

## Runner Beans and Origins

In Late October of 2017 I roamed the Taliesin Garden in Spring Green Wisconsin, crunching the spent squash vines and touching the brittle bean pods that were flapping on their trellises in the cold wind.

Many decades ago, this garden had been planted for the Taliesin Fellowship and the School of Architecture. It was a meeting place for the entire Taliesin community where students, artisans and teachers of all stripes converged in the famous structures built by the famous architect. The garden produced abundant vegetables for hearty communal meals served in the dining hall of Hillside School; itself a remarkable complex of studio, theater, library, kitchen and dorms that Wright famously created for his community. The garden was also home to flowers that went on to become graceful arrangements that illuminated the interiors of his visionary structures.

The evening before my garden roaming, I attended a magical dinner at the Riverview Terrace Café, the only Restaurant that Frank Lloyd Wright designed. He intended it for his apprentices, locals and international visitors alike. After he died it was built along the Wisconsin River at the gateway to his estate. This is where the Taliesin Preservation team had gathered their trustees and friends. They had asked me to chef-plan a gala dinner- I recognized it was an echo of a dinner I had presented at my own restaurant L'Etoile 20 years earlier. That dinner raised funds for a feasibility study for a farmer/cook learning initiative my regional friends and I hoped to bring to ground at Taliesin. I called that early version a School for Organic Arts.

For Taliesin Preservation's dinner, I knew it was important to incorporate local foods and local artisans, fundamental really, so I engaged a Madison chef, Evan Dannell's, who had worked for me at L'Etoile. I also engaged Barba Wright, the chef who had cooked for the estate's architecture school that season. We put on a successful meal and took our bows together at the end, though the distraction of the curtain call interrupted finishing the flaky pastry crust enrobing the encore: baked apples with hickorynuts! Despite the apple crust disappointment our eyes were moist with happiness of recognition; that our collective efforts had caused an old friend to return to the estate. That 'old friend' was the realization of what happens when a community comes together around ideas that benefit us all. In this instance it was the idea to revive Wright's vision of artisan work-study, inspiration from nature, self-sufficiency, and immersion in a learning community.

The next morning the folks at Taliesin preservation invited me to meet with them talk about it all. In a matter of only hours we rolled decades of estate food- traditions on to the path to their futures. We coined our initiative the Food Artisan Immersion and declared a pilot season for 2018. Taliesin preservation would host 6 students to operate its café and garden in a work study learning environment. Carrie Rodamaker TPIs executive director invited me to become its interim creative director, and I boldly accepted.

Following the meeting and before leaving Taliesin to catch my flight home to Boston I asked if I could walk the estate. I wanted to see it's contours and reflect on this momentous decision and the possible homecoming for the gathering place of my dreams. I came upon the now slumbering garden laid out by the road that leads from Tan-y-deri to the Hillside School. It wasn't hard to miss -as giant sunflowers as tall as young trees were still standing sentinel, their massive heads nodding with radiating seeds.

There is so much promise here I thought, so much possibility, and so much to still understand. This is when my eyes and ears caught the dried bean pods rattling in the wind. I Plucked one of the pods and fingered it open. Inside were 6 deep onyx jewels streaked with a scarlet purple, a color it seemed only possible in dreams. These beans casually held nature's utterly priceless gift, untouched by human

notions of wealth. They were hard but soft in their smoothness. I put the beans in the pocket of my winter coat and kept walking.

And there they stayed for three years. Three years which saw me return to Taliesin each summer to contribute to its food artisan program, while Caroline Hamblen took over the directorship and Selena Warsaw Lane built the curriculum. Every winter I would take out this coat and stuff my mittens into the pockets along with used tissues spare change and a tube of lipstick. The beans nestled down into its deepest reaches with the pennies and lint. While waiting in lines at the store my fingers would find them there and play with their soft perfect smoothness. I'd take them out from time to time and marvel once again at their depthless black perfection.

So beautiful, surely I could offer them up as ransom if I was ever ambushed by a gang of faery bandits.

This winter was a hard one with the Covid virus raging all around. I wore this sturdy waterproof jacket exclusively as my fancy going out coat was not needed. But Covid had also brought an intimacy to things that normally kept distant. I found and touched the seeds in the depths of my pocket through the long isolating winter, but this time I had a different thought.

Covid had brought me closer to my houseplants, patiently attending to their daily progress, marveling when a tiny flower head emerged from the begonia leaf, or a delicate tendril of germinating mouse melon seed that had found its way into the philodendron's pot. This March before I put the winter coat back into the closet, I took the seeds out. There were three left, I think I must have spent the others in an actual faery encounter. I had an impulse. On April 7, I popped them into moistened earth in an empty pot and set it by an East window.

Some days later to my delight these three little fellows emerged. They are all business, these Scarlet runner beans, putting on inches in a day. And then I realized I had planted them too early. But oh, did I have a spot for them in mind in our Boston back yard where they could twine and flower to their hearts content. Given their beauty and origin story I simply would have to make this work. I enlisted my husband to water them while I flew out to Taliesin at the end of April to help launch the 2021 FAIP season. When I got home, I transplanted them into a larger planter, but still had to keep them inside till May 15th -and the end of danger from frost. I'm glad I waited, for it snowed on April 16th! Now they are outside and twining around a sturdy staff. It is my wish that by November they will have made new seeds that I can put into my coat pocket and bring back to be planted anew at Taliesin.

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