



# FLX Table

FRIENDS AND FOOD COME TOGETHER AT UNIQUE  
AND ACCLAIMED GENEVA RESTAURANT

| BY JARED PAVENTI



FLX TABLE, OWNED BY CHRISTOPHER BATES AND HIS WIFE, ISABEL BOGADTKE, GAINED ACCLAIM EARLIER THIS YEAR FROM USA TODAY AFFILIATE 10BEST.COM, WHICH NAMED IT THE BEST NEW RESTAURANT FOR 2017.

**F**OUR MONTHS. IT TOOK FOUR MONTHS OF TRYING BEFORE FINALLY SECURING A RESERVATION AT FLX TABLE. THE GENEVA RESTAURANT, OWNED BY CHRISTOPHER BATES AND HIS WIFE, ISABEL BOGADTKE, GAINED ACCLAIM EARLIER THIS YEAR FROM USA TODAY AFFILIATE 10BEST.COM, WHICH NAMED IT THE BEST NEW RESTAURANT FOR 2017. SECURING A RESERVATION WAS ONLY marginally easier before the accolade. AFTER ALL, FLX TABLE IS NOT JUST A CLEVER NAME. THE RESTAURANT HAS ONE TABLE.

Each evening, at 6 p.m. and 8:30 p.m., 12 people take their seats to dine from a tasting menu at a large rectangular table underneath planter boxes of herbs suspended from the ceiling. On the first day of each month at noon, the online reservation system opens with seatings for the following month. It's typical for the restaurant to fill within the hour that reservations open.

"It has been amazing to see the reaction, Bates said. "It was certainly one of the most terrifying parts of the decision to try and open this restaurant. The concept is simple, and I was not really worried about being able to execute it."

Bates paused. Then he laughed.

"Actually, that's completely a lie. I was terrified. But, there was a concern of whether there would be interest in the concept, and more than that, would

there be sustained interest."

The concept has flourished behind the unmarked doors on Linden Street, a cobblestone road at the gateway to Finger Lakes wine country. It's guided by owners who have worked in restaurants and wineries around the world, but chose Seneca Lake to put down roots and begin their next respective chapters.

"Our goal is to be a part of developing the Finger Lakes as a gastronomic destination: wine, beer, food, life, all here," Bates says. "It's not just about growing a business. It's about growing a destination we believe in."

Bates was born and raised in the Steuben County town of Arkport, about 60 miles southwest of Geneva. By age 21, he had a bachelor's degree from the school of hotel administration at Cornell University, obtained his first sommelier gig and passed the

Court of Master Sommeliers introductory exam. He traveled through Europe to learn winemaking, which is where he met his wife and business partner, Bogadtke. They married after returning stateside, when Bates began managing Relais & Chateaux-branded restaurants and hotels in Texas and Pennsylvania. Along the way, he earned a few accolades: best young sommelier in the United States and, later, the world from Le Confrérie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, the world's oldest food and wine society, and Food & Wine magazine's 2016 Sommelier of the Year.

His wife's accomplishments are as impressive. The Berlin-born Bogadtke worked in five-star and Michelin-starred restaurants across Europe before transitioning from management to winemaking. A certified tea specialist, Bogadtke is the only person to ever receive the best service award from the Mobil (now Forbes) Travel Guide.

Element Winery, a small-batch microwinery in Arkport managed by Bates' father, was their opening salvo in Upstate New York. The FLX Winery, an artisan hot dog and burger stand on Seneca Lake, followed in 2014. FLX Table debuted in 2016. Earlier this spring, Bates began working on the FLX Culture House, which will take the brewed base of beer, called wort, and ferment it for rustic European styles. On tap for late 2017 is FLX Fry Bird, a fried chicken restaurant he plans for Geneva.

Clearly, Bates is not one to sit still, but for he and Bogadtke success isn't necessarily measured by the bottom line.

"None of our businesses are number games," he says. "They are all expressions of our dreams: a world where food is not about fancy or simple, expensive or cheap, but rather is about love, passion,

care and heart. For us, it does not matter whether the brow is high or low, so long as soul is being poured into it. It does not matter whether we are working with foie gras or hot dogs, as long as the same love, passion and care is applied."

Each business is highly personal to Bates and Bogadtke. The wines produced at Element Winery are based on recipes the two learned together while in Europe. A fermentation house next door to FLX Table was the natural outgrowth of his homebrewing hobby, which he shares with his parents.

The FLX Table experience begins with beer and wine served in an adjacent room as one of the staff carves razor-thin slices of jamon from a hoof-on pig's leg at the center of the room. The salty amuse-bouche provides a springboard into the evening.

The five-course tasting menu, priced at \$45 per person, typically starts with a farmers board of cheese, raw seasonal vegetables and a loaf of bread from Village Baker in Montour Falls. Ramekins of spreads and dips served alongside encourage conversation among the diners. Think of FLX Table not as a restaurant, but as a dinner party.

"This is how we entertain and it is how we hope the table comes back into importance in the American family and life," Bates says. "Sharing, learning, talking, entertaining. Put the phone down, log off, forget about how many 'friends' you want to impress, and make friends."

An eclectic music mix of jazz and old school hip hop plays on the speakers, while the open kitchen affords views of what's coming next. The table? It was built by Bates. The mismatched antique chairs and silverware flatware? Purchased by Bogadtke at estate sales in the area.

"Really, it's our home," Bates says.

The menu shifts periodically, dictated by both seasonal desires of the palate and the availability of meats and produce.

"Products come and go," Bates says. "Our own appetites do the same. The menu follows the family meal. When our bodies tell us we need raw veggies, we put them on the menu. When they say we need hot, hearty dishes, they go on. The goal is to make food that is delicious and makes people happy but, ultimately, follows the rhythm of the season."

A Memorial Day weekend visit began with the farmer's board and followed with a second course of raw shrimp, cooked in citrus juice like ceviche, layered with shaved asparagus and served with a wild ramp puree and steelhead roe, with crispy shiitake mushrooms crumbled over top. It was followed by a coddled egg served over polenta made from smoked grits and rendered bacon fat with black truffle puree and pickled fiddlehead.

## FLX Table

22 Linden St.,  
Geneva

Reservations can  
made online at  
[flxtable.com](http://flxtable.com)

PHOTOGRAPH BY GLORIA WRIGHT



FLX TABLE IS LOCATED IN AN OLD STOREFRONT ON LINDEN STREET IN GENEVA.



The entrée course was a duck breast cooked sous vide and finished medium-rare on a contact grill.

It was served over farro and sunchokes and finished with dried black olive and dukkah. The final course served in restaurant was cornbread French toast topped with a maple-rhubarb compote, whipped yogurt and lime curd, and served with small spatulas to scrape one's plate. The optional sixth course, served at one of the nearby bars, is a homemade marshmallow toasted to order by blowtorch.

Beer and wine are available a la carte or in curated pairings, including value wines, mid-range wines, Finger Lakes varietals and vintages from estate collections. Wines are poured through a Coravin system, which uses a pin to pierce the cork and extract servings to extend the life of each bottle. A craft beer pairing is also available.

The selections reflect both Bates' and Bogadtke's tastes and what they find appropriate for each course.

"Guests ask all the time, 'Which white wine do you recommend?' and the answer is all of them," Bates says. "These are 20 of the most exciting wines I could get, it depends on what you are interested in. Want something light and fresh? Aromatic and bright? Rich and textured?"

"It has been one of the really fun things about developing a small list. I can't have every single Chinon. I only get one, and you can be sure it is the one I believe to be the best."

Where FLX Table excels is the experience. Strangers come together at the beginning, and by the end, you feel a visceral connection with everyone, from the person next to you to the sous chef. It is not stuffy or formal, though the menu is painstakingly crafted. It is not just dinner at a restaurant. It is a dinner party.

But, is it Bates' favorite project? He says no.

"That's simple. The next one" is his favorite. "It's always the next project," he says. "It's FLX Fry Bird. Or, at least until the next one is announced." ❖



METICULOUS DETAIL GOES INTO THE FOOD PREPARATION AT FLX TABLE. THE MENU CHANGES CONSTANTLY AND IS DETERMINED BY WHAT IS AVAILABLE FRESH AND LOCALLY.