

The Ammonoosuc Inn

Good Food and Good Times



By Paul Lister

The Ammonoosuc Inn is why we were born with taste buds. When you come to dine bring three things: your appetite and two letters of the alphabet. “Ooooo,” for when they bring your appetizer and Entrée, and “Mmmm,” for each bite you take. If you want to impress your date, bring her/him there. If you want to impress your mother, bring her here (what till you see the Mother’s Day Menu.) If you want to impress me, bring me here. I really love this place.

Owner and chef Karen Melanie LaRocco has just celebrated her first anniversary of serving fabulous cuisine in Melanie’s Bistro and in the adjoining Ammonoosuc Pub. Karen studied at the French Culinary Institute in Manhattan and went to Paris for six months with the international Chefs’ tour. This is not a fancy-schmancy French Restaurant, not by a long shot. She is a pastry chef, travels to places like Argentina to seek out food and spices, and will also raid her South American sister-in-law for new ideas. When she had her Bistro in New York, she always fed her staff first, who were mostly from Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking backgrounds and loved the way she prepared their native dishes.

Five things I love About Melanie’s Bistro and The Ammonoosuc Pub at the Inn

- 1** Atmosphere – I have been in restaurants where I have asked my wife Tina, “Do you think they know what they’re doing?” From the moment you step in, you immediately sense that everyone here is on the same page. The dining room is beautifully appointed with linen, but it is unpretentious and comfortable. In the style of great New York restaurants, the wine rack is right in the dining room and the selection is extensive. The Pub is just what it should be, with lots of polished wood and lots of comfort
- 2** The Fare – Calamari to die for! If someone offered me the two choices of either joining Sophia Loren in her room for a cocktail or enjoying some ‘mari at the AI. It would be close, but I’d be sending Sophia my regrets. It is the freshest, served with a spicy marinara that makes a grown man weep with joy. Lamb like you have never had and meatloaf better than your momma’s. Never satisfied, they recently signed a deal that insures their beef is so fresh they might as well have the herd in their backyard.
- 3** The Soup – Presentation, aroma and taste combine to make your palate glad its part of your mouth. My editor dared me to try the Manhattan clam chowder. “I don’t eat red stuff,” I said, haughtily defending that staid New England tradition of milk. I took the bet and WHAM, I got hooked. Finished his and then ordered one for myself. Karen, jokingly, said it’s the New York water is the reason it tastes so hood in the Big Apple but this, right here just seven miles from Littleton, is a soup-to-die for. Known as being stubborn this side of a mule, I let my wife order the potato leek soup. “How good could potato leek soup taste?” I thought, but after trying one spoonful we shared the rest of hers and then figured one of my own would be nice, too.
- 4** The Staff – You can tell they like being there. Dawn Scovill’s eyes sparkle when you tell her how much you are enjoying the Bordetto. She breaks into a big grin and intones, “I knew you would.” I haven’t had the pleasure of having Nancy Best as a waitperson, but speaking during our photo shoot for the article, she was congenial, witty and savvy about her craft. Sandra Taylor, hmmm, there is something wonderful about her that says, “I am in charge of insuring that your dinner is just the way you like it.” With her hands behind her back and chin up, she offers a slight nod of the head with each suggestion. She just exudes that “there is nothing going wrong here while I am in charge” confidence. She would be right at home at Morton’s or Tavern on the Green. She never writes the order down, and if you really want to see waiting on diners as an art form, watch Sandra at work.
- 5** The Whole Experience – From sipping one of Peter’s delicious Tom Collins’ while relaxing on the Porch to the final denouement of an incredible Karen made dessert, this is what “going out to eat” was meant to be, and I know two local chefs who agree with me.

The Ammonoosuc Inn is the best-kept secret in North Country dining, but the word is out. The Bistro and Pub are rare gems. Just remember you read it here first. If you want to show your gratitude, well...just take me along next time you go. Ms. Loren will understand.

The Ammonoosuc Inn
and Melanie’s Bistro
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