

PROFILE: MIRANDA RUSSELL of RUSSELL ORCHARDS

From Eve in the Garden to Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity, Benjamin Franklin's advice to eat an apple a day, and, of course, *Snow White*, apples have played many roles in our culture. They have also come to represent the epitome of Americana: home and hearth. After a conversation with Miranda Russell, whose family has owned and managed Russell Orchards for decades, one is left with a deeper respect for this 120-acre stretch of pristine farmland in Ipswich. Apples are healthy and delicious. Growing them, along with other fruits and vegetables, plus running a winery and bakery, well, that takes a village.

Russell Orchards is a direct portal to joy from May to November each year. Far more than just a working farm or fun destination, the orchard is a reminder of the simple plea-



Terri Unger

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ures of life, where precious moments are created, where all are welcome, where—regardless of the season—friendly faces will greet you (some of the four-legged variety), and share with you the bounty of the land. A day at the Orchards is one spent in gratitude.

“We live on the farm,” shares Russell. “My husband, Doug, and I split the responsibilities. I oversee the store and the bakery, the winery...but every day, I look at the email, try to move mountains of paperwork around on my desk and think about how I can get outside or into the bakery or winery because I like creating and I very much enjoy being part of the team...That’s a really rewarding part of my day, interactions with people, meeting new people. Hearing stories from families.”

The farm experience is visceral, touching all five senses. You’re breathing fresh air, experiencing nature, wandering amidst rescued farm animals, perhaps tasting the Russell’s award-winning fruit wines or hot apple cider, waiting for your baked goods to cool before eating. It’s a moment of simplicity where you need nothing more than what the Orchards provide.

“Our main focus is on fruits,” Russell continues. “We have a lot of berry crops like

strawberries, raspberries and blueberries, blackberries, elderberries, and then we have some that are more rare like currants. There’s actually a market for people, particularly those who didn’t grow up in this country, but grew up where those berries are more common. We see customers and friends from Russia and Ukraine that go nuts for the currants. These touch points go beyond fruit and nutrients. They are human connections...We have visitors of different ethnicities where cherries have a lot of significance in their culture or peaches. It’s a joy for them to come out and find this fruit fresh out of the orchard.”

And then there are the apples. “We probably have four or five dozen different varieties that we grow,” says Russell. “Regular visitors know to look for things like Baldwins. The heirloom type apples like Northern Spy, Idared, Roxbury Russet, the types that you won’t see in the grocery store. And boy, if we don’t have the Baldwins out by the harvest date, people get downright indignant. They’re very, very loyal to the apples they love...”

From the farm to the pastry table, they travel. “Everything in our bakery we make from scratch. The donuts, all of our pie

dough. Everything is made in small batches. So, if you’re the six a.m. shift and you’re supposed to make muffin tops and scones, you just look around and say ‘Alright, well there’s strawberries. I see there’s rhubarb, some blueberries...I think I’ll make this and that.’...We make a savory scone so you walk out in the morning to the garden or the greenhouse and clip fresh herbs. That’s what our bakers enjoy—they get to flex a bit creatively...It’s a pretty cool feeling.”

“In Ipswich, we have this amazing farming community and there’s so much support for keeping our spaces open and green. That’s not been easy to do. But it’s definitely worth doing.” Russell understands the affect that the Orchards have on the community. “This is just a little anecdote, but it happens every year and it’s so moving. During fall [school] breaks I see families that I haven’t seen in a while. Parents are overjoyed to have their college kids home. The kids are happy. They’re wandering around wearing their PJs and parkas and they just wanted to come to the farm because they just didn’t realize that they missed home, and when they got home, *this* is what they wanted to do.”