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# LIVING

## Southern New England

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# Michelle Kwan

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Our editors' top picks for restaurants that specialize in special occasions.

Whether the date is a birthday or anniversary—or maybe just the end of a particularly long workweek—your first thought is probably: make a reservation. You're craving lit candles, white tablecloths, a leisurely pace of courses, not-your-typical cocktail and wine selections and a particularly memorable entrée.

There's something indulgent about sitting down at a restaurant that takes not only food but also service and ambience to the next level. Just in time for that next circled date on your calendar, we've polled our editors and come up with a collection of standout special occasion restaurant options. So sit back, relax and let these topnotch establishments wine and dine you.

Salmon with peas  
and cauliflower purée,  
Tallulah on Thames



## IN & AROUND BOSTON



Bar bites at Meritage

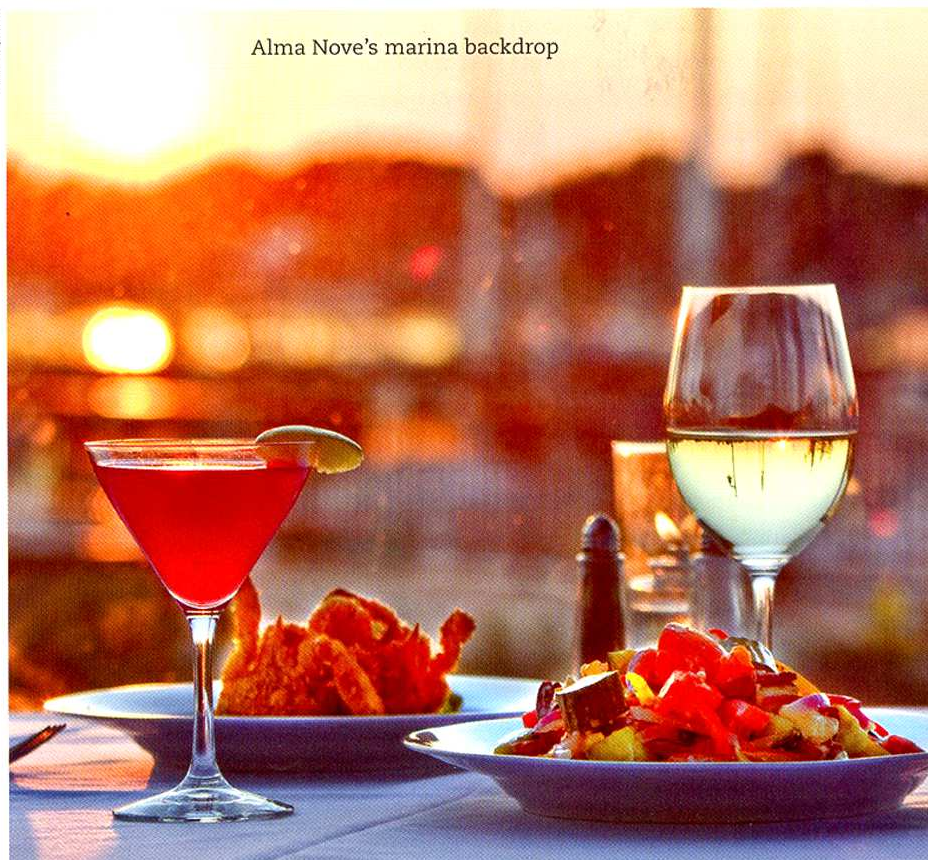
**TAKE IN THE STUNNING VIEW** of Boston Harbor as you enjoy chef Daniel Bruce's celebrated cuisine at **Meritage** at the Boston Harbor Hotel. Romantic lighting, streamlined décor and attentive service combine to ensure an unforgettable evening. Wine director and sommelier Nicholas Daddona helps guests navigate Meritage's wine list, which pulls from a 5,000-bottle wine cellar with over 850 different labels. Chef Bruce, who founded the Boston Wine Festival, believes that the right wine is essential to a complete dining experience. He changes the menu constantly, based on what is seasonal and fresh but a few of his innovative go-to dishes include Northeast oysters on the half shell with lime and tarragon, sage-roasted Vermont pheasant and a cocoa-rubbed roast Kobe beef flank steak. A tasting of artisan cheeses is the perfect end to the evening. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
70 Rows Wharf, Boston, MA,  
617-439-3995; [meritagetherestaurant.com](http://meritagetherestaurant.com)

**"OUR FOCUS HAS ALWAYS BEEN** on providing amazing dishes with the highest quality and freshest ingredients," says Paul Wahlberg, chef/owner of the waterside Italian-Mediterranean restaurant **Alma Nove**, named after his mother, Alma. Overlooking Hingham Bay, the view from the wraparound windows is hard to beat unless you nab a table on the patio, which is a prime spot in warm weather. The mood is festive even if you're not here to celebrate a special occasion, and it's easy to get caught up in the spirit. But give more than a casual glance to the menu, which includes such signature dishes as braised pork meatballs with polenta and tagliatelli with short ribs. Craving seafood? "The ocean is our backyard," says Wahlberg. "We serve local lobster, and our oysters are farm-raised at Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury." You can't get much fresher than that!

—*Janice Randall Rohlf*

22 Shipyard Drive, Hingham, MA, 781-749-3353;  
[almanovehingham.com](http://almanovehingham.com)

Jim Playcroft



Alma Nove's marina backdrop



## RESTAURANTS IN & AROUND BOSTON



Steak tartare, Sorellina

**LOCATED IN THE HEART OF COPLEY SQUARE,** **Sorellina**—overseen by chef/owner Jamie Mammano of Mistral fame—offers traditional Italian cuisine with a contemporary twist in a refined setting. Masterminded by designer Celeste Cooper, the interior gives off a date-night vibe with soft leather seats, quilted drapery in neutral tones and floor-to-ceiling, backlit wine racks. One of its smaller, more intimate tables is perfect for two; request one by the window for more privacy. Sharing the burrata with fig marmellata and prosciutto is the perfect start before moving on to one of Sorellina's rich, delicious pastas. The not-to-be-missed fettuccine with truffle butter and the gnocchi with Maine lobster are perfect for exchanging bites with each other. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
1 Huntington Avenue, Boston, MA, 617-412-4600;  
sorellinaboston.com

**THE FRENCH/MEDITERRANEAN** restaurant **Mistral**, the crown jewel in the Columbus Hospitality Group, is the perfect spot for surprise proposals or to mark an important anniversary. High ceilings, light earth tones of green and lavender and pendant lighting create intimacy in the sophisticated dining room, where each table feels private from the next. Mistral's menu, created by chef/owner Jamie Mammano, is filled with delights from the South of France like seared foie gras with confit of duck and escargot done in the Burgundy-style with red wine and garlic butter. Save room for dessert and share it with your special someone. The Mistral Assiette for Two—a sampling of crème brûlée, pot de crème au chocolat, profiterole and berries with Champagne sabayon—will have your spoon clanging against the plate for the last bite. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
223 Columbus Avenue, Boston, MA, 617-867-9300;  
mistralbistro.com

**THE WHISPERINGS OF** this restaurant's greatness have not been exaggerated—**O Ya** is a wonderful place to celebrate a special moment and also to treat yourself to inspired cuisine. Reserve a spot at the intimate Chef's Counter and opt for one of the tasting menus, either 17 or 20 dishes of inventive sushi, meat and vegetable dishes. Chef/owner Tim Cushman is at his best when making simple ingredients sing. The menu tempts in every category, from soup, salad, nigiri and sashimi to pork, chicken, Japanese Wagyu beef, truffles and eggs, somen and homemade soba. Plus, there are categories that Cushman calls "traditional & seasonal" and also "something crunchy in it." Nancy, O Ya's sake sommelier and Cushman's wife, has an impressive résumé that includes completion of Japan's Advanced Sake Professional Course (fewer than 100 people in the world have this certification). —*Jessica Laniewski*  
9 East Street Place, Boston, MA, 617-654-9900;  
oyarestaurantboston.com



Italian with a local twist at Rialto





Clio's revamped bar

**Clio KNOWS HOW TO CELEBRATE** a special occasion. For its 15th anniversary, it commissioned the restaurant's original designer, Peter Niemitz, for a full renovation. The walnut-topped bar doubled in size and a new glass entryway welcomes diners. The revamped interior reflects a more relaxed feel with a leopard-print rug, banquettes upholstered in cream-colored leather and intimate two-person settees. Chef/owner Ken Oringer's Asian-inspired approach to French/New American fusion cuisine was and still is groundbreaking. Thanks to his inspired technique and dramatic presentations, his dishes border on art. Just a sampling from the daily-changing menu includes foie gras with milk and honey, fricassee of Burgundy escargot and Miso halibut with oyster emulsion, cardoon and Peking consommé. In addition to an à la carte menu, Clio also offers seven-, 10- and 14-course tasting menus with corresponding wine pairings. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
370A Commonwealth Avenue, Boston, MA 617-536-7200;  
cliorestaurant.com

**THE HARVARD SQUARE RESTAURANT Rialto** is favored by university professors and local VIPs who can't get enough of executive chef and owner Jody Adams' twist on Italian cuisine. Adams creates regional Italian dishes using local New England ingredients, aligning her menus with the changing seasons. Dishes range from butter-poached lobster with sunchokes, house bacon and Prosecco zabaglione to monkfish osso bucco with red wine risotto to slow-roasted Long Island duck. Acoustic paneling that absorbs sound, and curtains that make private tables and booths feel even more exclusive, add to the cozy restaurant's romantic ambience. The most coveted seats at Rialto are the large banquettes that make you feel like you have your own private nook. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
1 Bennett Street, Cambridge, MA, 617-661-5050;  
rialto-restaurant.com

**IT IS HARD NOT TO BE** swept away by **L'Espalier**, starting with its quiet, exclusive entrance off bustling Boylston Street where an attendant checks you in before an elevator whisks you up to a chic reception area. Whether you start there with a glass of Champagne or head straight to your table in a dining room that overlooks Boston's Back Bay, the evening is sure to impress with formal service and dishes like Georges Bank scallops with crispy sweetbreads and roasted Hudson Valley foie gras with caramelized mango. Many ingredients are grown on owner Frank McClelland's farm. Truly unique dining options include the Chef's Tasting Journey, a multi-course menu inspired by the season, or the more intimate Chef's Table, hosted in the L'Espalier kitchen. Dedicated staff, including maître d'hôtel and fromager Louis Risoli, who has been with the restaurant for over 30 years, aim to make your visit as special as possible. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
774 Boylston Street, Boston, MA, 617-262-3023; lespalier.com

**WHILE THE SLEEK, DARK INTERIOR** of award-winning **Menton** may not immediately call to mind its namesake in France, the cuisine will have you whispering in French by the end of the evening. The Relais & Châteaux restaurant (the only one to carry the distinction in Boston) offers two memorable options for dinner, the four-course prix fixe menu and the seven-course chef's tasting. Sample dishes include monkfish with kumquat and Vidalia onion or roasted game hen with Chantenay carrots. The wine menu, assembled by legendary Boston sommelier Cat Sirilie, pairs expertly with the cuisine. Menton was designed to give diners privacy as they dine, and the waitstaff is trained to go to great lengths to ensure satisfaction, including understanding diners' subtle body language cues. —*Jessica Laniewski*  
354 Congress Street, Boston, MA, 617-737-0099;  
mentonboston.com



## RESTAURANTS

Grilled Spanish octopus, Café-Boulangerie



Mike Piazza

### CAPE COD & THE ISLANDS

#### A PIECE OF PARIS IN THE HEART OF CAPE COD

is a rare find, and it was also the vision behind **Pain D'Avignon's Café-Boulangerie**, located within the wholesale bakery's Hyannis production facility. During the day, the café provides fresh bread, pastries, coffee and light fare but at night, it transforms into an intimate French bistro that prioritizes every guest with exceptional service. Glass walls overlook the bakery's nighttime staff at work as well as the new wine room, which houses more than 1,000 French wines. Executive chef Matthew Tropeano's menu features local ingredients at every turn but remains rooted with French classics such as caviar, foie gras, coq au vin and cassoulet de Toulouse. And food is not the only draw. Promoted under the headline "Make Wednesday the new Friday," live music and dancing occur every Wednesday night. And even after a multi-course meal, the café's offering of a complimentary bread loaf, presented with the check, is a welcomed perk. —Jennifer Sperry

15 Hinckley Road, Hyannis, MA, 508-778-8588;  
paindavignon.com

#### NAVIGATING THE RESTAURANT CHOICES on

Nantucket is a little daunting, but island natives know that **TOPPER'S** at the Wauwinet is an ideal celebration destination. Under the leadership of Executive Chef Kyle Zachary, **TOPPER'S** specializes in top-shelf local ingredients cooked exquisitely and presented beautifully. Sophisticated palates will appreciate poached duck eggs, foie gras, soft-shell crab tempura, chef-selected Retsyo oysters, porcelet loin and belly and the ever-popular butter-poached lobster. A list of over 1,450 wines tempts with the possibility of endless pairings. And those in the know round out their TOPPER'S experience with a pre-dinner one-hour bay cruise aboard the *Wauwinet Lady*, a complimentary water taxi that leaves from behind the Wauwinet's sister resort, the White Elephant. The taxi runs seven days a week in season and advanced reservations are required. —Jennifer Sperry

120 Wauwinet Road, Nantucket, MA, 508-228-8768;  
wauwinet.com



"Spring Harvest" first course, TOPPER'S



FOR THE ULTIMATE IN ROMANTIC DINING, you just can't beat **Chillingsworth**. The ambiance alone is worth a visit to the 18th-century estate home-turned-fine-dining restaurant. Rooms are filled with antiques, crystal chandeliers sparkle in the candlelight and the service is impeccable. Each dining room has a different appeal, but the main dining room features stunning views of a lovely lit garden. Owners Nitzi and Pat Rabin are classically trained French chefs who accent traditional dishes with a lighter, more playful touch. For a truly indulgent experience, their seven-course Table d'Hôte is like a vacation in foodie heaven, with each course artfully served on gorgeous china. Menu items are also available à la carte and, for a more casual experience, the restaurant offers an onsite bistro, Chill's Bistro, which has a greenhouse setting and its own delectable menu. —*Laurie Higgins*

2449 Main Street, Brewster, MA, 508-896-3640; [chillingsworth.com](http://chillingsworth.com)

EVERY DINNER at the **Red Pheasant Inn** is a unique experience. Housed in a 200-year-old building, this year-round restaurant combines antique wood beams and wide-plank floors with linen and candlelight for an elegant coziness. In the warmer months, be sure to eat in the "Garden Room," a windowed former porch overlooking a lush garden. The fireplace in the elegant main room makes for inviting winter dining, and the Bistro area, with its own fireplace, is great for cocktails and appetizers. But the food is the reason for so many return visits. Chef Bill Atwood specializes in creative takes on classic cuisine, using high-quality ingredients like free-range chicken, grass-fed beef and fresh produce from local farms. Signature dishes showcase duck, rack of lamb, local seafood and a variety of wild game. —*Laurie Higgins*

905 Main Street, Dennis, MA, 508-385-2133; [redpheasantinn.com](http://redpheasantinn.com)



**FITTINGLY SITUATED ON PLEASANT BAY**, the Wequassett Inn and Resort is a fabulous place to vacation. Fortunately for the rest of us, their posh, celebration-worthy restaurant, **Twenty-eight Atlantic**, is open to the public. This summer, guests will gush over not only the inspired food and classy décor but also the resort's multi-million dollar waterfront renovation featuring multiple terraces, a promenade and a grand overlook for unmatched ocean views. In his fourth season, British-born executive chef James Hackney looks forward to keeping his cuisine focused on the sea as well, coaxing exciting flavors from plankton, sea beans and sea lettuces. Among the menu's old favorites and new surprises are Pleasant Bay oysters on the half shell with cucumber granita, Atlantic halibut served with black quinoa, and scallops with pea purée and carrot gnocchi. "Health is at the forefront of cooking these days," says Hackney, whose deft touch ensures that nutritious is always delicious. —*Janice Randall Rohlf*

2173 Route 28, East Harwich, MA, 508-430-3000; [wequassett.com](http://wequassett.com)

**GIFTS IN SMALL BOXES** heighten anticipation. So do jewel-box-size restaurants like **C Salt Wine Bar & Grille**, unassuming on the outside and hugely rewarding once you crack open the door. Just a year old, Jonathan and Jill Philips' debut restaurant (Jon has cooked at some of the best) has already elevated them in Falmouth's growing pantheon of standout eateries. In a soothing sage dining room with black tables and chairs, deep-flavored French-Asian fusion cuisine featuring pork belly, grilled steak, fresh fish and seafood incorporates veggies, grains, spices and sauces in mouthwatering ways. Try the ethereal calamari with hot and sour vinaigrette, plump scallops with lemon bacon brown butter or a Wagyu meatball flatbread, or go decadent at brunch with foie gras French toast. —*Janice Randall Rohlf*

75 Davis Straits, Falmouth, MA, 774-763-2954; [csaltfalmouth.com](http://csaltfalmouth.com)



## RESTAURANTS



Ron Marville

Pot of mousse, Café Nuovo

## PROVIDENCE

**YOU DON'T GO JUST ANYWHERE** to dine with a dear friend you haven't seen in 10 years. You go to a place like **Café Nuovo**, a chic spot that makes you feel special whether you're here for a business lunch, a romantic dinner or a gala for 200 in the rotunda. In this sleek setting with a full-on view of the river (perfect during WaterFire), my friend and I clinked flutes of Prosecco, a fitting prelude to a meal that dazzled with artfully presented American-Euro-Asian cuisine. This culinary fusion excels in dishes like crispy sushi, made with ahi tuna and Korean chili mayonnaise, and you won't be disappointed by either the lamb shank or stuffed rigatoni, two dishes whose popularity has earned them a permanent place on the menu. Desserts are fabulous, so save room! —*Janice Randall Rohlf*  
1 Citizens Plaza, Providence, RI, 401-421-2525; [cafenuovo.com](http://cafenuovo.com)

**THE WAIT CAN BE LONG**—**Al Forno** does not take reservations—particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, but the wait list does not deter diners who know the end result is well worth the anticipation. Owners and chefs Johanne Killeen and George Germon are famous in culinary circles and a number of their recipes are cult classics, ordered by fans again and again and recreated by fellow chefs across the country. Choosing a meal is incredibly difficult: there are so many enticements, from their famous grilled pizzas and dirty steak to their handmade pastas and signature “clams Al Forno.” Since each dessert is made to order, the final course must be selected before the food arrives, before you even know if you'll have room for it or not! (The good news is that once it arrives, you'll make room.) —*Jennifer Sperry*  
577 South Main Street, Providence, RI, 401-273-9760; [alforno.com](http://alforno.com)

**THE INTERIOR OF CAV** is playful, warm, well-traveled and rather reflective of the restaurant's visionary owner, Sylvia Moubayed, who also sells the ceremonial Asian and African antiques that decorate the space. Nestled in Providence's Jewelry District among industrial brick buildings and a large art supply store, CAV is accessed through a winding garden path—a ritual reserved for local bohemians in the know. Its menu features chic, contemporary dishes inspired by cuisine the world over, but before you even get to your meal, you'll be transported. With tabletops and banquettes draped in Middle Eastern fabrics, curious crystal sculptures hanging from the ceiling and a historic mahogany bar that was rescued from the oldest tavern in New York, CAV is a world of wonders unto itself. —*Caroline Goddard*  
14 Imperial Place, Providence, RI, 401-751-9164; [cavrestaurant.com](http://cavrestaurant.com)



Al Weems

CAV's worldly dining room



**FOR AN AUTHENTIC AND UNIQUE** dining experience, try **Bacaro**, an Italian-style wine bar, salumeria and cicchetteria nestled on the east bank of the Providence River. With a strong Venetian culinary influence, Bacaro's menu digs deeply into Italian food culture, offering a huge selection of cured meats, pâtés, terrines, cheeses and tapas in addition to rich and complex pasta, pizza, meat and fish entrées. From an extensive menu checklist, guests mark their selections, which are served on an olive-wood board accompanied by honeys and preserves. As an enoteca, an Italian wine bar that offers a minimum of 100 wines with specific requirements for regions represented, Bacaro is also a great place for sharing light fare, good conversation and a quartino of fine wine with friends. —*Caroline Goddard*

262 South Water Street, Providence, RI,  
401-751-3700; [bacarorestaurant.net](http://bacarorestaurant.net)

**Nick's on Broadway** STARTED OUT AS A small neighborhood diner but today, under the leadership of owner and chef Derek Wagner, the West End eatery is in high demand for its creative American cuisine that exemplifies Wagner's self-proclaimed "unique, humble and thoughtful style." The atmosphere is unassuming—it still resembles a diner inside, albeit slightly larger and modernized—and the kitchen's inner workings are open to the dining room. The menu constantly changes due to Wagner's preference for sourcing ingredients from local growers and producers: the menu typically lists not only a meat, seafood or vegetable item but also its original host farm or body of water. And for true culinary immersion, try the tasting menu, a four-course menu specially designed by the chef; add wine pairings for the full chef-directed effect. —*Jennifer Sperry*

500 Broadway, Providence, RI, 401-421-0286;  
[nicksonbroadway.com](http://nicksonbroadway.com)

Erin McGinn



Beet-marinated sea scallops, Hemenway's

**WHEN THERE'S SOMETHING TO CELEBRATE**, seafood lovers flock to **Hemenway's** and are rewarded by a menu predominantly featuring fresh harvests from the sea. The raw bar is addictive: a chalkboard list of local oysters, littlenecks, cherrystones, shrimp, jumbo lump crab and an impressive Alaskan king crab cocktail make it hard to choose just one. Menu choices progress from clam chowder and lobster bisque to steamers and calamari to swordfish, paella and yellowfin tuna. Seafood is flown in daily from around the world but is more often than not locally sourced from New Bedford, Boston, Gloucester, Point Judith and Maine. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook South Main Street on one side and the river on the other while a central and always well-populated bar serves up classic, chilled martinis. —*Jennifer Sperry*

121 South Main Street, Providence, RI, 401-351-8570;  
[hemenwaysrestaurant.com](http://hemenwaysrestaurant.com)



## RESTAURANTS

### AROUND RHODE ISLAND



Poached egg on brioche,  
Tallulah on Thames

Nat Rea Photography

**WHEN CHEF/OWNER JAKE ROJAS** of **Tallulah on Thames** talks about farmers and his restaurant, the word “partnership” comes up often. One of the first restaurants built around the farm-to-fork model in Newport, Tallulah on Thames draws on the region’s impressive network of small farms and delights in the variability of New England’s seasons. Set within a small house in downtown Newport with just 60 seats, the space is welcoming, intimate and elegant but never pretentious. Each plate’s color palette is carefully considered and the presentation exquisitely rendered. Tallulah on Thames is a feast for all the senses. —*Caroline Goddard*

464 Thames Street, Newport, RI, 401-849-2433; [tallulahonthames.com](http://tallulahonthames.com)

**IF VIEWS ARE A MUST** for your special occasion, then the **Boat House Restaurant** in Tiverton is the place to be, hands down. Its dining rooms and bars offer sweeping views of the Sakonnet River; plus an expansive outdoor patio is prime real estate in good weather. Describing itself as taking the “seafood shack” to the next level, the Boat House excels in seafood prepared myriad ways. From raw bar treats to grilled fillets to surf & turf, there is something to satisfy every ocean-derived craving. If local seafood isn’t enough, the restaurant also uses local farms whenever possible. Aquidneck Honey, Barden Family Orchard and Baffoni’s Poultry Farm are just a few on their long supplier list. —*Jennifer Sperry*  
227 Schooner Drive, Tiverton, RI, 401-624-6300; [boathousetiverton.com](http://boathousetiverton.com)

**CHIC AND STATELY**, the **Dining Room at Castle Hill** offers world-class palate pleasers—seasonal and local delicacies prepared by esteemed Executive Chef Karsten Hart—coupled with wraparound views of Newport Harbor and an award-winning wine list. Now thanks to the expanded Sunset Terrace and its luxury teak furniture and linen-canvas umbrellas, guests can dine alfresco until 10 p.m. Whether your best seat in the house is indoors or out, the culinary experience here is unmatched with dishes that are inspired, delicious and beautifully presented. Worth a taste are the crisp endive and frisée salad, pan-roasted fluke and rich chocolate soufflé. Dinner options include three-course prix fixe, four-course prix fixe, a six-course tasting menu and dessert. For each prix fixe meal, beverage pairings are optional (so worth it) and include a multitude of wines, spirits and cocktails. —*Danielle Raciti*  
590 Ocean Drive, Newport, RI, 401-849-3800; [castlehillinn.com](http://castlehillinn.com)

**A NEW RESTAURANT STAPLE** on the Newport scene, **Midtown Oyster Bar** is an up-and-comer that blends architectural details and city charm with nautical nuances. Midtown has the feel of an old-school tavern from the 1800s but high ceilings, a generous allotment of windows and a combination of wood, steel and marble accents lend modern appeal. “We aim for a clientele that is more mixed than most bars/restaurants and it shows in the design,” says general manager Charlie Holder. In addition to the main dining room and raw bar, Midtown has a second-floor “Burgee Bar,” decorated in dark red lacquered walls for a cozier dining dynamic, and a mezzanine that is perfect for snagging bay views and sipping sunset cocktails. A must-order? The steak-frites or caramelized sea scallops. Seriously, so good. —*Danielle Raciti*  
345 Thames Street, Newport, RI, 401-619-4100; [midtownoyster.com](http://midtownoyster.com)



**WHEN THREE NEW YORK CITY** restaurateurs relocated to Newport, they saw a need for a topnotch, locally sourced menu coupled with an at-ease atmosphere (jeans and flip-flops welcome). A renovation of their chosen space rendered it pleasantly understated, almost homey, with an open kitchen, salvaged copper bar, handmade pillows, jam jar candles and industrial-style furnishings. Yet impeccable service makes dining at **Stoneacre Pantry** an indulgent experience. Guests are well looked after, from the first smiles that greet them to the last drop of wine, which, by the way, the owners import directly from the South of France. Be sure to sample the house-made pâtés, mousses and rillettes. Rumor has it the trio will be opening a butcher shop in Newport in the near future.

—Caroline Goddard

515 Thames Street, Newport, RI, 401-619-7810;  
stoneacrepantry.com

Seasonally inspired  
courses, Stoneacre Pantry



Chapel Grille's Cathedral Bar (left); veal chop entrée (right)

**CONVENIENTLY LOCATED IN** Cranston's Chapel View Lifestyle Center, **Chapel Grille** is an easy-to-find oasis of culinary excellence. Its interior is expansive, welcoming and comfortable. Seating options include the main salon, with plush furnishings and a central stone fireplace, as well as an outdoor terrace. Private functions are held in the conservatory and mezzanine (also popular dining spots) and in the wine salon, which accommodates up to 120 guests.

However, the interior's showpiece is the soaring Cathedral Bar, a unique, Medieval-style room with a vaulted ceiling, stonewalls and stained glass windows. Once a historic c. 1891 chapel, it now has cushy leather stools and a serpentine white onyx bar.

Executive chef Tim Kelly has lived in Rhode Island for over 20 years but his California roots are evident in Chapel Grille's menu: "I bring the light, healthy feel of my home state's cuisine to the Mediterranean table and the two work fabulously together," he explains.

"We are influenced by regions known for growing olives," continues Kelly, "and for producing the best extra virgin olive oils—we use olive oil extensively throughout our menu, from the house-made focaccia bread to the olive oil tasting that features oils from California, Greece, Italy and Spain."

Kelly boasts that even the restaurant's mashed potatoes are made simply with locally grown Yukon gold potatoes, extra virgin olive oil, salt, pepper and garlic—no cream or butter. The mashed potato "menu" boasts extra toppings such as white truffle oil and spicy lobster.

The executive chef prefers to keep his dishes focused on their ingredients, which are locally sourced whenever possible: "My job is to source all-natural meats as well as the finest local seafood from the New Bedford fleets," he says.

The menu selection is purposefully wide and includes statement entrées like braised lamb shank, wood-grilled chicken paillard and grass-fed beef tenderloin. "Guests also appreciate our petite entrées and our daily specials. They keep coming back because our food is generous in portion, well crafted, filled with love and super yummy," sums up the chef. —Jennifer Sperry **SNEl**

3000 Chapel View Boulevard, Cranston, RI, 401-944-4900; chapelgrilleri.com