black Cat is more than a side dish—it's the result of nearly a decade of patience, trial, and deep curiosity. "From planting my first test plot of wheat to baking a loaf of bread took about five years," says Eric. "And that first loaf? A D-plus at best."

With just one wheat harvest per year, progress was slow. "Each step took multiple seasons to practice and experiment," he says. "I still feel like I know nothing about wheat. I'll finish my career being a novice." But over time—and with the right variety, Sonoran White—he found his stride. "Now I'm probably at an A-minus," he laughs.

The baking began as a way to keep staff employed during COVID, starting with

20 loaves a day. But demand soared. "We jumped to 60, then 120—and still sold out before noon," he says. "That's when I realized there might be something here."

Today, he bakes up to 700-some loaves in the farm's commercial kitchen, alongside focaccia, rye, cakes, and muffins. "I spend my nights reading bakery websites in French, Spanish, and Italian," he says. "Then I get to experiment with them the next day. It's a blast." And if you're wondering if this half farmer, half chef, full scholar reads all of those languages? You would be right.

Eric still pulls all-nighters to bake every Friday, flipping the kitchen after dinner service and working straight through to sunrise. "If it felt like work, I wouldn't do it," he says. "But to me it's discovery." ●

✱ During farm dinners, as well as at the farmer's market, Eric serves a range of traditional sourdough breads using organic wheat grown and milled on the farm. Above, traditional Pain d'Epi and Fougasse, two breads from Provence formed with a wheat motif.





Alongside a lamb dish, a  
traditional Basque piperade.  
Visit [denverlifemagazine.com](https://denverlifemagazine.com)  
for the full recipe.



## the Farm

At Black Cat, sheep are raised with intention—and nothing is wasted. “When I take the life of an animal, I need to put it to the best possible use,” says Eric. “That’s all of it. And I believe that firmly.” The philosophy goes beyond the plate: The cabanas are insulated with wool, and every chair is draped in a sheepskin pelt tanned from the farm’s own flock. Whether it’s for warmth, comfort, or cuisine, each part of the animal is treated with respect—and serves a purpose in the farm’s full-circle approach. ●









## the Farm

### Gateaux Basque

#### INGREDIENTS

- 1 c. wheat flour, plus more for rolling out
- 1 c. rye flour
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- $\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. salt
- 10 Tbsp. unsalted butter, room temperature
- $\frac{1}{2}$  c. sugar
- 4 egg yolks
- 1 large egg
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. almond extract
- butter and flour for the tart pan
- 5 egg yolks
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 1 tsp. almond extract
- $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt
- $\frac{1}{2}$  c. granulated sugar
- $\frac{1}{4}$  c. cornstarch
- 1 c. whole milk
- 1 c. cream
- 6 Tbsp. unsalted butter, diced and chilled

#### DIRECTIONS

In a medium bowl, whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt to combine. Set aside.

In a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the butter and sugar and beat on medium-high speed, scraping down the sides of the bowl occasionally, until the mixture is light and fluffy, about 4 minutes. Add the yolk, 1 whole egg, and the almond extract. Beat on medium-high, about 2 minutes. Turn off the mixer and add the flour mixture, then mix on low to incorporate, about 1 minute.

Wrap the dough in plastic and let rest in the refrigerator for 1-2 hours.

Meanwhile, make the pastry cream filling. In a medium bowl, combine the yolks, extracts, salt, sugar, and cornstarch. Beat until the mixture is pale and thick, about 2 minutes. Add the milk and cream, a little at a time, whisking constantly.

Transfer the mixture to a medium saucepot over low heat. Cook the pastry cream, stirring constantly with a rubber spatula until the mixture begins to boil, about 4 -6 minutes.

Remove the pastry cream from the heat and beat in the butter pieces. Transfer the pastry cream to a container. Place plastic wrap on the surface to prevent a skin from forming. Refrigerate until cold, about 1 hour.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

Prepare a tart shell by lightly buttering and flouring it. Roll out the pastry dough thinly and transfer to the prepared tart shell. Fit the dough to the edges of the shell and trim away the excess. Fill the tart shell with the reserved pastry cream using a spatula dipped in hot water to smooth out the surface if necessary.



Transfer the tart to a large baking sheet and place in the oven. Bake until golden and set, about 10-15 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool completely before removing the tart from the shell.

To serve, slice into thin slices and garnish with fresh cherries and whipped cream.

