

{ DINE BEAUTIFULLY }

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After tasty food, décor with taste is a restaurant's greatest draw. These 8 eateries are sure to please your hungry eyes.

It seems everyone has a tale of discovering a ramshackle, hole-in-the-wall restaurant that turned out to have amazing food. Mostly, however, when we dine out we're on a quest for visual as well as gastronomic satisfaction. We want to please all our senses, and Bergen County's eateries don't disappoint.

These eight fine dining establishments, some new, some longstanding, have it all — exceptional food, amazing drinks, top-notch service and yes, beautiful décor that is more than just "the icing on the cake." You could swear the enticing surroundings make everything taste better, from the appetizers onward.

ESTY STREET, PARK RIDGE

Your home library or a cozy local eatery? It's hard to tell when you walk inside this Bergen restaurant, which has been serving the community since 1992. Its décor suggests a swanky private club—there's even a live saxophonist on the weekends. The menu features eclectic twists on American favorites, as well as more than 200 bottles of wine that pair with them beautifully. (The wine list helped Esty Street nab its coveted Wine Spectator magazine Award of Excellence.)



RUSTICA LOUNGE & RESTAURANT, CLIFFSIDE PARK

We're not saying the best part about Rustica is its original artwork at every turn, but we're not not saying that either. The menu at this Cliffside Park is Italian-meets-American, and don't get us wrong—the food is great and the cocktails are next-level. But the vibes here are spectacular; design details include mixed mosaics, framed portraits, wooden beams, tiled floors and distinctive decor such as newspaper-printed wallpaper. There's also live jazz on the weekends, plus Rustica has a Skylight Garden, which features outdoor dining by twinkly lights and heaters.



CAFE MATISSE, RUTHERFORD

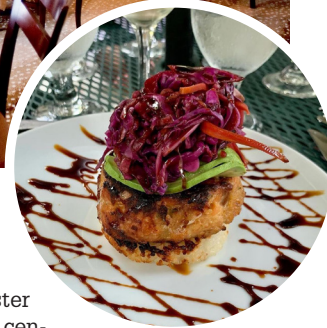
Chef Peter Loria's famous restaurant has a bevy of spaces in which customers can dine—pictured is the main dining room, inspired by the paintings of Henri Matisse, with a vaulted ceiling, colorful chandeliers and furry chic dining chairs. Other options are the "front dining room," which we imagine is what the inside of a genie's bottle looks like (those jewel tones!), and the outdoor European Garden patio, adorned with sun umbrellas and sparkly lights.





OCEANOS, FAIR LAWN

This family-owned, Mediterranean-inspired seafood spot is a sight to behold from the jump, with cascading white florals and lush greenery adorning the entranceway, as well as the tented outdoor dining area, which was created in 2020. But the real pièce de résistance here is the Oceanos cellar, where an exclusive group of no more than six guests can dine with a backdrop of rare whites and reds from around the world. Hoping to host a bigger party? The Nikolaos Room (named after one of the co-owners) features rich mahogany décor and can accommodate larger groups of up to 50. But whether you dine privately or not, your meal at Oceanos will feel almost like a Mediterranean escape.



HO-HO-KUS INN, HO-HO-KUS

Here's another place that pays homage to its history. The Ho-Ho-Kus Inn, a 1796 private mansion, is on the National Register of Historic Places and now thrives as the centerpiece of the borough. Its multiple dining rooms each offer a different vibe, depending on your mood and your party—there's elegant, social, cozy and casual. You could also say it has presidential appeal, as former President Richard Nixon dined here regularly when he lived in nearby Upper Saddle River (A framed photo of George Washington in the bar room reminds you of our Founding Fathers too.)



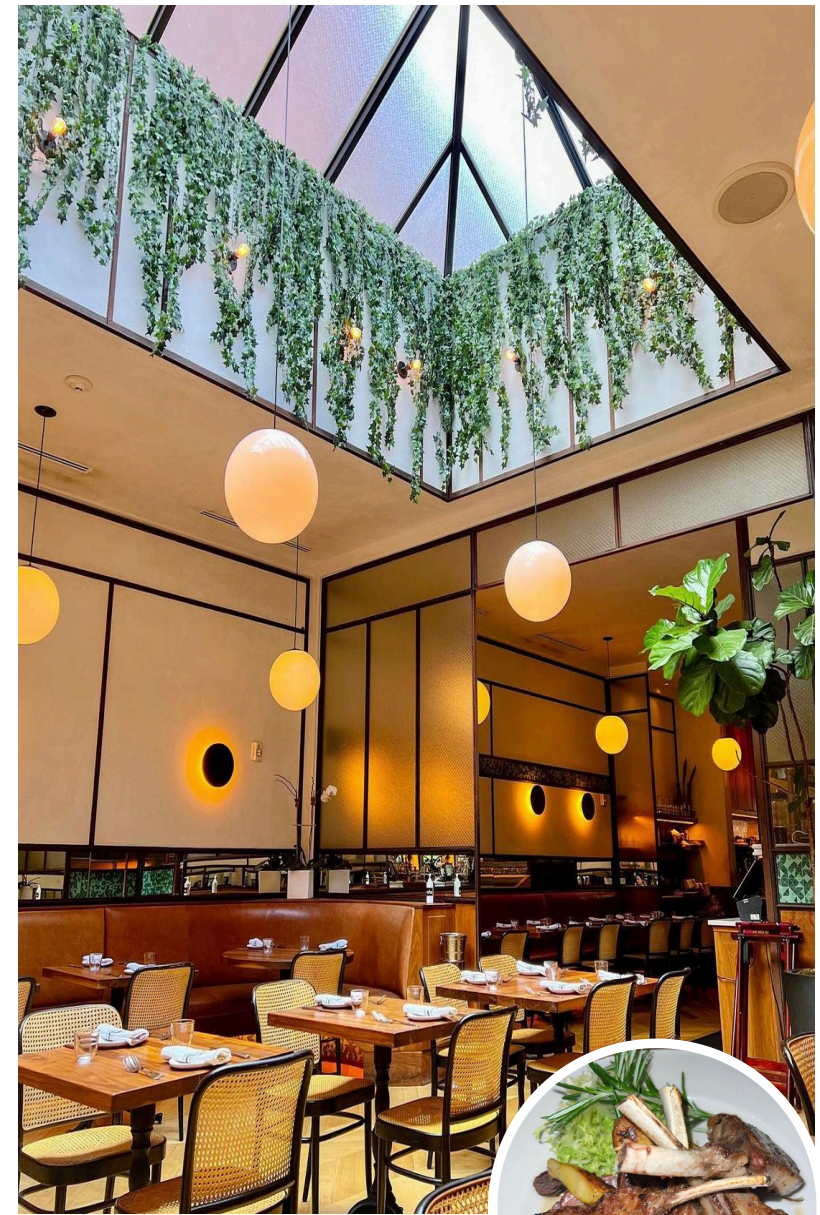
IVY INN, HASBROUCK HEIGHTS

The long and storied history of the Ivy Inn is something you feel once you pull into the parking lot. The mid-sized building has ivy hanging along the walls, and there's a similar comfortable sense of tradition inside. In the 1870s, this building served as a stagecoach inn with six guest suites and a bar—these have since been refurbished and turned into multiple cozy dining rooms. The “new” design (completed in 1997) features the brick fireplaces and cherry beams from the original inn, as well as a refurbished horseshoe bar. It's a romantic spot where you can enjoy a delicious American meal with your significant other, family or friends.



SADDLE RIVER INN, SADDLE RIVER

The tranquil location on Barnstable Court is an indication of what to expect once you step inside chef Jamie Knott's award-winning restaurant, easily one of the most romantic in the state. Knott and his culinary team transformed a little red barn into a chic, rustic dining room with wood beams, lighting that sets the mood and a mezzanine reserved for special occasions. The curved “mirror, mirror on the wall” befits this strong claimant to the title fairest restaurant of them all.



SOFIA, ENGLEWOOD

This farm-to-table Italian restaurant is one of the newer spots on our list, but Sofia has been holding its own on the Bergen County dining scene. It features fresh, local ingredients and offers pasta, pizza, steak, seafood and more. Floor-to-ceiling windows and a garden room mean this place is abundantly blessed with natural light, and its mosaic-tiled bar is stocked with “top shelf” liquor (literally). Downstairs is one of the area's only speakeasy-style cigar bars and lounges, which has feel similar to that of the main dining area. P.S. Since the pandemic, the outdoor “Piazza Sofia” has replicated the awesome indoor ambience outside.