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*for Families,
Foodies,
Beach-Goers,
Golfers,
Shoppers, and
Art Lovers*

FROM THE
EDITORS OF
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BONUS! BOSTON'S TOP HOTELS



Dining

Modern New England cuisine is so much more than baked beans and chowder. The smart, seasonal fare at these top restaurants is well worth a detour.



Clockwise from left, one of many tempting plates at Hen of the Wood; comfort food from the Dressing Room; the famous kitchen at Fore Street.

AMERICAN SEASONS Big shots jonesing for '82 bordeaux should look elsewhere. Instead of stocking the obvious (and expensive) bottles, co-owner (and resident vino whiz) Orla Murphy LaScola expends considerable energy scooping up quirky rarities. What's more, the duck confit, foie gras, and dried plum terrine with crispy poached duck egg, honey mustard, and port wine vinaigrette will make even a jaded foodie start salivating again. Most remarkable is that the restaurant still manages to keep the vibe unpretentious, chilled-out, and romantic (pretty candles!). News flash: For the 2010 season, chef Michael LaScola welcomes Nantucket-bred lamb to his fiercely locavore menu. 80 Centre St., Nantucket, MA, 508-228-7111, americanseasons.com.

DRESSING ROOM Believe it or not, there's this classically trained chef in Westport, Connecticut, using exquisite, high-end ingredients not for haute cuisine but—gasp!—*comfort food*. Say what? Jokes aside, Michel Nischan (who opened the Dressing Room with the late Paul Newman) breathes new life into the most played out gastro-trend of the millennium. Only the truly hard-of-tasting could fail to thrill in his dreamy Amish-chicken potpie, farmstead-cheddar mac and cheese (studded with salt-cured pork belly), and local honey-doused angel food cake. 27 Powers Ct., Westport, CT, 203-226-1114, dressingroomhomegrown.com.

FORE STREET Look up any published description of Fore Street, and chances are it blathers on, ad nauseam, about the mussels. Guaranteed, it attributes the "pristine" quality of the "plump" mollusks to the

proximity of Bangs Island farm, and babbles about the wood-fired oven—it apparently puts out such infernal heat (900 degrees Fahrenheit) that the shells pop open and the gobs of garlic-spiked almond butter start sizzling in two minutes flat, before the briny bivalves can toughen up. What the article hardly ever explains, however, is what to order *next*. So here goes: Get chef Sam Hayward's lamb—if it's your lucky night and it's on the menu, that is. 288 Fore St., Portland, ME, 207-775-2717, forestreet.biz.

HEN OF THE WOOD Now that eating local has gone mainstream, many menus prattle on, name-checking every farmer, bloodline, and land mass that begat the pedigreed blob on your plate. So it is at Hen of the Wood—though here, gracefully executed items like Winding Brook Farm pork loin with local spring-dug parsnips actually *deserve* such royal treatment by chef Eric Warnstedt. The waterfall crashing outside this former grist mill is full of majesty, too. 92 Stowe St., Waterbury, VT, 802-244-7300, henofthewood.com.

NEW RIVERS Tourists flock to Al Forno. Card-carrying scenesters cram themselves into animal-print banquettes at Café Noir. Meanwhile, finicky food snobs head to New Rivers, where chef Bruce Tillinghast's flawlessly edited menu nimbly bounces from classic French to *nuova* osteria to locavore New England. What they get for their efforts: dishes like house-made porcini tagliatelle that'll knock the socks off even the most discerning diner. 7 Steeple St., Providence, RI, 401-751-0350, newriversrestaurant.com. **JOLYON HELTERMAN**