



# Horizons

AAA SOUTHERN NEW ENGLAND

8

November 2011

## Food and community at Area Four

**By Christine E. McDermott**

His newest restaurant encourages patrons to order a variety of dishes for everyone in their party to taste – and maybe even to pull together tables with some new friends.

Sharing food made with fresh, local ingredients cooked over the hearth – that's the concept behind Area Four.

So, it's no surprise that Thanksgiving is chef Michael Leviton's favorite holiday.

"Thanksgiving is great – it's the one non-religious holiday that's all about food and community," said the six-time James Beard Foundation Award nominee, sitting at the bar of his Cambridge eatery. "It's really what we strive for every day here."

The wonderful scent from wood-burning ovens greets patrons as they approach Area

Four, named for the technology-driven neighborhood that has recently landed on the map as a hotspot for new restaurants.



Michael Leviton

Area Four doubles as a bakery/coffee house and bar/oven, with simple, polished décor leaving diners to focus on food like the grass-fed beef short rib sandwich and the cherrystone clam and bacon

pizza. Dividing the two spaces is an old wooden door from a New Hampshire barn, lending a bit of down-home country to the restaurant.

Emerging from the kitchen wearing shorts and a T-shirt, Leviton said he wanted Area Four to be a place where people – including himself – could be comfortable eating "great, simple food without all the puffery."

"When we created this, we wanted it to be all about fun,"

said Leviton, "we" being himself and his business partner, Michael Krupp. "When people come here, we want them to be immediately relaxed – take off the coat and tie and roll up their sleeves. The more people relax, the better time they're going to have."

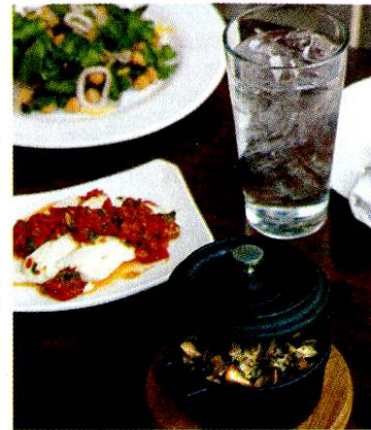
How could they not have fun in a restaurant that includes homemade soft-serve ice cream on the dessert menu?

It's a departure from his upscale French-inspired bistro, Lumière, in Newton. And yet, it isn't.

Leviton, who is chairman of the Chefs Collaborative, a nonprofit organization dedicated to local and sustainable food, has been at the forefront of the farm-to-table movement. He has built relationships with purveyors throughout the region, and at both restaurants, he uses



At Area Four, dishes are made with fresh local ingredients in a wood-fired oven.



as many local ingredients as possible.

At Area Four, almost everything – roasted meat, seafood, vegetables and thin-crust pizza – is cooked in two custom wood-fired ovens. There's no such thing as a grill or fry station here. Even the bar favors sustainable products, including local beer and wine.

Leviton wanted to pay homage to the heritage of the hearth – "the smells filling up the house, a lot of different things cooking in one space" – much like the Thanksgivings of old.

As for his own tradition,

Leviton cooks two turkeys that he buys from a particular farm in California. One bird, he fries. The other is solely for the purpose of stuffing, one of his favorite foods, which must be cooked inside the cavity to absorb the flavoring.

Certainly, he serves vegetables on the side, but for Leviton, Thanksgiving dinner is all about "the turkey, stuffing, gravy and lots of pie."

Of course, the holiday itself is about sharing and togetherness – much like Area Four aims to be on a daily basis.

For some of Michael Leviton's Thanksgiving recipes, visit [AAA.com/Horizons](http://AAA.com/Horizons).