

SOCOTM

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IT'S OUR VALENTINE ISSUE

& It's Steamy

OUR HOTTEST ISSUE EVER

Fashion You Don't
Want To Miss

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*Why Young Women Prefer
Well-Seasoned Gentlemen*

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LOW HOUSING PRICES &
LOW MORTGAGE RATES

It's Time to Make the Move

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ISSUE ISN'T GOING AWAY

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STAYING POWER

*We Ask What It Takes for
Couples to Mate for Life*

by James Holden
photography by Lucki Schotz



So Befitting the Month of Romance & Beyond

WELCOME TO THE SUGAR HILL INN

My recent visit to the inn began with a cocktail in the cozy fireplace lounge, which boasts local artists' work, tastefully decorated furnishings, and a full complement of libations.

their way into the dining room where they were a couple of courses ahead of me and my guest.

Our walk from the lounge to a reserved table in front of a crackling fire was about a dozen convenient steps. I was pleasantly surprised to find high-back chairs awaiting us.

The dining room with its lush candlelight glow invoked a distinctive feeling, similar to that of a private club. The eight or nine tables allow for privacy while still maintaining an openness of the room and adding character and charm. The intimate dining room also allows for service to be conducted in a calm manner rather than via mad dashes from kitchen to table as if running an obstacle course.

I spoke to Executive Chef Val Fortin during my visit and found it assuring when he explained that I could expect a relaxing and enjoyable experience—one that would be determined by my timetable and not that of the kitchen staff.

The Sugar Hill Inn offers a four-course, prix-fixe dinner, which is very reasonable when compared to other restaurants of similar caliber.

Guests are treated to a limited but well-rounded menu, one that takes advantage of

have little patience with food snobs who claim that fine dining, or artistry food, as I fondly call

it, can be found only in metropolitan areas or mega-resort casinos where sometimes the fluff of the chef's moniker smolders as quickly as the sear on a fine steak.

As for me, I continue on the road less traveled with the hope I might discover the gems, which are held like close secrets, so they are not invaded by obtuse diners, their pseudo-culinary proficiency held out in front, concealing their lack of expertise.

Case in point: My newly discovered favorite (and one you had better call for a reservation before you finish this profile) is the

Sugar Hill Inn, located in Sugar Hill, N.H.

The inn, which sits nestled on a small hill in the White Mountains, has become a destination for travelers from around the world, not only for its romantic guest rooms and elegant cottages, but for the advanced culinary exploration its kitchen offers and the numerous rewards it has won.

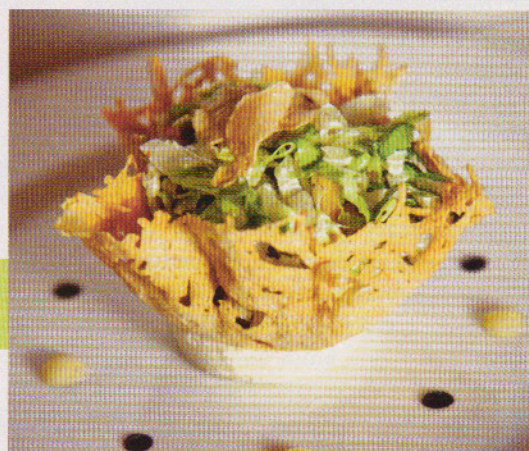
My recent visit to the inn began with a cocktail in the cozy fireplace lounge, which boasts local artists' work, tastefully decorated furnishings, and a full complement of libations.

The lounge was inviting and comfortable, and if it hadn't been so late, I am sure I would have had the pleasure of meeting many of the guests who had already made



Clockwise from opposite page: Pan-seared salmon cake with aioli; the chef's amuse-bouche; chili-glazed pork belly stacked with seared tuna; New Zealand king salmon over baby turnips and saffron potatoes.

Although there were only five entrees on the menu, I wanted to try every one of them. The descriptions were enough to fill the imagination and excite the senses.



Clockwise from top: Smoked frisee and micro arugula salad; New Hampshire maple creme brulee; Caesar salad; pumpkin whoopie pie; tasting of duck; pan-seared Vermont quail breast and leg with mushroom ravioli.



local products and changes frequently. It's doubtful you will ever become bored with any of the chef's creations even though they rely on local growing seasons and availability.

On this particular evening we began with an amuse-bouche. For those not familiar with this offering, it is a single-sized hors d'oeuvre, not ordered by the patron, but rather selected by the chef. Its purpose is to prepare the taste buds for the rest of the meal, while giving insight into the chef's style of cooking.

Our appetizer course consisted of surf & turf, a chili-glazed pork belly stacked with slices of seared tuna and topped with a pickled zucchini and wasabi aioli. The two distinctly different flavors melded together with a mild taste and finished nicely with an acidic accompaniment. Additionally, the distinctive textures further complemented the plate and added some excitement to the palate.

The second selection was a pan-seared Vermont quail breast and leg served with mushroom ravioli. Beautifully arranged, the small plate was adorned with a delicious wild mushroom and truffle broth and accented with a piece of crisp prosciutto. The smokiness of the mushroom dovetailed well with the fresh and light (not gamey) meat of the bird. While flavors abound, they were not so overpowering as to turn each bite into a rerun. The softness of the ravioli combined with the firm meat and the spark of the prosciutto turned each taste into a symphony.

We had just finished the course when the chef made a special appearance and insisted we try something he had just prepared that was not on the menu that evening. His special offering happened to be a pan-seared salmon cake, which was all meat with a flavorful and smooth aioli. This unique dish is exactly what I mean when I say experimental dining in its truest form.

Shortly after, our salads arrived; first was the smoked frisee and micro arugula, with a goat cheese fritter, which appeared to be gently flash-fried, complemented with drunken dried figs, cranberries, pickled onions, and a rich maple balsamic dressing. This combination turned what might have been just a salad into a dish that anyone with some talent could surely imitate at home.

The second was an artfully sculpted chef's signature Caesar salad. It was created with a parmesan custard, romaine lettuce, mini croutons, and a house-made dressing. I must admit, I did wish it was slightly larger once I

NEVER A
COVER



FEBRUARY'S LIVE ENTERTAINMENT SCHEDULE

EVERY TUESDAY!---Ear Candy
EVERY SUNDAY!---Industry Night
with DJ Vas

WED. FEB. 1ST---Craig DeMelo
THURS. FEB. 2ND---James Gagne
from Shipyard Wreck
FRI. FEB. 3RD---The Good Ol' Boys
SAT. FEB. 4TH---Bone Shaker

WED. FEB. 8TH---J Kelley
THURS. FEB. 9TH---Matt Silva
from What Matters
FRI. FEB. 10TH---Wild Nites
SAT. FEB. 11TH---Batteries Not Included

WED. FEB. 15TH---Craig DeMelo
THURS. FEB. 16TH---Lyn B**ch and
the Restraining Order
FRI. FEB. 17TH---Under Surveillance
SAT. FEB. 18TH---Identity Crisis

WED. FEB. 22ND---J Kelley
THURS. FEB. 23RD---James Gagne
from Shipyard Wreck
FRI. FEB. 24TH---Freeze Pop
SAT. FEB. 25TH---Likk

WED. FEB. 29TH---Craig DeMelo

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finished because I longed for another bite.

Although there were only five entrees on the menu, I wanted to try every one of them. The descriptions were enough to fill the imagination and excite the senses.

Having to settle, we sampled a tasting of duck, which consisted of sauteed breast, foie gras ravioli, duck rilette (plated atop a lingonberry gastrique), parsnip puree and side of Frenched green beans. As some of you may know, duck is one of my favorite dishes, and if it is yours, then check to see when the chef might be serving it again. You won't be disappointed—only intrigued by such a creative combination.

The second entree was a filet of New Zealand king salmon served over baby turnips and saffron potatoes, topped with wilted spinach, and enhanced with a white wine and fennel nage. The seared fish had a very crunchy outer coat but was still moist and tender underneath. The flavor of the fish was stronger than the West Coast type, but paired well with the fennel and white wine.

The night was a great success: The food, presentation, and service were exceptional. The effort made by the staff for guest satisfaction was without limits.

fired top, and a melt-in-your-mouth maple crust created the perfect ending.

For the child in all of us, the chef created a pumpkin whoopie pie, which my guest found heavenly. She enjoyed it so much that she is planning on ordering a dozen for another day—great choice if found on the menu during your visit.

I would be amiss if I didn't include the two spectacular wines I enjoyed, one with dinner and the other, post.

For a very reasonable price, Sugar Hill offers a California red, with the taste of a more expensive vintage. I suggest either a glass or bottle of the 2008 Liberty School, Paso Robles. This cabernet sauvignon was many grades above my expectation: Semidry and

Of course with this level of decadence it is only fitting to indulge oneself with a delightful dessert. I opted for the New Hampshire maple creme brulee garnished with fresh fruit. I can attest that you will not find a better sweet than this—and that includes any restaurant in Manhattan. A cool center,

smooth, the first taste to the last remained consistent, while the subtle bouquet fooled me since it didn't disclose the full flavor of the wine. I would recommend it. Try a bottle; it will allow for more than just a taste with each course.

As a special treat, because I rarely find it on a menu anywhere, I leaped at a glass of Inniskillin Vidal Icewine from Niagara, Canada. It is probably one of the more interesting wines but doesn't get the press it deserves. Due to limited space, I cannot delve into specific details other than to highly recommend it when available.

The night was a great success: The food, presentation, and service were exceptional. The effort made by the staff for guest satisfaction was without limits. Make the date and you will not be disappointed by the results; it will be a dinner to remember and a benchmark in evaluating others that compete at this level.

Oh how I love civilized dining. ★

The Sugar Hill Inn is located at 116 Scenic Route 117, Sugar Hill, N.H. 800-548-4748 or 603-823-5621. Visit sugarhillinn.com for a tour of the inn and for information on how to make a reservation.



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