

The Willows Inn scores the No. 1 spot on a national best-restaurants list

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4/11/2017

The Willows Inn on lovely Lummi Island — a couple hours' drive and a very short, very picturesque ferry ride north of Seattle — was named one of Eater's [Best Restaurants in America](#) in December. And chef Blaine Wetzel won the [James Beard Award for Best Chef Northwest](#) just last spring. [He and his restaurant are great.](#)

Now The Willows Inn is number one on the brand-new [nationwide best list from Opinionated About Dining](#). If you've never heard of it, you're not alone. But its founder, Steve Plotnicki, set out to rectify the problems inherent in lists like the World's 50 Best Restaurants (formerly known as Pellegrino) — at least [in terms of mathematical methodology](#).

In that, Plotnicki may have succeeded. He shared his way of assembling the list with none other than stats guru Nate Silver, who, according to [the Huffington Post](#), was impressed. "It's a good approach for serious foodies looking for a serious meal," Silver told HuffPo in 2013.

Those who object to such lists for their massive preponderance of male, white chefs (like [Eater's Ryan Sutton](#)) won't find any enormous difference here on that scale. The reviewing panel is "made up of some of the top destination diners and tastemakers in the world"; HuffPo, while [in an admiring mode](#), called the 2013 Opinionated About Dining list "uncompromisingly elitist." But there are, at least, a handful of women-run restaurants on the list, including our own Holly Smith's Cafe Juanita (coming in at number 107 — the list goes to 200). Other local places that made this particular "serious foodies" grade include Canlis (at number 81) and The Herbfarm (at 161).

Chef Blaine Wetzel has cooked at renowned restaurants all over the world, but everything on his menu at the Willows Inn comes from just nine square miles — all grown or found on Lummi Island. (Katie G. Cotterill and Corinne Chin / The Seattle Times)

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