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The
February 2020

KITCHEN ISSUE

Come for the Trails,
Stay for a Beer
**IN NORWAY,
OXFORD, AND
PARIS**

5 STANDOUT KITCHENS

In Kennebunkport,
Falmouth, Rockport,
and New Harbor—
And Why They Work

A Winter Pasta
Recipe from
SOLO ITALIANO

PLUS:
An Essay by
**ELISSA
ALTMAN**

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JESPER KRUSE

PASSIVE HOUSE MAINE

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Hoppy Trails ^{by} ALLISON PAIGE

BUILDER

Maine Passive House

ARCHITECT

Leslie Benson Designs

INTERIOR DESIGN

Will Sears

Oxbow Beer Garden revitalizes a farmhouse and cross-country ski course in Oxford, offering visitors a place to drink, dine, and hit the trails

PHOTOS by EMILY DELAMATER

Growing up, I thought I hated beer. I'd only snuck sips of my dad's Budweisers and Michelobs, the lager-lite sour suds he quaffed after mowing the lawn. Then I turned 18 and spent a semester in Belgium. *Salut, Saisons! Bonjour, Krieks!* My middling French took a *petit* backseat while I studied the local libations over verb conjugations. (Sorry, Mom!) Years later, that frisson of discovery returns whenever I visit Oxbow and raise a pint.

In 2011, Tim Adams founded Oxbow Brewing Company in a Newcastle farm-



above In the dining room, original barn board is coupled with fresh white paint to make a bright, warm interior. Pendant lights from build.com add a pop of color. The silver metal chairs were found on Amazon.

house. Inspired by European traditions and imbued with American ingenuity, Oxbow has risen to the top of Maine-made craft brews like the foam on a perfectly poured IPA. In eight short years, Tim has steadily expanded from Newcastle to Portland to Oxford, where Oxbow Beer Garden opened last April.

When I arrive, I find Tim and his wife, Birch Hincks, outside, painting a former farm stand black with red trim. They greet me, offering hugs over handshakes, and their warm welcome and DIY ethos feel a fitting introduction to their latest establishment, which is charming, approachable, and 100 percent hands-on.

Housed in a 200-year-old barn, the tap house and restaurant stands on nearly 90 acres. The property once belonged to Dave and Anne Carter, who ran Carter's X-C Ski Center on it for nearly 35 years. When Tim bought the land, he was determined to keep the trails groomed and free to ski.

"In a way, we're carrying the torch and just kind of taking it to the next level," he explains. "In addition to the cross-country skiing, we're bringing the food and beverages, while maintaining it, very much, as a community center."

Architect Leslie Benson (Leslie Benson Designs, Portland) created renovation plans, and Jesper Kruse (Maine Passive House, Bethel) helmed the build.

The original 4,000-square-foot barn was sturdy enough, but standing water had ruined its foundation.

"I removed some floorboards and basically found a lake below the barn," Jesper recalls.

So, the entire structure was gutted, jacked up, and rolled away and a new foundation was poured. With the drywall removed, the barn's bones appeared in fine shape, merely requiring a spiffing up and sanding down to



photo: Andy Busfin

previous page The convivial crowd at Oxbow Beer Garden's bar, as seen from the mezzanine level. **above** Oxbow's

Sap Haus beer is a smoked lager brewed with Maine maple syrup. The distinctive label art is by Mali Welch of All Over It Maine.

To maintain the exposed wood interior, builder Jesper Kruse of Maine Passive House insulated the building from the exterior. To the right, the bottle shop offers a small tasting area, beers to go, and Oxbow merchandise.



THE PROPERTY ONCE BELONGED TO DAVE AND ANNE CARTER, WHO RAN CARTER'S X-C SKI CENTER ON IT FOR NEARLY 35 YEARS. WHEN TIM BOUGHT THE LAND, HE WAS DETERMINED TO KEEP THE TRAILS GROOMED AND FREE TO SKI.

A polished concrete bar from Patriot Precast and pendant lights from build.com give balance to the bar's rustic wood beams. A pick-up window allows patrons to place their orders from the deck outside.





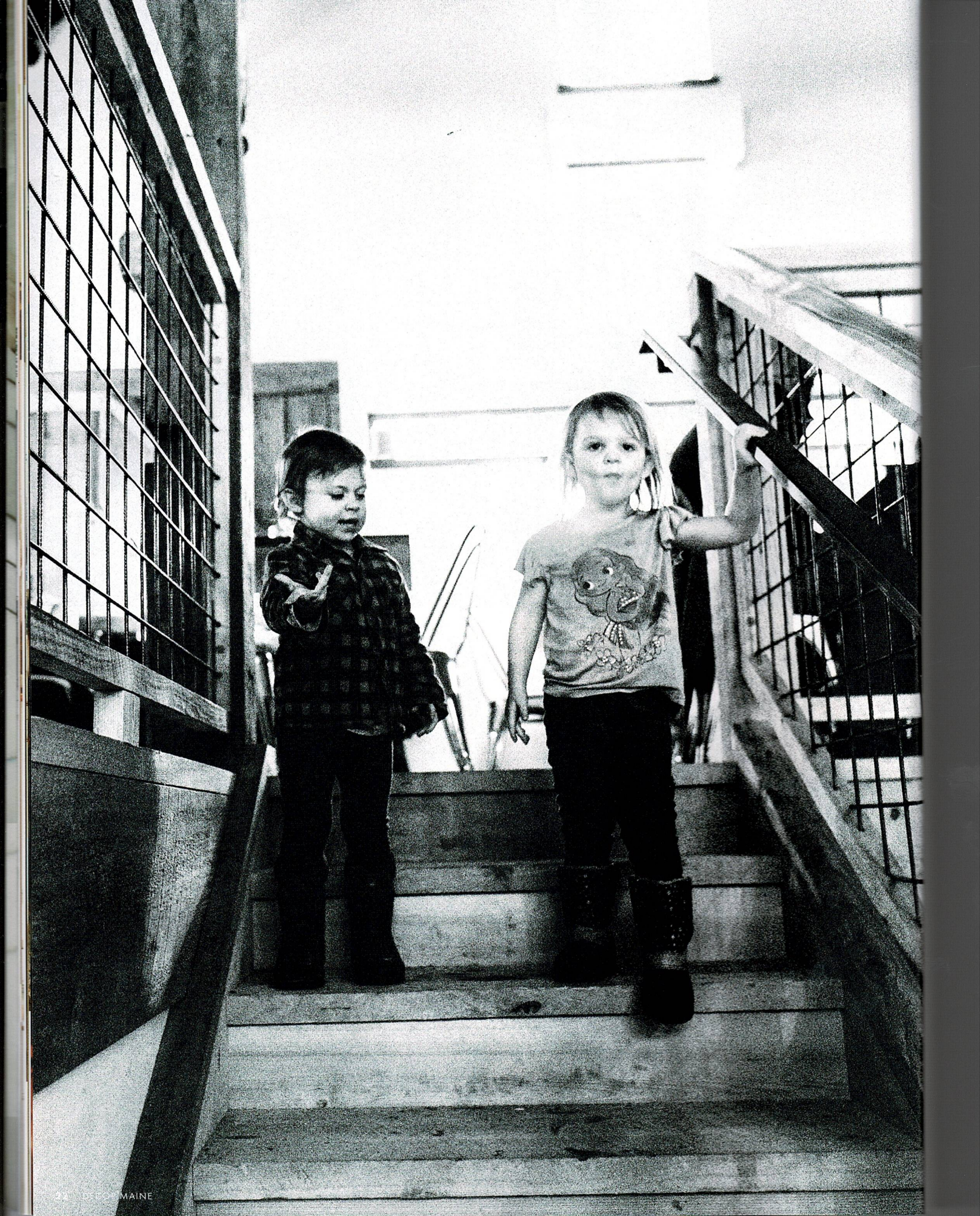
On the mezzanine level, the exposed beams of the 200-year-old barn provide lofty height and an unparalleled patina.



above A closer look at the bar's diamond-patterned wood paneling and stools featuring graphics from Will Sears' colorful hand-lettered signs. *right* A mouthwatering glimpse of Oxbow's house-baked wood-fired loaves.



photo: Andy Bustin





above The snow-covered woodpile outside is ready for use in the kitchen's woodstove. **opposite page** Two young visitors descend the staircase that leads to the Beer Garden's mezzanine.

highlight the post-and-beam construction and time-weathered wood.

"It felt like Indiana Jones, pulling this barn apart, because we kept discovering all this stuff," Tim says. "The roof was covered in layers of insulation. We pulled it back and were like, 'That's incredible. We need to showcase that.'"

Jesper agrees, "When we saw the beautiful old barn boards and beams, it became obvious that we couldn't cover that back up."

The 30-foot-high wide-beamed roof sports variegated shades, from amber to gray, that look stylishly engineered but are due to happy happenstance, a product of time itself.

Tim remembers raking over every nook and cranny. "We went through a lot of steel brushes."

"And picked pink insulation off every staple and nail!" Birch adds. "Our goal was to have no splinters in a place that is mostly old wood. We walked around

feeling every surface. The goal was to be splinterless."

In order to maintain the exposed wood interior, insulation was done from the outside.

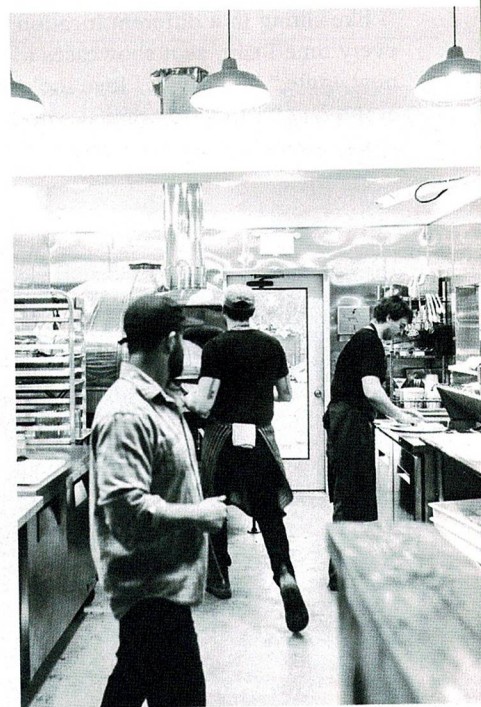
"We used a technique we have to retrofit a building to the passive house standard, applying an airtight barrier to the outside, then a Larsen truss, which we fill with lots of dense-packed cellulose insulation," Jesper explains. The exterior was then paneled with reverse board and batten, and this, along with a standing-seam metal roof, makes it look timeless.

Will Sears curated the interior. As the founder of Better Letter Hand Painted Signs, Portland, and Oxbow's art director, he is largely responsible for the company's visual identity. His hand-lettered graphics give the labels and signage their iconic feel.

The rustic, exposed-beam bar is invigorated by industrial touches like the waterfall-edged polished concrete bar

by Patriot Precast. Bar stools painted with details from Oxbow's signs give the neutral interior pops of bright orange and red, while slate-blue subway tiles make a cool backdrop for the row of handsome wood-handled taps that keep Oxbow's ale flowing.

Will notes, "My inspiration was old barn meets Scandinavian modern, as a nod to the Nordic skiing program that we continue to foster. The history of the space and its resulting patina creates a welcoming sense. The flip side of that coin, however, is that old barns can be dark and cavernous. The challenge



above The centerpiece of the open kitchen is a copper-clad wood-fire oven from Maine Wood Heat Company in Skowhegan. Pictured from left to right, Jesse Hill, Derek Richards, and Pete Uzell.

COMMERCIAL/OXBOW

was to keep and honor the old but also give some light and room to breathe. Introducing select amounts of white Sheetrock, paint, and warm neutral concrete to the barn brought it into the 21st century."

A hemlock staircase with a brushed steel bannister by Western Maine Steel in West Paris leads to the mezzanine. Tim points out the railing hardware, which is diamond shaped. To the eagle-eyed, rhombuses can be spotted on the wood-paneled bar and even in the metal plates that fasten the bar stools to the floor. This was an intentional choice—to pay tribute to the region's gem-rich terrain.

"We want people to come in and enjoy the pizza and beer," Tim says, though he acknowledges that it's great when people notice the beauty of the space itself. "A ton of thought went into how it looks and feels," he adds. "So, it's fun to share that."

"I like sitting in a different location every time I can, as it showcases a new angle," Will says. "I love looking at the detail from the original woodwork, seeing out the windows as the

snow falls on the fields, or staring into the mesmerizing flames of the wood-fired oven."

General manager Gabriela Acero deftly oversees daily operations, while executive chef Derek Richard turns out perfectly crisp, lightly charred pizzas from a copper-clad oven from Maine Wood Heat, Skowhegan. All are served on cozily mismatched dishes.

The restaurant seats 60, and more at picnic tables on the deck. Adjacent to the building is the bottle shop, where beer can be taken to go, along with Oxbow merchandise. In the vegetable gardens, kale, squash, and herbs are grown, and a whopping 3,500 pounds of tomatoes were harvested last summer for pizza sauce. The original chicken coops and storage sheds remain, and their weathered walls and rusted roofs add a dose of ramshackle allure.

"It's like wabi-sabi rustic," Tim says. "There's a lot of aesthetic charm we just straight-up inherited."

A collection of vintage snowmobiles still bear their 1960s-era Maine registration tags. "We got them for the adults to

play in, but they're a big hit with children. *All* aged children," Birch laughs.

The location, like all of Oxbow's, appeals across generations. "We're not just family-tolerant. We're family-encouraging," Tim notes. "We think the vibe is at its absolute best when there's kids running around."

Tim was a downhill ski racer in his youth, and cross-country felt a little slow for him. "Now? That I actively need to try to keep my beer belly down and don't want to get injured?" he jokes, perhaps cross-country is just the thing.

Jesper calls working with Tim and Birch "a great feeling of collaboration." "They were super open and brought a ton of great ideas to the table. Working on the place after the pizza oven was installed was a total hit. The chef would crank out pizzas and shepherd's pies and leave them on the counter for us to taste." Jesper remains close with the Carter family, which made the project even more meaningful.

While Tim and Birch never met Dave Carter, who passed away in 2014, they feel a kinship.

"He had this vision for the place that was entirely centered around cross-country skiing as a way to bring people together," says Tim.

Birch smiles. "He thought cross-country skiing was going to save the world."

Just add beer and pizza to the mix, and I could say the same for Oxbow. ■



left As this happy face attests, Oxbow's appeal is multigenerational. Tim Adams notes, "We're not just family-tolerant, we're family-encouraging."



photos: Andy Bushfin

right A list of drafts at the pick-up window offers a tempting selection of Oxbow ales. *far right* As seen from the road, Oxbow signage details all that the new location has to offer. Guests are encouraged to bring skis to enjoy the property's cross-country trails, while outdoor picnic tables provide a true beer garden feel.



Photo © DARREN SETLOW