



THIS YEAR COOPERATIVE LIVING IS TAKING A ROAD TRIP ALONG THE LENGTH OF ROUTE 11 AS IT CROSSES VIRGINIA FROM NORTH TO SOUTH. EACH ISSUE, CORRESPONDENT DEBORAH HUSO WILL RELATE HER EXPERIENCES ALONG THE WAY.

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Steak, Wine, and Stress Relief

Downtown Harrisonburg has its groove back on with fine dining, new retail offerings, and access to a wealth of Shenandoah Valley attractions that will stir the senses.

Downtown Harrisonburg has been on my radar for almost four decades. When I was a small child, my mother and grandmother plied the dress shops just off Courthouse Square, as I waited impatiently for them to try on suits, blouses, and sweaters, thumbing through *New Yorker* magazines, hopeful that if I behaved, I might earn an ice cream cone or a box of animal crackers at the grocery store.

Since then, downtown has undergone a lot of changes. The shops my mother patronized eventually went out of business, and for a time, downtown was a bit of a wasteland with a lot of empty storefronts and restaurants patronized by businesspeople only, travelers on Route 11 flying past to points east and west, taking very little note of what seemed like another lost Main Street.

Things have changed in recent years, however, and downtown Harrisonburg (perhaps a bit more slowly than some of its sister Shenandoah Valley cities) has been experiencing a revival. Today it is home to a number of locally owned restaurants, a bike shop, boutiques, and even a children's museum.

And the boutiques of my mother's day are returning.



Downtown Harrisonburg has been undergoing a revival and today is home to a variety of vibrant, diverse businesses.

Anna Pelletier is among the local business owners making all this happen. She opened her dress shop, Mint, in the old Wetsel Seed Company building on Route 11 just a block from the courthouse, three years ago.

"I grew up in downtown Harrisonburg," Pelletier remarks, "and I've always really liked this space and the aesthetics of the building." After working as a hairstylist for five years, Pelletier decided to go out on her own. "Downtown has always needed more business," she says.

Pelletier wasn't new to retail. She worked in boutiques while in school, and she manages to keep her shop running with as little overhead as possible by getting help in the store from her family. She has one part-time employee.

"The items I carry are different from anything else," she says, as she runs her fingers across one-of-a-kind silky dresses and blouses. "You won't find any of these things at Old Navy or Target."

Pelletier says she has developed a loyal clientele base over the last three years, consisting mostly of 18- to 35-year-old

women looking for unique clothing and accessories. She fits in well here in the old Wetsel Seed complex. Her neighbors include two other young female business owners — Tracy Fornadel of Ruby Red Shoe Boutique and Sara Christensen of The Lady Jane: Vintage Home Décor. “We’re three young women, and we all own our own stores,” Pelletier says. “We carry different items that complement each other, so that’s helpful.”

It’s the adaptive reuse of some of Harrisonburg’s most iconic historic retail and industrial buildings that makes the downtown especially unique. Just a few blocks from Mint is the old City Produce Exchange, which now houses condominiums as well as the Local Chop and Grill House, a bi-level restaurant and bar specializing in steaks, of course. The chop house opened in 2009 with the intent of offering as much *local* flavor as possible.

“There’s such an abundance of beef in this part of the Valley,” says Executive Chef Ryan Zale. “We use as much local food as we possibly can, and I like to visit each farm we source from personally.”

Zale, who hails from a culinary school in Pittsburgh and formerly worked as a chef at the Inn at Little Washington, says the intent of the restaurant is to “create something where if you come in five days a week, you can have a different meal each time. Everything is hand-cut every morning.”

What I like about the chop house is the way I can select my own cut of steak, the rub, the sauce, and the sides. It’s like making one’s own dinner without actually having to make it! Zale treats me to some tantalizing and unusual appetizers, including ravioli wrapped in pork and a house-made tofu. And the atmosphere can’t be beat — warm brick walls with windows overlooking Route 11, crisp white tablecloths. It’s a delightful mix of rustic and elegant.

After dinner, I check in at the hopelessly romantic By the Side of the Road Inn & Cottages. Owners Janice and Dennis Fitzgerald and their innkeeper daughter Anna Bergey have been operating this B & B just off Route 11 on the west side of Harrisonburg since 1999, and were, in fact, featured in the August 1999 issue of *Cooperative Living*.

Things have changed a lot since those early days. Today they not only offer road-trip travelers bed-and-breakfast rooms in the main house, but three romantic cottages as well. The couple completed the cottages in 2005, not realizing, says Janice, “that cottages were becoming the trend.”



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PAUL SOMERS PHOTO

Chef Ryan Zale of the Local Chop and Grill House says, “We use as much local food as we possibly can, and I like to visit each farm we source from personally.”



By the Side of the Road Inn & Cottages is owned by Janice and Dennis Fitzgerald, shown above with their innkeeper daughter Anna Bergey.

Changing the World One Scent at a Time

If you have time for a side trip off Route 11, visit White Oak Lavender Farm just southeast of Harrisonburg on Route 276, near Weyers Cave.

Founder Julie Haushalter says of this peaceful acreage drenched in multiple shades of purple, “The lavender farm came about as a result of life.” Before starting the farm, Haushalter had spent her career as a special-needs teacher, then a school administrator, and then a campus pastor at Eastern Mennonite University. As she watched others struggle with stressful life events and she worked to cope with her own sister’s death from cancer, Haushalter says she became inspired to look at natural means and habits for reducing anxiety.

Among her discoveries was the healing power of lavender, which clinical trials have shown to be effective in calming the nerves. Haushalter says she recognized the scent of lavender was not a cure-all, but it was indeed efficacious in helping to reduce anxiety levels in people coping with grief and trauma. “If someone can lower anxiety,” she says, “he or she can make better decisions in the moment.”

Haushalter decided to start growing some lavender of her own and began with 150 plants, selling the harvested buds as well as products she made from lavender at the Harrisonburg Farmer’s Market. The business took off like wildfire, leading Haushalter to give up her day job and start growing lavender and selling to the public full-time about five

years ago. She now has a retail shop on the farm, grows 9,000 lavender plants in many varieties, and hires area college students to help with harvests.

“Some of the products in our store are made completely from scratch,” Haushalter says, “and we do all of our own bottling and labeling here.” Up until recently, her mother and mother-in-law, both 92, were the business’ main seamstresses, stitching sachets and pillows.

In order to teach people how to use lavender, Haushalter has started workshops and home parties where she or her daughter, Rebecca, who also works in the business, teach others how to make lavender-infused products, which run the gambut from body lotions and soaps to jams and jellies. “What has surprised me is the number of people who are interested in lavender, male and female,” Haushalter remarks. “And the stories that come from people who have experienced our farm and our products — that’s what keeps us going with the actual hard work of being farmers and running a business.” ■



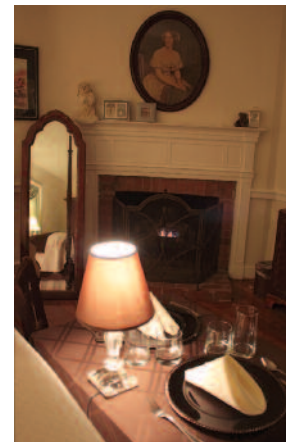
From top – Rebecca and Julie Haushalter at White Oak Lavender Farm; the White Oak meditation garden; lavender sprays and sachets; the farm’s retail shop.



She says the inn appeals to a new generation of travelers, not my parents’ generation of baby boomers loving the camaraderie of a B & B, but a younger set of couples looking for privacy. Hence the cottages ... as well as the Fitzgeralds’ decision to deliver breakfast to your door rather than having a family-style gathering in a dining room like most inns.

“The younger demographic doesn’t like the traditional B & B,” Janice remarks. “They want to be by themselves, so we’re trying to meet the needs of a changing guest.” That also means iPod docks next to your bed.

Janice says the primary draws for guests staying in Harrisonburg are “the outdoors and history.” Travelers tend to gravitate toward nearby Shenandoah National Park or the region’s Civil War battlefields and historic architecture.



By the Side of the Road Inn & Cottages (above) provides “hopelessly romantic” locales for weary travelers to rest.

Wineries are also a big draw, and for Thistle Ridge Bed and Breakfast, located down a winding country road south of Harrisonburg in the rolling farmscape between Mount Crawford and Bridgewater, wine enthusiasts make up a major component of the business. On first glance, Thistle Ridge looks like an ordinary Valley farmhouse. In fact, I breeze right by it on a chill winter evening. But after circling back and being invited in by innkeeper Dixie Stromberg, I find myself in a cozy suite decorated in cheerful blue, white, and yellow, furnished with antiques and reproductions, courtesy of Stromberg's frequent patronage of estate sales.

What makes Thistle Ridge unique, however, is not so much its down-home atmosphere as the wine tours the Strombergs offer. Guests can arrange in advance for day trips to Shenandoah Valley- or Charlottesville-area wineries, transportation and lunch included. ■



Innkeeper Dixie Stromberg says Thistle Ridge Bed and Breakfast is a favorite of wine enthusiasts visiting the area. Through the inn, guests can arrange day trips to Shenandoah Valley- or Charlottesville-area wineries, including transportation and lunch.



● IF YOU GO ...

Get your bearings at the **Hardesty-Higgins House Visitor Center** (212 S. Main St., 540-432-8395, www.visittharrisonburgva.com). Enjoy excellent local shopping in downtown Harrisonburg. Be sure to hit **Mint** (128 W. Market St., Suite 103, 540-434-6468) for truly unique women's clothing and **Ruby Red Shoe Boutique** (128 W. Market St., Suite 102, 540-434-7829) for NYC-worthy shoes and trendy accessories. Also in the Wetsel Seed complex is **The Lady Jane: Vintage Home Décor** (128 W. Market St., Suite 101, 540-820-6629, www.theladyjaneshop.com). **Ten Thousand Villages** (181 S. Main St., 540-442-1010, www.tenthousandvillages.com/harrisonburg), which sells beautifully crafted home décor, jewelry, accessories, and garden items made by artisans in developing nations, is another must visit.

Across the street, you can grab lunch at **Earth and Tea Café** (120 S. Main St., 540-432-8280, www.earthandteacafe.com). I love the place for its lush atmosphere of silk, velvet, and jacquard fabrics with a variety of tables, booths, and private lounging areas. The café features teas from around the world as well as tapas, wraps, salads, and sandwiches. Get your pre-dinner drinks at **Three Brothers Brewing** (800 N. Main St., threebrosbrew.com). This local brewery, operated by (as you might guess) three brothers, has tastings every afternoon and evening Thursday through Monday. For dinner, make reservations at **The Local Chop House and Grill** (56 W. Gay St., 540-801-0505, www.localchops.com), or **Union Station Restaurant** (128 W. Market St., 540-437-0042, www.unionstationdowntown.com), also in the old Wetsel Seed complex.

The best overnight digs in Harrisonburg are at the **By the Side of the Road Inn & Cottages** (491 Garbers Church Rd., 540-801-0430, www.bythesideoftheroad.com), a gathering of cottages and a stately manor house around a pond draped with weeping willows on the west side of downtown.

In the morning, head south on Route 11 to the **Shenandoah Heritage Market**

(121 Carpenter Ln., 540-433-3929, www.shenandoahmarket.net), which features some very reasonably priced antique furniture, shelves and shelves of knick-knacks, antique farm tools, and estate jewelry, and a mouth-watering selection of Mennonite baked goods, cheeses, pastas, spices, candies, and baking ingredients at Grandma's Pantry. Make sure to pick up some pimento cheese while you're here!

Mount Crawford, just south of Harrisonburg, is home to the **Green Valley Book Fair** (2192 Green Valley Ln., 800-385-0099, www.gvbookfair.com), one of my favorite spots for obtaining baskets full of discount books, including literary fiction. Also, be sure to venture southwest for a side trip on Route 276, and pay a visit to **White Oak Lavender Farm** (2644 Cross Keys Rd., 540-421-6345, www.whiteoaklavender.com), where you can purchase everything from heavenly scented sachets to lavender-oil-infused lotions and soaps.

Stay the night at **Thistle Ridge Bed and Breakfast & Winery Tours** (11 Pops Ln., Bridgewater, 540-828-4118, www.thistleridgebnb.com), and arrange for a Shenandoah Valley winery tour after breakfast! ■



Shenandoah Heritage Market



Earth and Tea Café