

FOOD & WINE

This Long Island Wellness Retreat Features a Menu from Noma's Co-Founder

Shou Sugi Ban House opened earlier this year with a menu from Danish chef Mads Refslund.

By [Mary Holland](#) | August 12, 2019



PHOTO: FREDRIKA STJÄRNE

As we huddle around the long communal table, the chefs place three large ceramic bowls over gas burners. Into the broth-filled bowls, they add some herbs and wakame. Waiters bring dishes overflowing with colorful vegetables like red-skinned potatoes and exotic-looking mushrooms, and neatly place them around the steaming bowls of corn broth. Everyone oohs and aaahs at the array of bright colours. Who knew vegetables could look so pretty? When it's time to eat, some of diners look confused. They aren't sure whether the broth is poured over the vegetables or the other way around.

“Like a hotpot – you toss the vegetables into the broth, let them cook, take them out, then eat them,” explains [Mads Refslund](#), consulting chef at the wellness-oriented [Shou Sugi Ban House](#) in the Hamptons, where dinner is commencing.

[Shou Sugi Ban House](#), a retreat that opened earlier this year, is designed to provide guests with integrative wellness experience from fitness to meditation and nutrition. At the helm of the culinary program is Refslund, the co-founder of [Noma](#), who recently helped launch a nutritional retreat experience, which includes a talk with a dietician on digestive wellness, a micro-greens workshop, and all meals made by Refslund himself.

It might sound like an odd collaboration: a Michelin-starred chef designing a menu for a wellness retreat. But despite his fine-dining accolades, Refslund doesn't want to create finicky fare and the food he's making at Shou Sugi Ban House doesn't stray far from his original cooking style.

“I've always cooked like this; I like the cleanness of food,” he says, adding that he views his backyard as his fridge. At the retreat, herbs and greens are collected from the garden, seafood and other ingredients from the area. “It was a very intentional decision,” says Sat Darshan Khalsa, program director at Shou Sugi Ban House. “We didn't want to do predictable ‘spa food’. We want it to feel nourishing and healthy without being a giant salad.”



PHOTO: ASTRID STAWIARZ/GETTY IMAGES

At breakfast, they serve Danish rye (with actual gluten) and coffee (with actual caffeine) along with a collection of house-made nut milks, avocados, boiled eggs, porridge, miso soup, and tofu. All meals are community-style, so guests are encouraged to interact with one another.

“I think people come here looking for a connection and community because they don’t have that opportunity all the time,” says Khalsa. “Sharing a meal is a great way to connect with another person.” Refslund, who is an advocate for using food waste and cooking healthy seasonal food, is a fan of eating family-style. “It’s almost like walking around barefoot – it’s comfortable,” he says.

At the table, the curious diners carefully select their vegetables and lob them into the steaming bowls of broth. At first, they keep track of their chosen carrot or bean, but as the vegetables swirl together, it’s impossible to know whose

carrot or bean belongs to who. When the diners dunk spoons into the broth to retrieve the contents, they take whatever veggie is revealed. As more kale and carrots are tossed into the bowl and vegetables intermingle, so the conversation and laughter between strangers grows.

“I like that idea of eating *better*. It’s about having fun and community-style. It’s boring to eat at a fancy restaurant all the time,” says Refslund.

Shou Sugi Ban House, 337 Montauk Hwy, Water Mill, NY 11976.