



Sam Beall

Proprietor of Blackberry Farm, commissary of connectedness, devotee of sustainable living—and dedicated husband and father of five.

SAM BEALL (pronounced “bell”) was born in the foothills of the Smokies—and after college, culinary school, and work in the Napa Valley, he returned to his family’s own Blackberry Farm, just 25 minutes from Knoxville, to live, work, and raise his children with his wife, Mary Celeste. An award-winning Relais & Chateaux property—the brainchild of Sam’s parents, Kreis and Sandy—continues to expand, and today, in addition to the inn, includes a restaurant, a residential living community, a working farm and hunting grounds, tennis courts, a spa and wellness center, and an event center. Here, Angelique Medow and Beall discuss priorities in a busy life, eating well—and share a blush on the Blackberry Farm experience.

ANGELIQUE MEDOW: How would you describe a day in the life of Sam Beall?

SAM BEALL: Same priorities every day: family, health, work. With five kids going in different directions and a business driven by guests’ agendas, I stay flexible. Somewhere in there, I make time for some physical activity, five days a week. I also maintain a list of weekly meetings with my team: senior leadership, food and beverage, special events, marketing, brewery/distillery, development, and farmstead meetings.

AM: Politicians, movies stars, and top musicians are at Blackberry all the time—

in fact, Kelly Clarkson had her wedding here last fall, as did Pistol Annies’ Ashley Monroe (who married Chicago White Sox pitcher John Danks). How has Blackberry adapted from the early days of a six-room, country inn to becoming the high-profile inn of the stars?

SB: We have just stayed the course. Guests appreciate and enjoy the genuine qualities of our character.

AM: What do you think about food shows such as *Emeril Live* or *Iron Chef America* or even *Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives*?

SB: I certainly know of these shows, but

have actually never seen one! However, my thoughts would be that they are great as they have influenced Americans (in some cases) to be interested in cooking and dining beyond fast food again.

AM: You recently published a new cookbook entitled *The Foothills Cuisine of Blackberry Farm: Recipes and Wisdom from our Artisans, Chefs, and Smoky Mountain Ancestors*. What inspired you to write the new book?

SB: There was so much more story to tell, particularly about the process and artisans that make this place tick, as well as diving deeper into some of the old ways of our South, before they are forgotten.

AM: Food and family are inseparably intertwined. What is the key to making an intimate family dinner that everyone will enjoy?

SB: Getting the family involved in menu-planning, harvesting product from the garden, chopping, mixing, plating, and beverage selection.

AM: You have five beautiful children and a gorgeous wife. What are some of your family’s favorite meals?

SB: Pizza night: Everybody makes their own version and then we share. “Breakfast for dinner”: Waffles, grits, bacon, sausage, potato cakes. Pasta night: Usually an offering of different types—Bolognese, pesto, and garlic-pancetta-pepper flakes and olive oil. Burger night: Build-your-own venison burgers and sweet potato fries in fall; lamb burgers and garden white potatoes in spring and summer.

AM: Favorite snack?

SB: Chocolate.

AM: Are there are particular foods or cuisine you *must* have every couple of days?

SB: No. The only consistent thing about the way I eat is variety. I hardly repeat the same foods in a given week. Variety is excellent for the gut and general health.

AM: Any foods or cuisines you dislike?

SB: Monkey brains and Rocky Mountain oysters.

AM: Food is a part of the total experience at Blackberry Farm, and events throughout 2014 include concerts, truffle and fox hunting, educational workshops and seminars, field trips around the 9,000 acre farm, a paintball challenge, sewing and design, fly fishing, holiday meals and festivities, hiking, biking, yoga, fitness sessions, and discussions about nutrition. What’s next for Blackberry Farm?

SB: A focus on wellness through active, nourishing, sustainable approaches to living.

AM: I’ve read that your mission has been “to inspire people to cook and eat local foods in season.” Does that hold true today?

SB: Yes—but that would be just a small part of a larger mission to challenge and

inspire people to look at their lifestyle as a whole and be willing to try a different approach for a more sustainable and rewarding life. Eating local and seasonal is at this foundation.

AM: With the recent public outcry for eating raw, gluten-free, green, vegan, paleo—and juicing—will these types of fit-foods be a part of the Blackberry Farm experience?

SB: They already are. We serve tons of raw ingredients, naturally gluten-free offerings, enormous amounts of greens, plenty of meat, and lots of good juice. Being vegan is just a dietary restriction in our book, and we modify most items on the menu as needed. Our opinion is that the healthiest approach to life is a balanced one! There is nothing wrong with fat, starches, carbs, wine, coffee, or sugar when in balance with a mindful and responsible lifestyle approach as a whole.

AM: You are strongly in favor of intentionally creating a balanced and healthy relationship with both food and life. Why is balance important?

SB: If not a balanced approach, one is likely depriving oneself of something. If any end of the spectrum is a focus, more than the other, then that approach is likely not sustainable and exceptions are made. Just live one life that embodies all good things.

AM: What do you think are the biggest challenges to leading a balanced life?

SB: Knowledge and looking at the big picture. For example, looking at one meal versus always looking at three meals at a time for diversity, balance, and enjoyment.

Angelique Medow is a 2012 Cityview Entrepreneur and the Principal of BuildingIdeas, which provides design, decorating, consultation, and project management for commercial and residential properties. She also enjoys exercising her degree in journalism from Arizona State University.