

# Charlotte's in Millbrook: Perfection Prepared Daily

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By ML Ball  
 Photographed by Steven Steele Cawman

**M**IKAEAL MÖLLER IS NOT a chef. At least, not if your definition of a chef is simply “a professional cook who prepares food for others to eat.”

No, far from it.

As executive chef and co-owner of Charlotte's Restaurant and Catering in Millbrook, Mikael Möller's meals are symphonies, and he is the maestro.

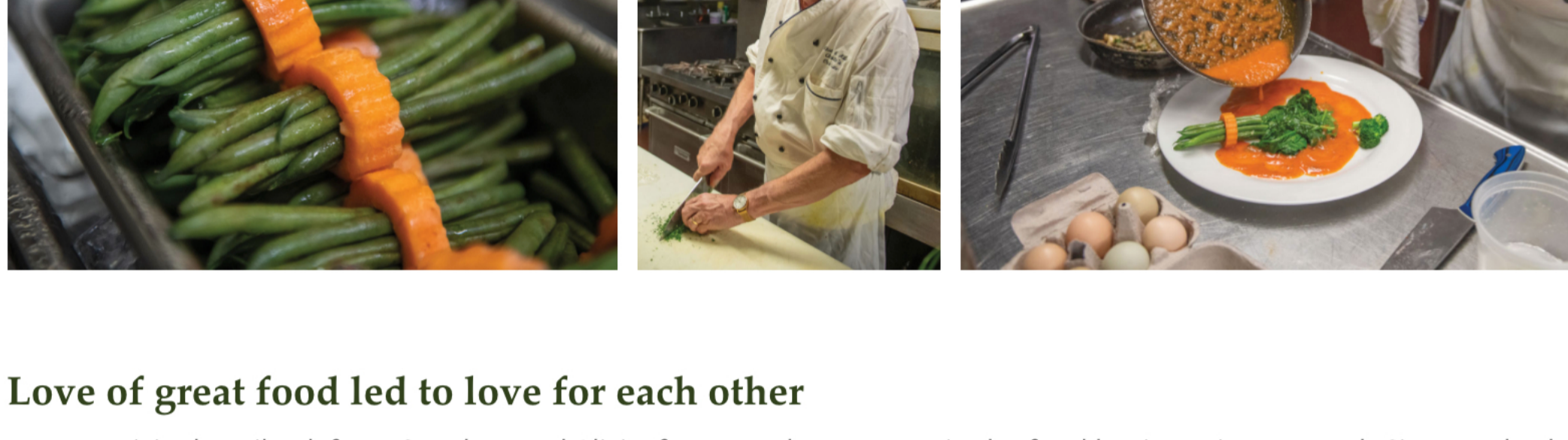
For example, here is a little something Mikael whipped up in 20 minutes for a private lunch the other day: clam chowder with bacon and red micro greens, followed by filet mignon carpaccio, topped off with Thai chicken with banana, mushrooms, roasted red pepper, cilantro, coconut milk and rice on baby arugula. Spectacular.

“Mikael doesn't follow recipes, he cooks by feelings,” explained his wife and business partner, Alicia. “He's Swedish, so sometimes we have an item with an international flare. Plus, we have our own smoker so we can smoke our meats, which brings out more layers of flavor.”

But don't be fooled. While it is true that Mikael cooks not by rote but by taste, smell and creative whimsy, his creations are very intentional.

“I take people on a journey,” he said recently during a break before the hungry dinner crowd arrived. “As they move around the plate, tasting each item, by the time they reach the end they've traveled around the world. Each dish is a discovery, an adventure.”

Alicia was quick to echo this sentiment. “The one thing we have that nobody else has is our chef,” she said. “Mikael can cook anything. His imagination and what he can do with food is incredible. When people hire us to cater a special event, he custom-creates the menu to suit their tastes and what they want to serve their guests, but with his unique take on it. That's really special.”



## Love of great food led to love for each other

Not surprisingly, Mikael, from Sweden, and Alicia, from Manhattan, met in the food business in New York City. “We both worked for a woman named Charlotte who had a wholesale food and catering business in lower Manhattan,” Alicia explained. “As you can guess, when we moved here to Millbrook, we named our restaurant after her.”

Alicia worked in sales and catering, and Mikael was the chef. One thing led to another, and in 1989 they got married, bought the food company from Charlotte, dropped the wholesale division and concentrated on catering, which became highly successful.

Then in 2006, Mikael and Alicia purchased the restaurant Allyn's on Route 44 between Millbrook and Amenia and relocated there with their two sons, particularly so that one son could attend The Kildonan School.

“We've been here 13 years now,” Alicia said. “We actually live upstairs, so we're really here.”



## The epitome of country elegant

Housed in what was originally a 19th-century church, Charlotte's is at once laid-back cozy and elegantly refined. Decorated according to the season with leaves, flowers, pumpkins or holiday boughs, the establishment makes diners feel as if they've arrived at a warm and welcoming country inn right out of a Currier and Ives print—that is, an inn where you're going to be exceptionally well treated and well fed.

“Our portions are generous,” said Alicia, “because after working outside or hiking or riding, people are hungry. They want to eat. We also always accommodate their dietary restrictions.”

## The menu changes every day because what's fresh changes every day

When asked how they decide on their daily menu offerings, Alicia said that “it's all about what Mikael can find fresh. If something comes in and it's not perfect, he won't accept it. Then, depending on what's in season and at the peak of its flavor, he comes up with unique ways to interweave those tastes and smells.”

As much as possible, Mikael and Alicia buy local. “Our hamburger meat comes from Lone Silo Farm in Canaan, CT, our suckling pigs and birds from Quattro's Farm Store in Pleasant Valley and our lamb is often from Finnsheep in Pine Plains,” Alicia stated. “Mikael has great relationships with our local farmers, and by now they know how exacting he is.”

In Charlotte's bar, the beer on tap is frequently from Chatham Brewery, the house wines from Millbrook Vineyard and Clinton Vineyard, and Hillrock Estate Distillery's Single Malt and Taconic Distillery's Rye are popular favorites.



## Something for every palate

Charlotte's is well known for its stunning rack of lamb, seafood crepes, salmon, duck breast and ribeye, yet it also has many return customers, including families, who come for the burgers, pasta, smoked pork chops, grilled free-range chicken, calamari, Maryland crab cakes, soups and salads.



## From a large reception, to an intimate dinner for two, to special restaurant events and off-site catering

“We have three wonderful spaces for parties,” Alicia said. “Our banquet room can hold 100 people, which is great for holiday parties and receptions. With a roaring fire going, it's magical. Our veranda can hold up to 30 at one long table, which is perfect for showers, birthdays, graduations and business lunches or dinners. And our dining room is great for a romantic date or anniversary, or just a lovely dinner out. We're both an around-the-corner place and a destination place.”

If you're planning a party and want the food to be truly memorable, Charlotte's caters as well. “We love catering,” said Alicia. “It's so gratifying to tailor-make an event to a client's needs and tastes and give them the party of their dreams.”

Don't feel like cooking for Thanksgiving? Let Mikael do it! Charlotte's annual Thanksgiving Family Friendly buffet is not to be missed!

Just as there are chefs and there are chefs, there is food and there is food. At Charlotte's, you're guaranteed the latter. Every time. Enjoy!

For more information about catering, restaurant events, specials, and today's menu (which changes daily), visit [www.charlottesny.com](http://www.charlottesny.com).

