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19 Hottest New Restaurants

Westchester's newcomers sling serious star power (and flavor).

BY JULIA SEXTON PUBLISHED FEBRUARY 16, 2011 AT 10:33 AM
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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ANDRE BARANOWSKI

These are heady times for Westchester diners, who are finding their culinary dance cards filled with ever more and better choices. Sceney debuts like Juniper (from Chef Alex Sze) and Restaurant North (from Manhattan luminaries Stephen Paul Mancini and Chef Eric Gabrynowicz), mean that Westchester is no longer a dining hinterland punctuated by a couple of high profile standouts. The county's new restaurant diversity means that even a hipster locavorian gastropub, Peekskill's Birdsall House, can hop—pardon the pun—while, on the other side of our borders, bartaco is bringing surf-style heat to the humble shores of the Byram.

We hit the hottest openings and checked out each and every restaurant in our list, and while we can't tell what the future will hold (some full reviews are still pending), we can say that these spots look like the winning picks in the bunch. We've put in the miles, so all that's left for you is to keep your dialing (and clicking) fingers limber. Check out Westchester Magazine's 2011 roundup of Westchester's hottest tables.

Restaurant North

386 Main St, Armonk (914) 273-8686



Farmers' market veggies and scallops at Restaurant North.

Stephen Paul Mancini was younger than 30 when he opened the doors to breezy North, yet he comes to his first ownership position with serious Manhattan restaurant cred. The former wine director at Union Square Cafe, Mancini reconnected with his old colleague from USC, Chef Eric Gabrynowicz, who was fresh from a praise-filled stint at Garrison, New York's Tavern at the Highlands Country Club. Together, they are unstoppable, making Restaurant North the hottest table in town.

Sure, some well-heeled scenesters come to bathe in Mancini's intuitive "enlightened hospitality," though foodies seeking hearty, seasonal fare are just as likely to be fans of Chef Gabrynowicz's menu. His trend-conscious, yet rib-sticking, cuisine is largely sourced from Armonk-area farmers, and we know we'll return again and again for favorites like hanger steak with chickpeas, zucchini, and Swiss chard, especially when paired with Mancini's tight drink program, which offers great picks at thoughtful prices.

Birdsall House

970 Main St, Peekskill (914) 930-1880

This is the restaurant that brought Billyburg north, with a loca-brewian ale selection that stresses craft beers sourced from producers within a day's drive. Though its roster is ever-changing and mostly local, you'll find the stuff of beer fantasists' dreams; in the past, it's hosted exotic draught rarities like Ridgeway Brewery's Bad Elf from South Stoke, England, and NØgne Ø Imperial Stout from Norway. And, like its stylish—yet, somehow, anti-stylish—urban counterpart, New York City's beer mecca Blind Tiger (also owned by Birdsall's Tim Reinke and John Sharp), Birdsall House's vibe perfects the weathered but warm embrace of a small-town tavern.

Now, such a serious beer program might overshadow the average kitchen, but Chef Matt Hutchins' locavorian menu is an equal counterpoint to Birdsall's brews. In the way that 10 of Birdsall's 20 taps focus on New York breweries, Hutchins' menu is sourced locally with grains from Wild Hive Farm, meats from Hemlock Hill, and the cream of New York cheeses. But, ethics aside, we can think of no better way to while away an evening than to be curled around a barleywine and a plate of Chef Hutchins's charcuterie.

Juniper

575 Warburton Ave, Hastings-on-Hudson (914) 478-2542

Though Chef Alex Sze comes to Westchester riding a CV that features serious restaurant names (Michel Richard Citronelle in Washington, D.C., Adour and 10 Downing Food & Wine in New York City), the best thing about Juniper is its almost total lack of pretension. This small, BYOB restaurant could hardly be any simpler; its plan comprises a bakery case, a cash register, and a small, open kitchen. Still, the flavors produced in this storefront are as sophisticated as any uptown, AvroKO-designed foodie haunt.

Look for hanger steak with roasted bone marrow; strozzapreti with parsnips, poached egg, pancetta, and Pecorino; and delectable house-made terrines and pickles. Juniper's lunch—the restaurant is the home of the subtle and compelling soups and sandwiches—is one of Westchester's best-kept secrets. Plus, after the last crumb is gone, one can always linger with coffee and a perfectly chewy oatmeal-raisin cookie.

bartaco

1 Willett Ave, Port Chester (914) 937-8226

The folks behind Barcelona—that staple of style-conscious dining in Connecticut—are dipping their toes into the warm waters of super-casual dining. Port Chester's bartaco, the first venture (another will follow in Stamford, Connecticut), takes its inspiration from the iconic taco stands of seaside Baja, Mexico. Look for a fabulous, industrial-chic interior that celebrates this building's humble, Byram-side origins; it's all centered on a square central bar and an open kitchen that plancha grills fish for tacos. Lengua (tongue), beef al carbon, and spicy chorizo are also tucked into tacos, while a rotisserie spins Peruvian chicken, and gorditas and tamales round out the spread. All are offered in sample-and-share servings, and all celebrate the clean herb-laden surfers' haunts. Homebodies take note: take-out is also an option.

As befits its name, bartaco stresses its drink program. It's overseen by Gretchen Thomas, the award-winning wine director of all seven Barcelona locations. She's hand-selected about 40 tequilas and whipped up eight specialty cocktails—all feature juices squeezed to order at a rank of anvil-style commercial citrus presses. But if wine is more your tippie, none of this mostly South American list tops \$60 per bottle. We can't wait until summer comes, when we can park on the deck and eat and drink all night long—bartaco invested in a \$40K sound system, designed to keep the summer vibe flowing year-round. (Look for a full review at a later date.)

Eliá Taverna

502 New Rochelle Rd, Bronxville (914) 663-4976

It seems like all of our guilty pleasures are enjoying their moment in the gourmet sun. First it was pizza, then hamburgers, meatballs, and fried chicken. When will gyros get their own 15 minutes of fame?

Whether or not they're trendy, we love Eliá's balanced gyros. They're not wadded with lettuce hay, and you don't need to remove tons of filler before you strike. Classic dips like hummus, taramosalata, and skordalia keep diners tearing off tender, fresh pita shreds, while standouts like house-stuffed grape leaves separate Eliá from the usual Hellenic pack. Eliá slings tons of lemony seafood, simply grilled, oiled, and served up on the plate, plus kebabs, moussaka and spanikopita for those looking for the heavy hitters. PS: Don't miss Chef Mike Sarris's crisp and fragrant baklava.



Eliá Taverna's Greek-spun seafood.

Taiim Falafel Shack

598 Warburton Ave, Hastings-on-Hudson (914) 478-0006

You've heard about cursed restaurant sites—well, how about a blessed one? Taiim Falafel Shack steps into Comfort's former nook and proves equally as indispensable to Hastings's hopping dining scene. We love Taiim's cheap and cheerful Israeli comfort food, which includes juicy falafels, succulent shawarma, spicy kebabs, and bright salads. And, handily, Taiim's menu offers a built-in glossary, so even non-Israelis can utter "warbat" (custard-filled phyllo pastries) with confidence.

Moderne Barn

430 Bedford Rd, Armonk (914) 730-0001

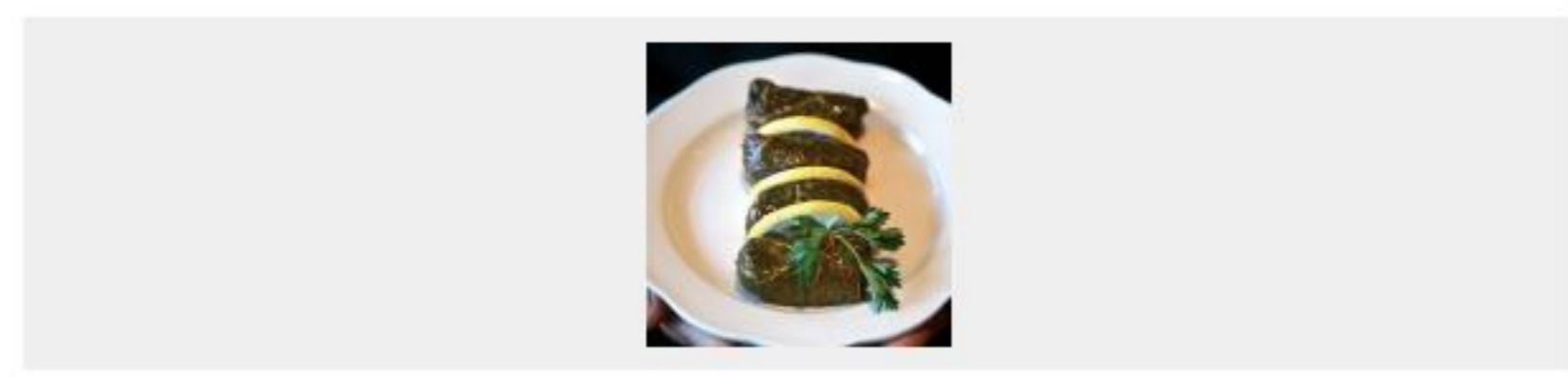
The Livanos Restaurant Group—the family of New York restaurateurs that launched Molyvos, Oceana, and Abboccato—has deep roots in Westchester County. Not only does much of the family live in Armonk, but it also owns the White Plains landmark City Limits Diner. Like its urban counterparts, Molyvos and Oceana, Moderne Barn offers a sophisticated décor, here, managing a difficult balance between woody rusticism and ultra-modern chic. Look for large-format photos by Robert Dutesco—these black-and-white images of Sable Island's wild horses evoke untamed America with graphic punch.

Moderne Barn's kitchen is overseen by Chef Ethan Kostbar, who offers a large, democratic menu that makes this an ideal destination for diverse groups. Salads, seafood, pizza, steaks—and ecumenical comfort foods like meatballs, taquitos, and matzoh ball soup—mean that there is something for absolutely everyone at Moderne Barn.

Also, Moderne Barn sports a hopping nightlife, where locals crowd four deep at the bustling bar. They come to sample Wine Director Christopher Gambelli's vast selection, which is accessed by a precarious-looking catwalk over the bar. Also look for craft-distilled whiskeys, tequila, Scotch, and mescal—all perfect partners to small plates at the bar.

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