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Norfolk bed and breakfast is seemingly sophisticated

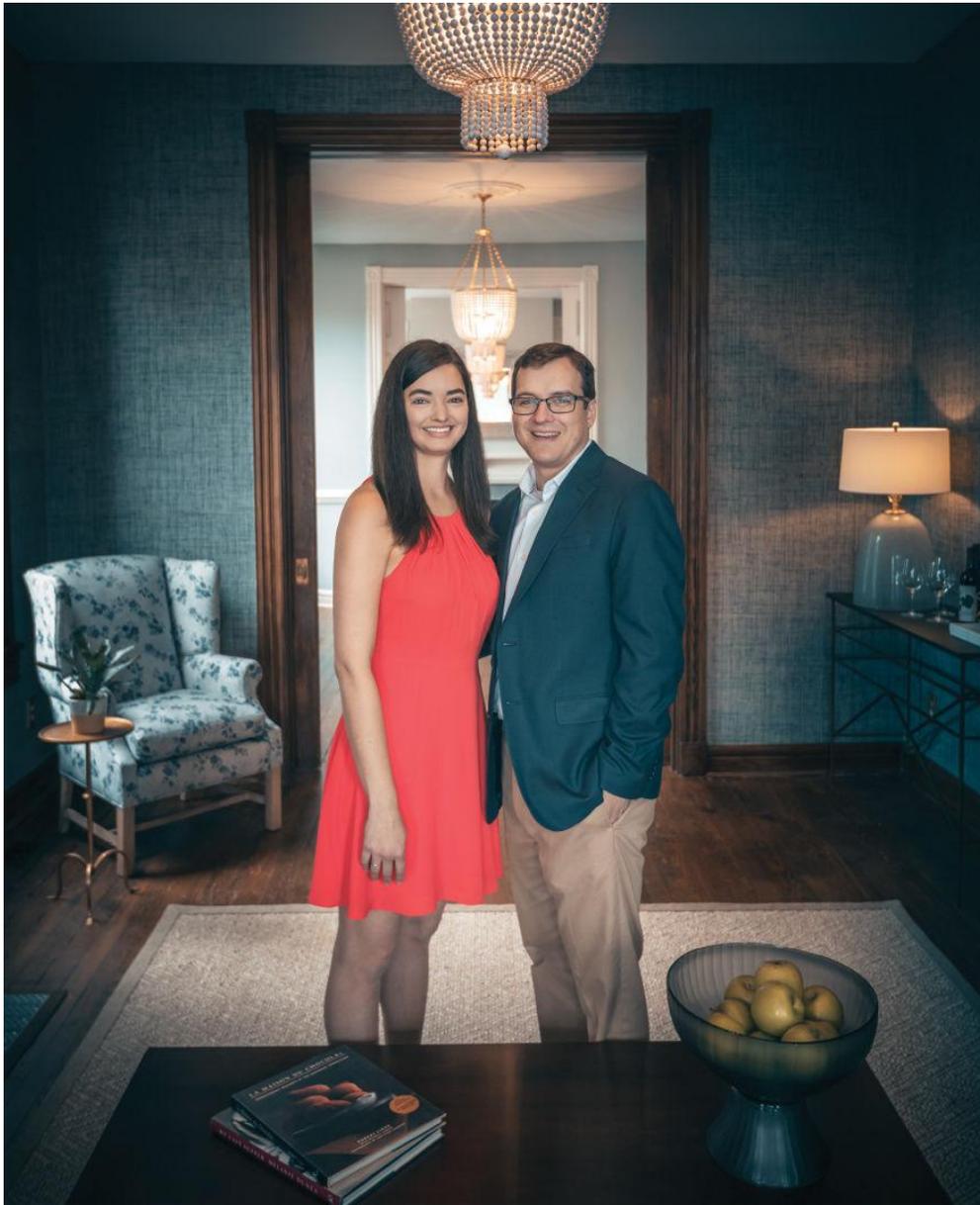
By Tom Robinson
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Eight years ago, Malia Paasch turned her eye for design and taste for craft beers into The Birch, a pioneering bar that gained national headlines and propelled the revival of Norfolk's industrial Chelsea neighborhood.

Now, barely five minutes away in the tony Freemason District, Paasch and partner Jeremy McGee are hoping to add another establishment to Norfolk's must-visit map: Four Eleven York, a daringly upscale restaurant and boutique bed and breakfast located in adjacent buildings by the light rail tracks.

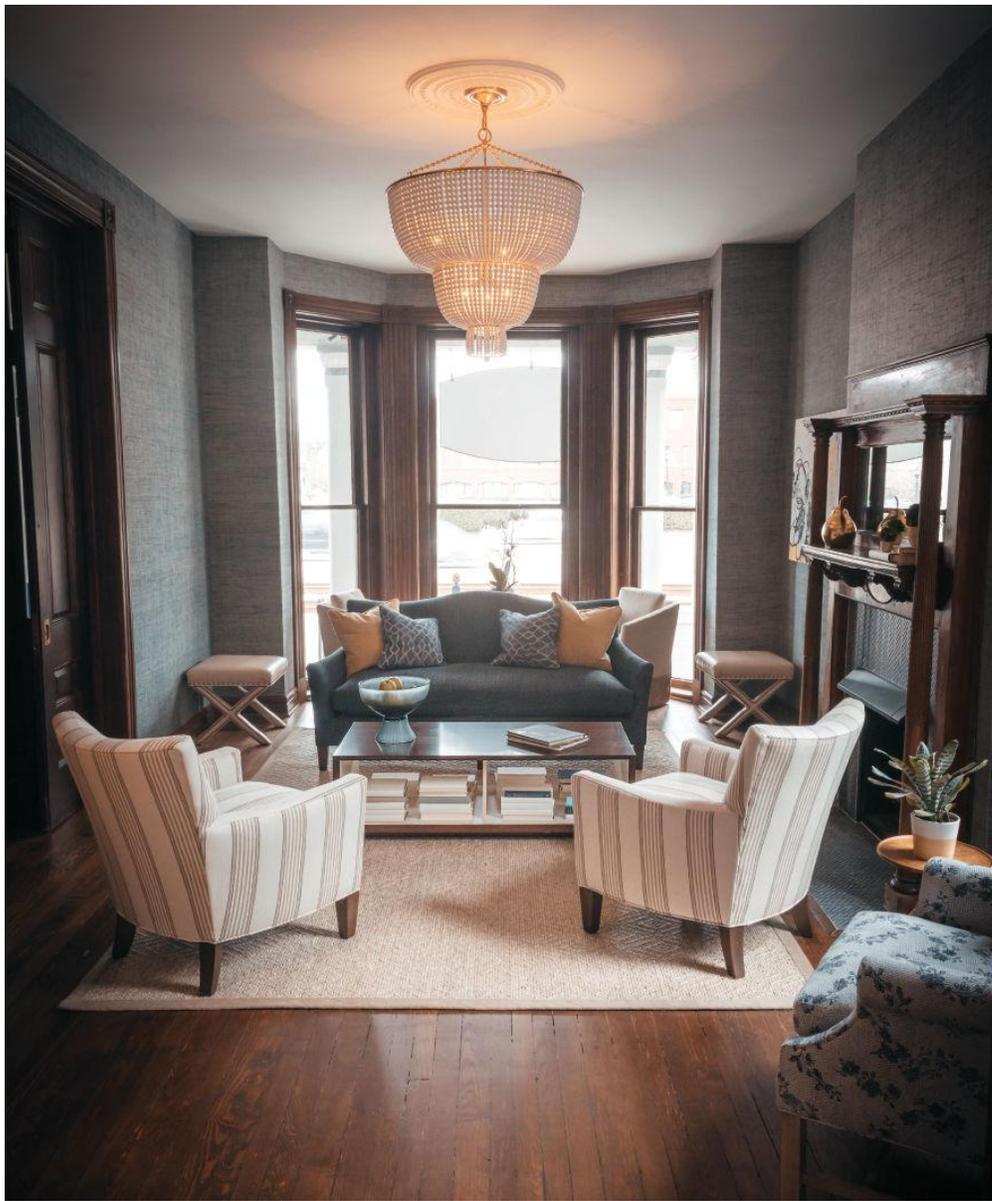


Photograph by Keith Lanpher
Malia Paasch, Jeremy McGee.

The restaurant opened in August and has already attracted a cadre of fans of chef Shawn Matijevich's meticulous, Virginia-sourced menus and bar manager Matt Labarge's improvisational cocktails.

Paasch, 30, says Four Eleven York's vibe is warm and welcoming. Sophisticated, yes, but unassuming. "It's comfortable fine dining," she says, "not stuffy."

The bed and breakfast, formerly the Freemason Inn Bed & Breakfast, is a breathtaking vision of wide staircases, impressive pocket doors, floor-to-ceiling windows, refinished wood floors and a commercial-grade kitchen. There are five bedrooms, including a third-floor, two-bedroom suite; each has a gas fireplace and a spacious bathroom with heated Carrara marble floors and a luxury shower. When the doors open this spring, rooms will go for upwards of \$300 per night.



Photograph by Keith Lanpher

Paasch and McGee, who owns a Virginia Beach media production company, did much of the renovation themselves. (He actually broke his wrist falling from a ladder during the renovation.) The project took more than a year and a half to complete, a fact not lost on potential customers.

“Every night someone at the restaurant expresses interest in staying here,” says McGee, 36. “That blows us away, but it also adds pressure like, man, this is really going to have to meet expectations. People are expecting something unique.”

The genesis for Four Eleven came two summers ago during a trip to a beer festival in Charleston. Paasch and McGee stayed at a luxury inn with a world-class restaurant, and loved the experience.

“We thought, ‘Something like this would be cool to do someday,’ ” says Paasch, who has two degrees from the Savannah College of Art and Design. “Little did we know someday was a year later.”

The couple’s hand was forced when the inn, which they had been eyeing, was suddenly slated for auction. They bought it in advance. The vacant restaurant next door had a different owner and required a separate negotiation. With those purchases complete, the challenges truly began, including calming neighbors who worried about a bar moving in.

When the restaurant opened, “There was certainly a little bit of ‘Well, let’s hope this works,’ ” McGee says. “But since then we’ve seen there’s absolutely a niche for it.”



Photograph by Keith Lanpher

That’s thanks in large part to Matijevich, who loved cooking so much that he dropped out of high school in Smithfield to do it. He cooked in the Navy, and after culinary school worked his way up and into the kitchens of famous chefs Bryan Voltaggio and David Burke in Washington. Matijevich had been executive chef of Burke’s BLT Prime in the Trump International Hotel for less than a year when he answered an ad by Four Eleven York.



Photograph by Keith Lanpher
Chef Shawn Matijevich



He'd left Tidewater originally to advance his skills, but over time Matijevich says he sensed a culinary progression taking root here. When Paasch and McGee asked him to help bring about their vision of beautifully presented, seafood-centric dishes that use top-shelf regional ingredients, he went for it.

"It was a pretty easy decision," says Matijevich, 32. "They said they wanted food that will stand up to the good restaurants in D.C., New York and San Francisco."

He also helped redesign the 900-square-foot space done in exposed brick, blue-gray bench seats and gold-stand tables, with new French doors opening out back to a rustic courtyard.



Photograph by Keith Lanpher

Labarge, 37, says he, too, hired on for the creative freedom and the potential to make Four Eleven York a name beyond Tidewater. He previously ran the bar at the Public House on Colley Avenue, and he came to know Paasch and McGee when they frequently stopped in for drinks.

"It was the longest job interview of my life," he says with a laugh.

Labarge performed improv with the Push Comedy Theater and uses that talent for his bartender's experience cocktails. He'll ask customers something like their hobby or a word that describes them, and create their perfect drink.



Photograph by Keith Lanpher

Next door to the B&B is Four Eleven York, where bartender Matt Labarge joined the staff for the creative freedom and high standards.

Next door at the inn, perfect hospitality is what Paasch and McGee have in mind as well. In that vision, Four Eleven York presents far more than dinner and a room: a lush experience to relish and remember.



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