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La Fina | Photograph by Brian Samuels

Andover Pairs New England Charm With Cosmopolitan Cuisine

There are many adjectives used to describe Andover, historic, charming and picturesque chief among them. This tucked-away Colonial-era enclave at the junction of Routes 93 and 495 has a walkable downtown packed with specialty shops, architectural marvels and a thriving dining scene with trendy cafes and restaurants that truly offer something for every palate.

Jimi Gallant, regional executive chef of 34 Park in Andover, describes the town's dining culture as up-and-coming, with potential for more growth. "There's always been a lot of restaurants in Andover, but I think the downtown area is starting to pop in that way that chefs really like. It brings people in and then they notice there's another restaurant. It keeps them coming back."

34 Park, part of the Lupoli restaurant group, serves modern Italian cuisine for brunch, lunch, and dinner, and has its local fans who come for the chicken Milanese, butternut ravioli, filet mignon, pan-roasted veal and North End-style pizza. It's a neighborhood place, Gallant said, where regulars feel at home and visitors are made welcome. "We try to push the envelope with creative specials," he said, adding, "We offer a pretty creative, straightforward menu."



34 Park

Having so many dining options within walking distance of each other keeps people coming back, he said. It's easy to have Italian one night, Thai the next, and steak and seafood after that.

"I think it's awesome that you can park once and then you're in the downtown area where you can hit all the different restaurants in a four or five block range and get a couple of things off the appetizer menu at each," he says. "I feel like there's room for more. The town can entertain more."

Michael Sherman has been the executive chef at Elm Square Oyster Co. for 15 years, overseeing a menu that sources the highest quality seasonal and local seafood, meats and cheeses for its "new" New England focus. The "scratch kitchen" makes everything in house, from Maine mussels, prime beef tartare and seafood stew to all of the sauces, seasonings and condiments including ketchup and sea salt.

Sherman said while he has seen many dining trends come and go, the constant since his early days have been the regular customers who come in to enjoy the bar and restaurant. "I'd say 80 percent are regulars who show up every night, with the same people for specific nights," he says. "You kind of know who is going to be here on a Tuesday or Wednesday night."



Michael Sherman, Elm Square Oyster Co. | Photograph by Mark Manne

Many customers are visitors to Phillips Academy, the private preparatory school just up the street, which also houses the Addison Gallery of American Art and the Robert S. Peabody Institute of Archaeology. "We get tons of international people, and I've had return guests who have come back for their kids, for a parents' weekend, and they say they've been wanting to come back since the last parents' weekend. It means we are doing something good," he says.

Phillips Academy, with its museums and grounds, is one of the sights for visitors to Andover to enjoy. Pop in for a visit to the Andover Historical Society, housed in the Federal-style Amos Blanchard House on Main Street, marvel at the architecture of Memorial Hall Library and the Park Street Baptist Church. Shop in chic boutiques and gift shops, before pausing for a libation and a snack at the Oak & Iron Brewing Company, Andover's hometown brewery, where, according to their slogan, "Strangers become friends and friends become family."



If the great outdoors is more your style, you'll find plenty of outdoor trails, ponds and picturesque views to keep you moving.

The 3,000-acre Harold Parker State Forest hosts a network of trails, vernal pools, freshwater swimming and well-appointed campgrounds. Ward Reservation also has hiking on its 700 acres, with Holt Hill offering the highest point in Essex County for panoramic views as far as downtown Boston. You can access the Pine Hole Bog, a glacial kettle hole, via a 700-foot boardwalk. Pumps Pond has swimming, kayaking and picnic areas in summer, and in the off season, the waterside trails are open to dog walkers.

You're bound to be peckish after an afternoon of shopping or hiking, and Andover's downtown dining scene awaits. Here are a few of our favorite options:

Oak & Iron Brewing Company

Opened in 2017, this local craft brewery offers seasonal beers and time-honored classics. Sample up to four in a flight, while you play board games on the patio. The bar food menu includes warm Bavarian pretzels, spinach and artichoke or Mexican street corn dip, cheese plates and hotdogs cooked in Oak & Iron beer. *18 Red Spring Rd., 978-475-4077, oakandironbrewing.com (<https://www.oakandironbrewing.com/>)*

Elm Square Oyster Co.

Chef Michael Sherman focuses on local and seasonal ingredients blended to create "new" New England cuisine, with creative seafood and American dishes. It was the recipient of Best Gastropub on the Northshore Award from North Shore Magazine. *2 Elm Sq., 978-470-2228, elmsquareoysterco.com (<https://www.elmsquareoysterco.com/>)*

Palmers Restaurant & Tavern

Chef/owner John Ingalls has overseen this North Shore favorite for more than 30 years, turning out award winning classic New England-style specialties including clam chowder and burgers, sandwiches, steak and seafood. *18 Elm St., 978-470-1606, palmers-restaurant.com (<http://palmers-restaurant.com/>)*

Privé Lounge

Privé Lounge serves up eclectic small plates and curated cocktails in a chic environment. Think luxurious small bites like lobster sliders, spicy wagyu spring rolls, and crisp tuna tacos. 27 Main St., 978-475-4082, theprivelounge.com (<http://theprivelounge.com>)



BuenoMalo

BuenoMalo

Creative Mexi-Cali cuisine like mushroom empanadas, seared ahi tuna bites, tater tot tacos and California burritos await, along with fresh margaritas and inspired cocktails. 93 Main St. 978-409-2119, buenomalo.com (<http://buenomalo.com>)

LaRosa's Italian Café and Bar

LaRosa's offers classic Italian entrees, handmade pasta and gourmet sandwiches in a cozy space. 7 Barnard St., 978-475-1777, [larosasofandover.com](https://www.larosasofandover.com/) (<https://www.larosasofandover.com/>)

La Fina

This boutique steakhouse is inspired by European and South Beach, Miami influences to provide fine dining with a distinct twist. Start with oysters on the half shell or blue fin tuna tartare and move to a bone-in ribeye or New York strip, lamb chops or the perfect burger. 27 Main St., 978-475-4082, lafinarestaurant.com (<http://lafinarestaurant.com>)

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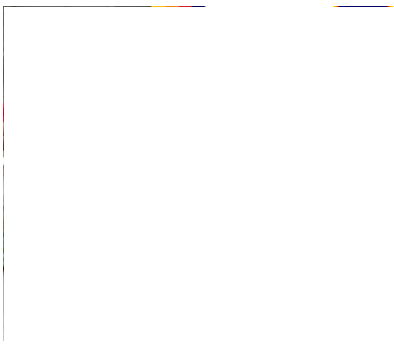
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