

# Find a New Favorite

Take a chance and try one of the Upper Valley's new restaurants. You just might find your new favorite.

By LAURA JEAN WHITCOMB  
Photography by JON GILBERT FOX

It was a simple question — “Where do you want to eat for your birthday?” — but one that made me pause. Did I want to try a new restaurant? I thought about it for a minute. I could have the best meal of my life, but — not knowing the menu or able to recall if I knew anyone else who had eaten there — did I want to take such a chance on my special day? Or did I want to eat lunch at one of the tried-and-true eateries in town, a restaurant where I have eaten just about everything on the menu over the years and whittled it down to a few favorites?

I am somewhat embarrassed to say that I went to a tried-and-true restaurant, and ordered the meal I always get. And I decided that I would be a bit more adventurous for *Upper Valley Life* readers, providing some “word-of-mouth” about a few new restaurants in the area. (I know I would have made a different decision about my meal if I had an article like this to help me out.) So *Upper Valley Life* visited several new restaurants last winter; expanded our already expanded waistlines; and found some new favorite places to eat.

## **SALUBRE TRATTORIA, HANOVER, N.H.**

It isn't located on Main Street, and you can't look in the window to see diners enjoying their meal. If you didn't know Hanover well, you might miss this little gem of a restaurant, located in the Hanover Park Building on Lebanon Street.

Alison Lee and John Hester both worked at Carpaccio Ristorante Italiano, an Andover-then-Hanover-based restaurant that closed in 2009. By locating their new restaurant, named Salubre Trattoria, in the same location as Carpaccio, they've been able to welcome back diners who were missing the flavors of handmade cuisine. But Hester, head chef at Salubre, adds his own personal style to the menu, and Lee creates a welcoming environment for patrons.

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(Top) Warm goat cheese is encrusted with pistachios and almonds, and served over fresh, sliced beets

(Bottom) Almond Amaretto flourless chocolate cake topped with white chocolate sauce and strawberries



Salubre Trattoria chef John Hester and partner Alison Lee offer delectable dishes in a warm, inviting atmosphere.

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Salubre, which means “well being” in four languages, opened on Aug. 20, 2009. Foliage season and back-to-school at Dartmouth College kept the new restaurant hopping all fall, but patronage tapered off slightly with the cold weather. Lee is hoping to attract more locals with their flexibility and availability. “We try to make sure there is something for everyone — foodies can find items, but so can vegans,” she explains. Vegetar-

not to say that the atmosphere is stuffy or pretentious, the kind of place where diners would look down their noses at children. It definitely is not. Lee and Hester are creating “a cozy atmosphere, not high end or untouchable,” says Lee. “When John and I go out, we think, where do we want to eat? People are watching their money, so we bend over backward for our customers. If you want 100 percent organic or a meal featuring game meat, we can do that. The more

sweet and salty, and we’re hoping that this appetizer makes a regular appearance on the menu in the future.

Our entrees arrive, and we stop our chatter to look at the presentation. It is lovely. The wild-caught Canadian salmon is served on a cedar plank; diners at other tables also stop talking to watch its delivery to our table. The roast chicken is sitting on top of a large pile of garlic mashed potatoes, which are circled by bright green Brussels sprouts. The ravioli, sitting deep in a large pasta bowl, are peeking out from underneath a light tomato broth with roasted grape tomatoes, kalamata olives, and cloves of roasted garlic. Hester’s presentation is upscale, but playful. You don’t feel like you are upsetting a modern art sculpture when you take your first bite; the plate is designed so you can dig right in. And there is plenty to dig into — the portions are generous.

Hester comes out to the table to say hello, and he’s a hoot. Even after five years in the Upper Valley, his Southern drawl — courtesy of Lexington, Kentucky — is still noticeable. Add the accent to his sharp sense of humor, and “he can talk a dog off a meat truck,” he tells us.

Hester isn’t a formally trained chef, but he’s been in the restaurant business for a long time — since he was 14. “I started in high school washing dishes, then I started cooking, then I started cooking some more,” he says. He’s worked at the Quechee Inn at Marshland Farms and as a sous chef for Giovanni Leopardi, Carpaccio’s chef/co-owner, before opening Salubre last year. “I try to buy good ingredients and put it on a plate properly.

**It’s hard to decide on a favorite but, fortunately, our tastes differ. We do agree on one thing, however: we’ll be coming back to Salubre Trattoria real soon.**

I’ve been doing this a long time but I love what I do. If you’re looking for a recipe book, I don’t have one, and neither does anyone who has taught me.”

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Wild-caught Canadian salmon is served on a cedar plank with sautéed shiitakes and crème fraiche herb-roasted fingerlings.

ians have a wide variety of appetizer and entrée items, from a trio of goat cheese croquettes to potato gnocchi with ricotta, arugula and foraged mushrooms. Vegans will find that whole wheat pasta (which isn’t made with eggs) can be substituted in any of the fresh pasta dishes, and Hester will remove the cheese. Even the bread basket offers a choice; it comes with a sweet butter spread and a garlic bean spread. “You can tell me you’re allergic to food and we’ll figure something out,” Lee laughs.

There isn’t a kids menu, per se, but marinara — made daily by Hester — is always available to pour over noodles. Although there is a preteen eating supper with her mother, I’m not sure that I’d bring my toddlers to Salubre until they are old enough to appreciate the ambiance of a leisurely, gourmet meal. That’s

notice, the more creative we can get.”

The appetizers arrive: beef Carpaccio, lobster bisque, and a beet salad with goat cheese. Ten rounds of thinly sliced beef tenderloin — sprinkled with truffle oil and topped with shallots, capers and shaved Grana Padano cheese — didn’t remain on the white plate for long. The bisque was darker and smoother than traditional seafood chowders; it was good but wasn’t something we’d order again. But the special, the beet salad, was a show stopper. Hester peeled and boiled the beets at 5 p.m.; arranged slices on a plate underneath a round of goat cheese crusted with crushed almonds and pistachios; and drizzled beet syrup over the plate. Each bite was the perfect combination of



Salubre Trattoria Chef John Hester creates in the kitchen.



Chef Fredric Byarm of Corners Inn Restaurant in Bridgewater Center, Vt., prepares squash.

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Hester brings out a dessert tray with three samples: almond amaretto flourless chocolate cake, maple goat cheese cheesecake and almond praline semifreddo. It's hard to decide on a favorite but, fortunately, our tastes differ. We do agree on one thing, however: we'll be coming back to Salubre Trattoria real soon.

**CORNERS INN RESTAURANT,  
BRIDGEWATER CENTER, VT.**

The dining room is cozy, almost like having dinner at a friend's house. Tables of two and four surround a working fireplace, which crackles as the logs are stoked. One side of the room has an old stone wall, perhaps from the original farmhouse, while the other side has a large picture window overlooking Route 4. Each table, adorned with white linen tablecloths, has a vase of fresh flowers and a candle. The Corners Inn Restaurant is definitely a place you'd want to take a first date, or celebrate a special occasion with a loved one.

My co-workers are busy with holiday preparations, so my husband, Jay, is dining with me tonight. As the hostess takes our coats, he whispers to me, "I didn't bring a tie." Although casual dress is fine at the Corners Inn Restaurant, you feel like you want to match the elegance of your surroundings. The hostess seats us near the fireplace, and Jean, our waitress, quickly brings out an appetizer of cheese dip and crackers after we order our cocktails. The cheese dip is "a random concoction based on my mood," jokes Chef Fredric Byarm. This week it is chestnut and tarragon.

The specials are listed on a blackboard. I order an appetizer from the menu — a spinach salad with shaved green apple and roasted potato wedges — and Jay orders one of the evening's specials: a ravioli appetizer. The salad is excellent, and so is the ravioli, which is filled with goat cheese, cashews and arugula and topped with parmesan cream. It is so wonderful that it could be a main dish. We're also enjoying the basket of bread, which is made with Long Trail

Ale (brewed in Bridgewater).

So far, we're impressed. The food is nicer than we expected; we've paid \$8 and \$9 for appetizers at other restaurants that were nowhere near this good. And the bartender has a good hand when it comes to pouring a drink. The service is impeccable; Jean provides details about the beer (made in Burlington and only available by keg) and, after taking our entrée order, returns to ask if Jay has a noodle preference. But she's not hovering; she just knows how to do her job and do it well.

Chef Byarm tells us he was "bewitched by the romance of Vermont." He was working in Colorado at Keystone Resort and people would say that there is no other decent place to ski — unless you went to Vermont. "For some reason it stuck with me," the New Jersey native says. "When I worked my way back to the East Coast, I had the opportunity to visit Vermont, one of the most beautiful states in the country." Byarm worked as a head chef at the Red Clover Inn in Mendon, and later at the Killington Resort and Hemingway's in Killington. He bought the Corners Inn Restaurant in June 2009.

I order one of

the evening's specials for the main course — a petit filet with shallot sauce. Byarm has seared the filet with bacon and rosemary. While it finished in the oven, he added red wine, brown butter, garlic,

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(Top) Petit filet with shallot sauce is served with mashed potato and green beans. (Bottom) Chocolate Corners is a chocolate cake layered with hazelnut mousse. It is topped with a wafer of hazelnut tuille and surrounded by raspberry syrup and fresh raspberries.

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shallots and stock to the drippings in the pan to create the sauce. The beef, cooked perfectly to medium, is served on a bed of mashed potato and surrounded by green beans. It is melt-in-your mouth wonderful.

Jay orders a carbonara from the regular menu. He's been on the lookout for a bacon-based carbonara that he remembers as a college student, and is somewhat disappointed that this version is made with sweet sausage and smoked and cured Vermont ham. Byarm makes the sauce with red chili flakes, stock, parmesan cheese, and an egg yolk, which, he says, "keeps the sauce lighter than cream." Although it wasn't what he remembered, Jay eats the entire bowl of pasta.

**Byarm is standing in front of the stove and he is smiling; it makes me smile to see someone happy at work. Byarm is committed to featuring local products on the menu, staying within the average Vermonter's budget — and saying thank you.**

Although we're not sure if we have room for dessert, we order it anyway. The

## Plan Dinner Out

**Salubre Trattoria** is open for dinner Tuesday through Sunday from 5 to 9 p.m. Reservations not necessary, but they are helpful; please call (603) 643-2007. Menu is available online at [www.salubrehanover.com](http://www.salubrehanover.com)

**Corners Inn Restaurant** is located between Woodstock and Killington, Vt. It is open Wednesday through Sunday from 5:30 p.m. Reservations are required; please call (877) 672-9968 or (802) 672-9968. Menu is available online at [www.cornersinn.com](http://www.cornersinn.com)



(Top) The Corner's Inn bar, staffed by Gillian Herderger and Christopher Silva  
(Bottom) Byarm and line cook, Jared Black, prepare the petit filet.

pumpkin cheesecake is dense and rich. The signature dessert, Chocolate Corners, is picture perfect: chocolate cake layered with hazelnut mousse, with a wafer of hazelnut tuille tilted on one side (like a ski hill). It is surrounded by three blue dots of raspberry syrup, fresh raspberries and a swath of mango sauce. The desserts are good, but they don't match the meal Byarm made. When we ask Byarm later, we learn he has a pastry chef.

As I stand to put on my sweater, I can look through a small window into the kitchen. Byarm is standing in front of the

stove and he is smiling; it makes me smile to see someone happy at work. Byarm is committed to featuring local products on the menu, staying within the average Vermonter's budget — and saying thank you. "Even when I first moved to Vermont, I've been treated very well," he says. "People have helped me and helped me some more. I owe them a ton, and I'd really like to say thanks."

Two couples at the table next to us propose a toast: "It's so nice to be in Vermont." We couldn't agree more. UVL