

# Restaurants We Love

TAVERN AT THE HIGHLANDS COUNTRY CLUB, GARRISON

By Liz Johnson  
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It's hard to choose the best season to go to Tavern at the Highlands Country Club.

If you go in autumn, your drive along Route 9D in Garrison takes you past some of the best fall foliage in the Hudson Valley. In the winter, three crackling fires keep you warm and toasty. In the spring, the menu is graced with the first baby greens of the season. In the summer — well, the menu is bursting with local produce, harvested from the restaurant's own farm up the road.

Tavern has been known for serving locally sourced food since the moment it opened in 2004. And when it was Xaviars at Garrison before that, chef-owner Peter X. Kelly was a pioneer in using Hudson Valley ingredients.

With such a rich history behind it, you might say this little restaurant has been a definitive force in shaping the area's cuisine.

Last year, a new chef took up the cause. Jason Wood, who used to cook at Blue Ridge, a locavore restaurant in Washington; Savoy in SoHo; and Marlow & Sons in Williamsburg; has been executive chef at Tavern since May, 2010.

"I'm very fortunate to be in the Hudson Valley," he says. "Because everything I worked with in the city was so about what was in the



The buttermilk fried chicken at Tavern is shatteringly crisp and succulent.

## IF YOU GO

Tavern, 955 Route 9D, Garrison. 845-424-3254. [highlandscountryclub.net](http://highlandscountryclub.net)

**Hours:** Lunch: noon to 4 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday; Dinner: 5 to 9 p.m. Wednesday, Thursday and Sunday, 5 to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.

**Dinner for two, minus tax, tip and alcohol:** \$75.

**Good to know:** The restaurant can be closed during its regular hours when it's booked for private parties. Do check the web site and then also give a call before you go, especially if you'll be traveling a long distance.

Hudson Valley."

We're very fortunate that he's here, too. Ninety per-

cent of his menu comes from local farms, including two right around the corner: Glynwood Farm and Garrison Farms, which is owned by the same couple who own Tavern and its sister restaurant, Valley at the Garrison.

But none of that would matter if the food weren't good, or you didn't enjoy the setting where it was served. Both are superb.

If you've been to Tavern before, you'll recognize the cozy tap room, anchored by a tiny copper bar and one of those three fireplaces. The rustic, rough-hewn tables are communal, and between that and the flickering taper candles, you feel like you're somewhere between a Colonial-era pub and an Italian enoteca.

The grand ballroom is still



The rustic, rough-hewn tables are communal at the Tavern at the Highlands Country Club in Garrison. Through the doorway, you can see the new veranda, which is covered and enclosed. PHOTOS BY JOE LARESE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

there, too — with an enormous fireplace on each end and the equally gigantic crystal chandelier hanging from the ceiling in the center. What may have changed since your last visit is the veranda, which looks over the ninth hole of the club's golf course. It's now covered and enclosed.

You can dine there in the new wicker-style chairs and watch the players take their final putts while enjoying an appetizer of plump, fresh mussels from Prince Edward Island. (The only thing Wood sources from outside of the region is fish.) The bacon broth, which mixes with the mussel liquor and some sweet caramelized onions, is sultry, and so addictive you'll sop up every last bit with your bread.

The pan-seared testa — a pork pate — is sure to become a signature dish at Tavern. It's topped with an egg-yolk ravioli, and once you break through the pasta, you get a porky-runny egg mixture that chef Wood says reminds him of breakfast.

The beets in the beet salad are earthy and sweet, and you'll want to drag each one through the rich walnut crema sauce that's hidden underneath.

Wood is using a trendy technique for his gnocchi dish: He's flavoring it with hay smoke. He smokes the potatoes first so the outside is burned but the inside is soft. Then he peels the potatoes and makes his gnocchi. You get a hay taste without it being overbearing.

His fried chicken is a miracle. It's brined with aromatics, lemon and honey for about 2 1/2 hours, then steamed until it's completely done. Afterward, he dredges it in buttermilk and



Bill and Kristin Hall at Melt, where everything is made fresh from scratch daily. JOE LARESE/THE JOURNAL NEWS

## LIKE TAVERN, BUT CLOSER TO HOME

**42:** Chef-owner Anthony Goncalves' creative kitchen serves a la carte and tasting menus in the opulent dining room, and you'll often find local produce — including from Mead Orchards — on the menu. The decor is urban-chic, with crystal chandeliers and a faux fireplace made of red blinking lights. 1 Renaissance Square, White Plains. 914-761-4242. [www.42therestaurant.com](http://www.42therestaurant.com)

**City Limits Diner:** A diner in name and decor, but the food says something

different. They may not source from local farms, but the desserts are made in-house and the salmon is smoked here. 200 Central Ave., White Plains. 914-686-9000. [www.livanosrestaurantgroup.com](http://www.livanosrestaurantgroup.com)

**Melt Sandwich Shop:** So it's not a tavern, but everything at this small, hip, order-at-the-counter sandwich shop is made fresh from scratch daily, including the flatbread that's grilled for pizza or panini. 77 Mamaroneck Ave., White Plains. 914-358-1364. [www.meltsandwich.com](http://www.meltsandwich.com)

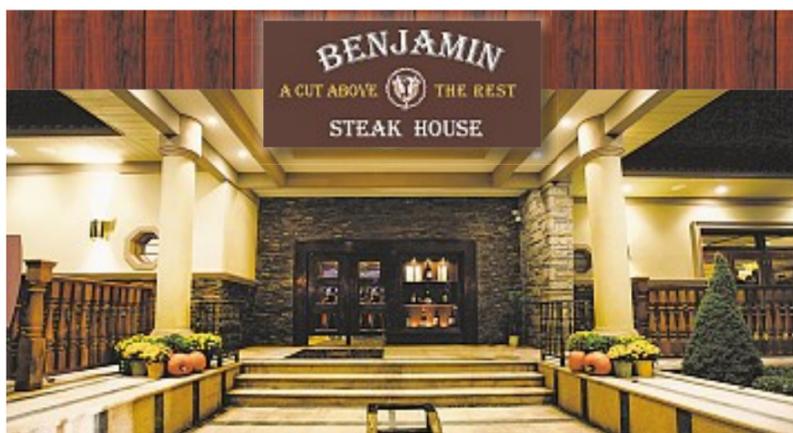
flour before a quick dip in the fryer. It comes out shatteringly crisp — and when you cut it, the dish makes a sound like you're crumpling a piece of paper. The meat is succulent.

Wood was trained at the Natural Gourmet Institute, a health and wellness-based culinary school in Manhattan, so he tends to keep his entrees on the small (that is, more normal) side. Don't

worry. The flavors pack a big punch and you won't go home hungry.

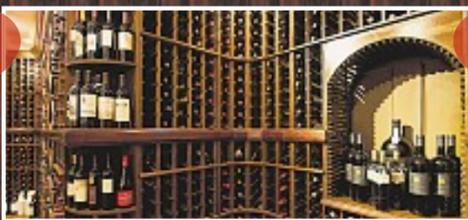
What you will go home with is a good idea of what the Hudson Valley has to offer. "I think a chef has a responsibility to put new twists on classic things," Wood says. "And I'm telling a story of time and place on the plate."

At Tavern, it's a story we love to hear — in any season.



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## Well-known farms on our menus

By Liz Johnson  
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Lately, it's getting easier to find a chef who uses ingredients grown right here in the Hudson Valley. These chefs are changing the way we eat, by featuring everything from regional fingerling potatoes and ramps to farm-raised trout, grass-fed beef and eggs still warm from the nest.

But the equation is incomplete without the farmers. These are the folks who get their hands dirty — literally — to provide restaurants with their tomatoes, eggs, fish, vegetables, and, of course, beef.

It's a relationship that makes eating and buying locally grown foods that much easier for all of us.

While many restaurants have to go reasonably far afield to get their local ingredients — mostly north in the Hudson Valley and the Catskills — there are a few

farms right in our midst, including Stone Barns Center for Food & Agriculture, which supplies Blue Hill at Stone Barns; Garrison Farm and Glynwood Farm in Cold Spring, which supply Valley at the Garrison and Tavern at the Highlands Country Club; The Orchards of Concklin in Pomona and Dr. Davies Farm in Congers, which supply chef Peter X. Kelly with produce for his four restaurants in the Xaviars Restaurant Group; and Cabbage Hill Farm, which supplies The Flying Pig on Lexington in Mount Kisco.

But you may recognize the names of other farms and producers on local menus. Here's a look at just a few of them:

**Bread Alone:** Founded in 1983, this bakery with retail stores in Boiceville, Woodstock and Rhinebeck makes organic bread on the hearth of a wood-fired brick oven. The organic grains are

grown in New York, the Midwest and Canada, and many of other products, such as dairy and fruit, are local, too.

**Hudson Valley Fresh:** A not-for-profit dairy cooperative that produces whole, skim, low-fat and chocolate milk along with half and half, heavy cream, and the best sour cream you've ever tasted.

**Sprout Creek Farm:** A 200-acre farm, education center and retail market in Dutchess County known mostly for its cheese made from free-range cows, sheep and goats. The farm also raises turkeys, chickens and pigs, and sells farm-produced meats, vegetables and other dairy products.

**Wild Hive:** A former apiary in Clinton Corners, N.Y., that now specializes in micromilling its own grains into fresh flours and terrific polenta.

Karen Croke contributed to this report.