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Chef Ouita Michel has mastered everything from fine dining to casual eateries and a bakery to a cooking school. Now she has added Penny's at Pomegranate.

Chef and textile unite behind Penny's at Pomegranate

BY PATTI NICKELL
Contributing writer

What happens when two of Lexington's most dynamic entrepreneurs combine their talents and energy?

Penny's at Pomegranate, one of Lexington's newest dining options.

Chef Ouita Michel has joined forces with textile designer Angela Beck to open her latest venture in the courtyard of a modest bungalow on Clay Avenue, where Beck's collection of colorful hand-blocked table linens, apparel and bathroom and bedroom accessories have their first physical home.

The two women have been talking about a collaboration for 15 years, according to Michel, who said it began when Beck became her landlady at Windy Corners Market.

"Then the pandemic hit, and it got put on the backburner," she said.

In April, the garden café opened, becoming Michel's 11th culinary endeavor in the Bluegrass. While she has mastered everything from fine dining to casual eateries, from a bakery to a cooking school, this is her first attempt at running a spot that is part dine-in and part grab-and-go, with a touch of a special event venue thrown in for good measure.

"However, Penny's is really focused on a to-go concept," said Michel, adding that the challenge lies in the fact that "there is no actual kitchen here."

Everything is made at Fasig-Tipton, where Michel owns catering business Holly Hill

events, and brought to Penny's, she said.

Penny's is a small courtyard where a scattering of benches and tables provide seating for meals dispensed from a structure resembling a garden shed.

"We're still working out the kinks now, but we have big plans," said Michel, who describes her and Beck's efforts as a multi-tiered approach. "It will be a Pomegranate-branded tabletop experience with the platters, napkins and glasses combined with Ouita Michel-branded food."

As for the kind of food she has created for her newest establishment, Michel said it focuses on dishes both healthy and uniquely Kentucky.

For example, there will be a different soup every day, from asparagus to gazpacho with local tomatoes, to green garlic and potato bisque, depending on what is in season.

Michel warms up to her subject as she describes all the possible menu items — from healthy (quinoa salad with poached chicken) to those reminiscent of tea parties with our grandmothers (olive nut, pimento cheese and country ham on milk bread from her Midway Bakery).

Two favorites are the Chicky Sal — chicken salad made with dried cranberries and almonds — and Eggy Sal — egg salad with fresh dill, red onions and mustard.

There is benedictine to be spread on yeast risen crackers (and not just at Derby), different kinds of bowls, and small veggie salads with cucumbers, pickled beets, charred baby carrots, snap peas and cherry



In April, Penny's at Pomegranate café opened, becoming chef Ouita Michel's 11th culinary endeavor in the Bluegrass.

tomatoes fresh from the garden with homemade buttermilk herb dressing.

"The menu will change often as I want to ensure that every ingredient is as fresh and local as possible," said Michel.

Diners have the option of eating at one of the courtyard tables where their meal can be accompanied by a pinot noir or chardonnay from Beck's vineyard in Oregon's Willamette Valley, or packaged to take home to enjoy later.

"We really see this as a place where folks will stop in on their way home from work to pick up a nutritious meal to have for dinner," said Michel.

Michel and Beck also see it as an attractive option for neighborhood events ranging from book and wine club meetings to mah jong tournaments.

"We want them to feel at

home here and experience the same kind of hospitality that my mother was known for," said Michel. (The name Penny's is an homage to her mother's girlhood nickname, although coincidentally, Beck also has a pug named Penelope.)

Within the next couple of months, Michel says they will add a partial roof of waterproof bamboo, all-weather tents, string lights, planters and a gated entrance from East Main Street.

"We're a work in progress now, but come back in a month or two, and you'll find a whole different experience," Michel said.

PENNY'S AT POMEGRANATE
Where: 700 E. Main St., Lexington
Hours: 11 a.m.-5:30 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday
Online menu: pennyslex.com

Want a fast but fancy dinner? Try pan-frying fish fillets

BY BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune

When it comes to fixing a fast dinner, I go with trout fillets. A rich, fatty fish, trout is as flavorful as salmon but the thinner fillets cook off in a jiff.

Most often sold skin-on, the fish has a high skin-to-flesh ratio. Even if you don't care for the skin, cooking with it on intensifies the flavor and helps keep the fillet tasty and juicy. If you favor the skin, there's plenty to savor when it cooks up to be crisp and salty. Plus, the bits and pieces left in the pan are the foundation for a terrific butter-lemon-herb sauce.

Trout is an especially healthy choice. A member of the salmon family, it is high in omega 3's and low in fat. A lean, clean, low-calorie protein, trout is rich in vitamins and minerals

The best technique for cooking trout is also the fastest. All you need is good butter and a heavy skillet. The whole process takes less than 5 minutes from start to finish, and the short cooking time reduces the chance of those lingering fishy smells. Simply film the skillet with a neutral oil, and then sear the fish on both sides. Add a nob of butter to the pan and baste like crazy as it melts. The trout will form a lovely crust as the butter browns into a tasty, nutty base for a lemony sauce. The method works for most fillets that are a half-inch thick – Arctic char, cod, rockfish, sea bass, etc. It's an easy technique adapted from restaurant chefs, whose fish must come to the table straight from the stove, hot and not overdone.

This simple weeknight dinner is also dinner-party worthy. Serve with boiled new potatoes, lightly smashed and gilded with that buttery lemon pan sauce, a side salad or steamed vegetables, and crusty bread to sop up all that goodness.

PAN-FRIED TROUT WITH LEMONY BUTTERY SAUCE
Serves 2, but is easily doubled.
All you need for this simple recipe is a heavy skillet and good butter. In this recipe we've sprinkled the trout with sesame seeds for additional crunch. The whole process takes less than 5 minutes. If you're serving company, consider garnishing the fillets with capers or chopped olives and minced chives. Otherwise, just a sprinkling of parsley brings the whole thing together.

- 2 skin-on trout fillets, each about 6 to 8 oz.
- Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 tbsp. sesame seeds, optional
- 1 tbsp. neutral oil, such as grapeseed, avocado, canola
- 2 tbsp. unsalted butter
- 2 tbsp. fresh lemon juice
- 2 tbsp. whole milk Greek yogurt or heavy cream
- Chopped parsley, for garnish

Directions
Pat the trout dry with a paper towel and lightly season on both sides with salt and pepper. Sprinkle the sesame seeds on the flesh side of the trout.

Film a large heavy skillet with the oil and place over medium-high heat until shimmering. Place the trout skin-side down in the pan and cook undisturbed until the skin starts to brown and feels crisp when tapped, about 3 to 4 minutes. Add the butter to the skillet. Using a spatula, carefully flip the fillets and baste with the melting butter and cook until the fish is cooked through and the flesh begins to flake, about 1 to 2 minutes.

Remove the fish from the pan and quickly whisk in the lemon juice and yogurt and cook until it thickens, about 30 seconds. Serve the fish, flesh side up, drizzled with the pan sauce. Garnish with parsley before serving.

Beth Dooley is the author of "The Perennial Kitchen." Find her at bethdooleyskitchen.com.

Second new Kroger Marketplace proposed for north side

BY JANET PATTON
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Another new Kroger Marketplace could be coming to the north side of Lexington.

The 127,000-square-foot grocery store has been proposed for 1811 Winchester Road, west of Executive Drive and opposite Frederick Douglass High School, next to the Patchen Wilkes subdivision.

It's unclear what the timeline for opening the new store is yet.

The plan by RD Property Group was filed May 5 and will

require a zoning adjustment. A public hearing on the zone change is scheduled for June 26 at Lexington-Fayette Urban County Council chamber at 200 E. Main St.

Several neighborhood associations have been invited to an initial public meeting May 14 at Frederick Douglass High School to share more information about the proposed development.

WHAT ELSE IS PROPOSED FOR NEW KROGER DEVELOPMENT
According to development

plans filed with the city, the store would be part of a new shopping center that also would include 154 apartments as well as a mix of restaurants, retailers and professional services.

The Kroger would have a wine & spirits shop, as well as a fuel center and other neighborhood amenities, according to the plans.

The high school's access road, Charleston Drive, is expected to connect across Winchester Road with a traffic signal and a pedestrian walkway that would provide access.

According to documents filed

with the development plan, the Patchen Wilkes Development, begun by the late businessman Warren Rosenthal, is expected to connect via a new roundabout to a network of roads in existing areas that include Crawford Middle School, Bluegrass Wilkes, Eastland Park and Dixie Plantation neighborhoods as well as existing businesses.

No direct access is proposed for the Patchen Wilkes neighborhood, according to the plans.

It's the second new Kroger store coming to the north side; a new Kroger Marketplace is under construction on Newtown Pike, just off Citation Boulevard. It's expected to open in spring 2026.

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