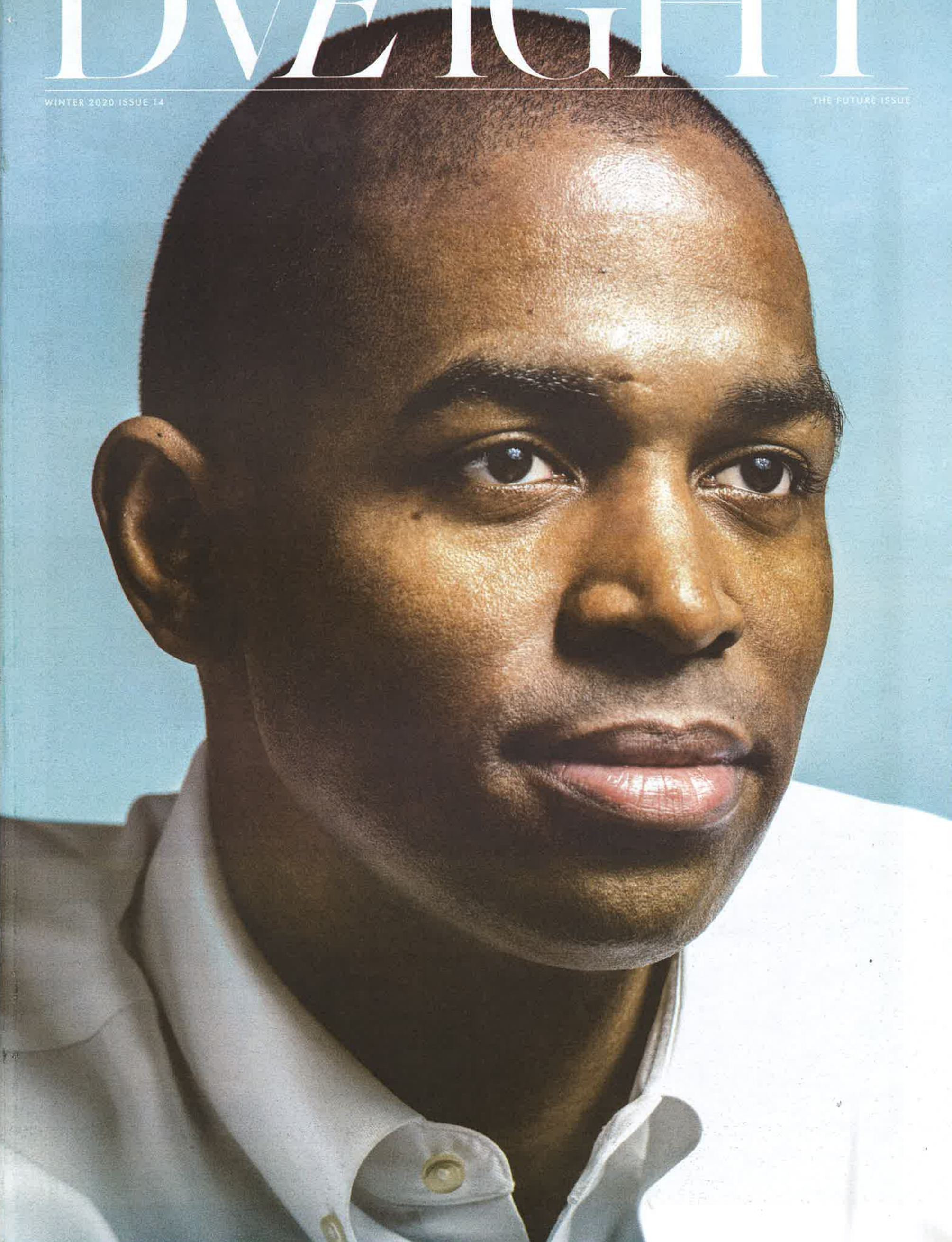


# DWIGHT

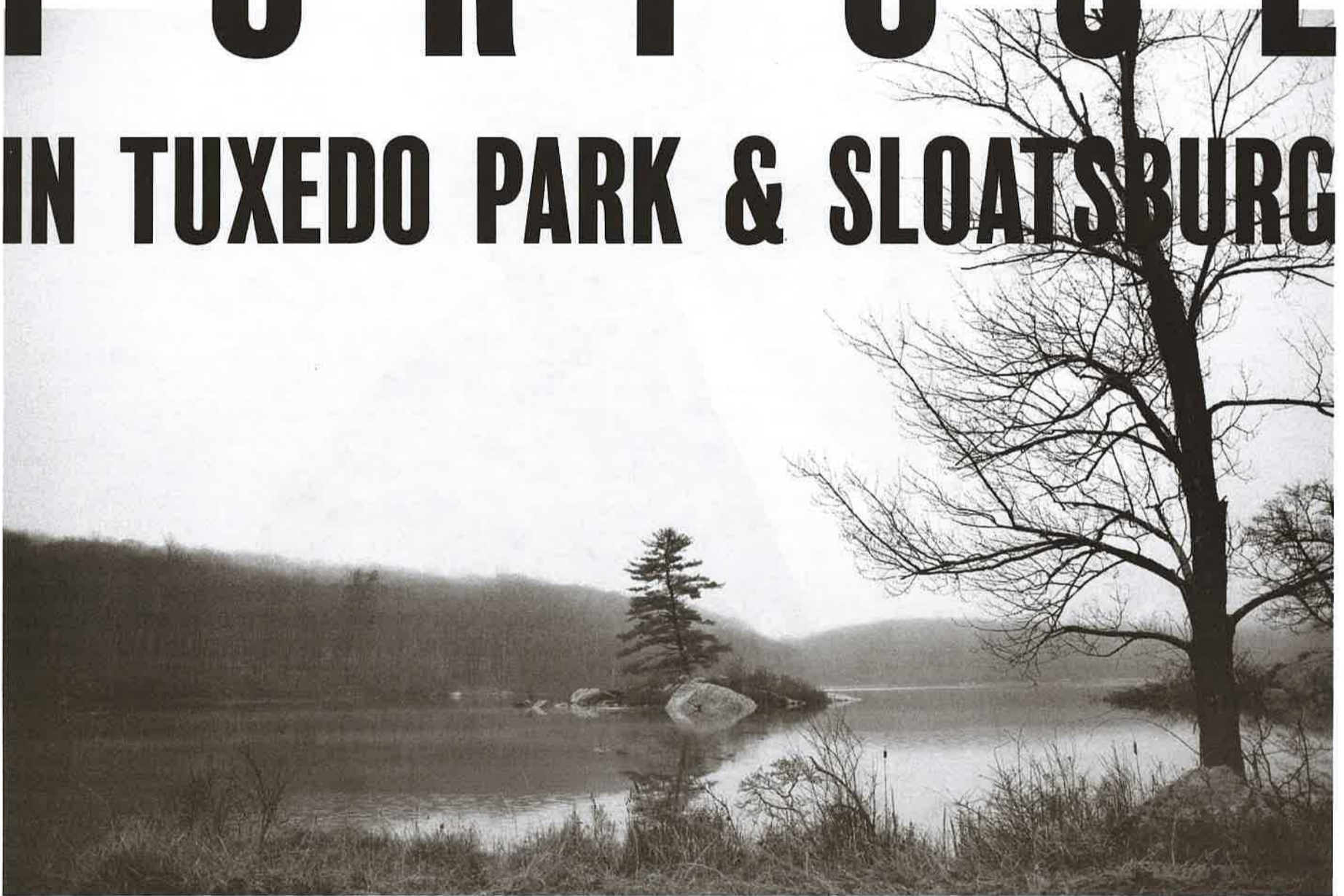
WINTER 2020 ISSUE 14

THE FUTURE ISSUE





# A BIGGER PURPOSE IN TUXEDO PARK & SLOATSBURG



It seems that to be able to envision a radical future, you must also have an unwavering understanding of the past.

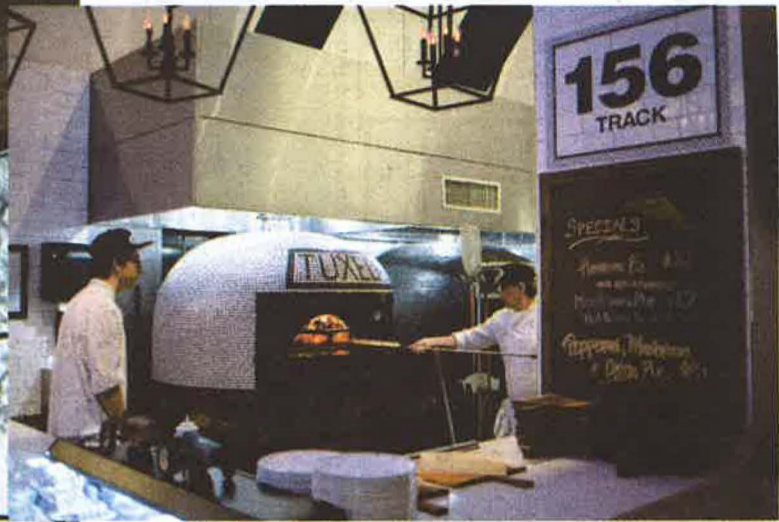
Words and Photography SANDY SOOHOO

TUCKED AWAY BEHIND A WALL OF HEDGES on 17, at the back corner of the commuter parking lot for the Sloatsburg Metro-North, is the newly instituted, high-end inn and resort complete with a fitness center, pool, open-air restaurant and soon to be operating full lodge with dinner service and an impressive bar. When the inn's host Geena met us to let us in, leading us through a quaint market and then down a garden path to our house for the night, the hidden nature of the Mountain Club only added to the effect of its appeal—everyone wants to be admitted to a secret garden that houses delicious things and luxurious places to lounge. Our house, named Twin Peaks and designed with a soothing palette of neutrals, had a sitting area with an enormous couch stuffed with feathers, a 60-inch TV, and a fridge

full of Saratoga Springs water. Our room had its own bathroom, the softest sheets, and a bed that was not too soft or too hard. So, for twelve hours or so, at least, we wanted for nothing.

Tuxedo Park itself is a tiny community comprised of around 800 people at the last census, and Sloatsburg isn't terribly larger, clocking in at about 3,000. This seemingly untapped location is less than two hours from New York City, and directly on the edge of the sprawling Harriman State Park that boasts over 45,000 acres of nature trails, lakes, and land that's been protected since it very nearly became the grounds for a prison in the early 1900s. While the location seems ideal, development has come relatively slowly to the region—though it offers an endless amount of









hiking, swimming, kayaking, and biking, the social centers of the two towns were severely lacking. Enter Michael Bruno, the founder of 1stdibs.com, an online antique marketplace that changed antique dealing forever—and an entrepreneur with an expert's taste for historical relevance, who quickly recognized the invaluable nature of the area for both its location and history. It seems that to be able to envision a radical future, you must also have an unwavering understanding of the past. Initially, the plans were for a small antique market and neighborhood cafe on the highly trafficked but not highly developed stretch of Route 17. As neighboring properties became available, Mr. Bruno expanded his vision accordingly. He bought up the row of dilapidated 1800s houses on Route 17, as well as the land behind the houses that looked like a junkyard, and got to work reviving a whole community by way of an inn, a marketplace, and a restaurant.

The local inn has always been a kind of touchstone for a town. "Every community should have a good inn... it's a place for families to build memories around," Mr.

Bruno tells me as we drive through the expanse of the park behind the inn. I'm here to witness the impressive beauty of the area though we're driving through a fog so thick we can barely see the water on the four or five lakes we pass; my photographs are coming out like misty sketches of trees through clouds. The park is immense—due to the inclement weather we're driving, but if it had been nicer out we would have been on a hike—and Mr. Bruno is telling me about the area, the development of the community, how creating something that offers a multi-faceted experience can be a huge draw for all sorts of city folk young and old alike. The questions I want to ask him are too vague and center around, I guess, my own problems when imagining a future. I want to ask: what made you believe all this was possible? To which, I can only assume, the answer is: why wouldn't it be possible? The effect that exudes off Michael Bruno is one of intense optimism. This appeared to me to be someone who believes with their entire being that if you put good things into a project—building a place to stay with the best materials, a restaurant that has its own farmland, a marketplace offering organic produce, impeccably landscaped





## “AS WE TOUR THE TOWN, I CAN SEE THE DEPTH AND INTELLIGENCE OF MR. BRUNO’S IDEAS AS THE MANIFESTATION OF ONE MAN’S VISION OF SUBURBAN RENEWAL”

garden areas—you will eventually reap the rewards of your work. It helps to have the capital for it. But within the first year of opening Valley Rock Inn & Mountain Club, they were operating in the black—which is as much of a triumph as its inception was, to begin with.

The community so far has reacted positively to all these developments. And Mr. Bruno is not done yet—by 2020 they plan to have the full lodge and restaurant open to the public, an expanded marketplace with a cafe and a hot and cold salad bar and a screening room for movie premieres and business conferences alike. As we tour the town, I can see the depth and intelligence of Mr. Bruno’s ideas as the manifestation of one man’s vision of suburban renewal. But is it possible to reinvent a town on your own? In the best of circumstances, you can hope the laws of attraction are on your side, and your efforts will inspire others to dream the same. To a certain extent, they have—entrepreneurs are coming to the area with new ideas centered around local experiences. There is the recently opened Steve’s

Brick Oven Pizza, offering a variety of innovative pies made with fresh ingredients and fired in a custom-made brick oven stove that reads Tuxedo in its mosaic facade. We arrived late on a Friday, but my partner and I were able to sample their pepperoni pizza, and a vodka sauce pizza, the latter of which we decided was the winner. We took a tiramisu to go, which I ate later by the spoonful on the couch, its layers of fluffy whipped mascarpone contrasting with the espresso-soaked biscuits making just the right texture. There was no shortage of food at the inn, either—our breakfast consisted of a delicately made quiche, a blueberry pastry with so many blueberries they stained our hands, and some excellent smashed and crispy potatoes that neither of us could stop eating even when we were full. Even with these new options becoming available, there is still the local standby, Dottie Audrey’s, where we fueled up on a gingerbread latte and the most perfect chocolate chip cookie before taking a quick hike in the rain, around a beautiful lake we could barely see and then heading home in the approaching dark—full of enough treats and Mr. Bruno’s contagious optimism that I didn’t eat for days.