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FOOD & DRINK

Heavenly Hell

By Virginia Rainey



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How to write about Hell's Backbone Grill in Boulder without turning it into a love letter? I won't even try. If you've ever been to the little oasis on the edge of the Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument, you know why. Equally humble and refined, grounded and ethereal, it's one-of-a-kind.

Owners Blake Spalding and Jen Castle—both former river cooks—are celebrating the Grill's 10th anniversary this year. Though they've been lauded by diners from all over the world and featured in "O" and Gourmet, it hasn't been easy.

Championing (and then growing) organic food and serving perfectly matched wines in a remote county that's not exactly keen on "Wild Utah" bumper stickers or demon alcohol was an act of faith. But through a combination of good will and working with local ranchers and farmers, they not only made it, they're thriving and beloved in the community. Their gorgeous cookbook, *With a Measure of Grace*, tells the whole story, complete with coveted recipes.

As for the actual dining experience? Heavenly, of course. A few weeks ago, we sat at a sun-dappled table on the wooden deck. A cat named Jezebel perched on the railing, gave our table a nod, then vanished as our attention turned to a basket of feather-light biscuits with sage butter. A salad of organic greens with jicama and roasted corn in a chili-honey dressing hit all the right notes of freshness, texture and honest flavors. We sampled a gently seasoned bowl of lamb and green chile posole and practically impaled one another as our forks vied for bites of a delicate cheese enchilada spiked with tender baby tumbleweed greens. Skillet-fried trout encrusted with blue corn and molasses vanished as quickly as Jezebel. Ditto for the chocolate-chile cream pot.

HELL'S BACKBONE GRILL

20 North Highway 12

Boulder

435-335-7464

HellsBackBoneGrill.com