

# NO-BIG-DEAL DINING

COMFORT FOOD IN THE MID-HUDSON VALLEY



RIBS WITH SWEET POTATO FRIES & CORNBREAD AT DAWN'S DISH IN NEW PALTZ.

BY BETHANY SALTMAN *photos by jim fossett*

Grass-fed beef, wild fish, local produce, cotton napkins tied with twine; husband-and-wife teams, funky old farmhouses, stacked desserts, renovated industrial spaces, and green tea infusions served in clay pots. Hudson Valley food now competes with New York City not only in terms of culinary mastery, service, and originality, but also in terms of style. Dining out in the region is no longer limited to eating a great meal; instead, we are served up an *experience*. And there are plenty of fabulous opportunities out there for when we are hankering to be whisked out of our everyday lumbering along and into the realm of the almost spiritual attention to every detail. But what about when we want a good burger, fries, and a Coke? Or if we are actually feeling okay about ourselves, and can spend the extra for great food, but don't need to be fawned over like someone really important? What about if we just really dig interesting food? Here are some suggestions for places to go for great food that is delicious, home-cooked comfort food, not because the places are trying so hard, but actually because they aren't. They are all no big deal.

Great, down-to-earth food doesn't discriminate: it can come cheap, and it can come pricey. **La Duchess Anne** in Mount Tremper is a gem. Owners Martine Gaudet and Bruce Baum, who also run the inn by the same name, have been in the business for 26 years serving delicious, classic French food with zero fuss. Martine basically runs the whole operation: overseeing the kitchen, buying—yes—local produce, seating guests, and dealing with the inn side of things. The menu has no big surprises: smoked fish, pate, fish soup, chicken, risotto, lamb, and what has turned out to be my favorite steak in the Hudson Valley. The porterhouse is \$28, and big enough for two. The delicious salad is \$2.95, and the appetizers are all around \$8, so you could also sit at the big wooden bar, watch TV with Bruce, and eat old-fashioned French food without completely breaking the bank. This is not the place for those needing lots of affection or high-end, groovy atmosphere, but over time, the whole place warms up and in the summer the porch may start calling your name.

Also not cheap, also French, and also right off Rt. 28 is **Yvonne's**. Driving along 28 just past Phoenicia, if you



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE PINE VIEW CAFE & BAKERY, ON RT. 28 IN SHOKAN; THE DINING ROOM AT FOSTER'S COACH HOUSE TAVERN IN RHINEBECK; CHICKEN MOLE TAMALES SERVED WITH PICO DE GALLO AT EL DANZANTE IN KINGSTON.

see what looks like a Dairy Queen with a billboard out front reading: crisp duck, wild boar, goat, rabbit, cassoulet confit, you can rub your eyes, be assured you are not dreaming, and be confident that, yes, it's okay to go in. Yvonne may or may not be there during the week (call first and she just might open up for you) and she closes up for the winter. Yvonne, and Yvonne only—she does everything by herself—has been serving Catskill diners things like wild boar pâté, strudel of escargot, and specials like fried chicken and apple-cider donuts for well over 30 years. She may or may not be there next year, so hurry on in and get ready to spend around \$25 per person for apps and dinner—more for drinks or dessert.

For the morning after your French extravaganza, try Pine View Café and Bakery for breakfast—they

have been in Shokan since 1947. Try the ham and cheese omelet with homemade sourdough toast while trying to make sense of all the bad-ass hunters getting busy with their pancakes in this old Dutch-inspired café that is so totally adorable it is almost hard to take anyone seriously there. Two other breakfast treats are in New Paltz—Plaza Diner's from-scratch corned beef hash, and College Diner's eggs benedict. Yum! It was sworn to me that the hollandaise sauce was not from any powdery mix, and being the daughter of a man who broke long-term relationships over hollandaise sauce, I think I believe him.

If you are heading toward Kingston, drive over to Broadway and eat your heart out. Sea Deli is not to be believed. Straight out of...I don't even know when. You will find fresh fish on one side (salmon for \$5 a

pound!), a sea-kitsch-filled restaurant on the other, and two brothers who run the place in the back. Fish and chips is served on cardboard plates for \$4.95—the fish is fresh, moist, and delicious, and chips are big steak fries. They have all kinds of crazy specials, too, like on Wednesday, all the fish you can eat for \$4.95. When I asked one of the brothers how they could serve food for so cheap, he looked at me like I was weird and said, "It's fast food. People don't associate 'fast' with 'expensive.'" Right.

For Mexican, try El Danzante, also on Broadway—a family-run place with the real-deal Mexican food. Order a selection of incredible tacos, each for \$2, and each with completely distinct flavor, or any one of the "Classic Dinners"—things like pork ribs, mole, or fabulous salted beef—for \$12. This is not Tex-Mex Mexican, although they do serve things like chimichangas for the bashful. And the service is great.

Another great down-home place is Dawn's Dish in New Paltz, serving Southern food. The meat is zesty and fresh—brisket, ribs, pulled pork—and full dinners including two sides go for around \$11. There are a

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