

# BUSINESS

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## Ammonoosuc Inn opens new venture

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LISBON—The Ammonoosuc Inn recently opened the doors of its latest venture. Chef and owner Karen Melanie describes the new Tapas Lounge as “cozy and romantic.” The Inn’s Web site calls it a place “where friends come together.” Both are right, but neither fully describes the atmosphere of the lounge, a cross of foreign sophistication and New Hampshire relaxation.

The inviting low light is offset by candles on every table, which throw shimmers of light over the vintage photographs that grace the walls. The murmur of conversation mixes with the strumming of a live Spanish guitarist.

The distinguished atmosphere is in keeping with the rest of the Ammonoosuc Inn, which dates back to 1888, and prides itself on both sophistication and the laid-back charm of northern New Hampshire.

This charm pervades the lounge, from the smiling wait staff to the laughing friends meeting at the bar.

The lounge is elegant, bespeaking Chef Melanie’s New York City background. Melanie creates and serves the tapas—which is Spanish for small appetizers—with care and panache. She changes the menu every night, drawing inspiration from her studies at the French Culinary Institute and the International Pastry Arts Center, and from her experience working with other chefs from all over the globe. She said that after cooking with such talented and diverse individuals, “you learn from them.”

After living in New York City, Melanie wanted “a change of pace,” she said. Melanie began looking for a small country inn with a restaurant and golf course, and happened upon the Ammonoosuc Inn, which was run-down at the time. Yet Karen said that after sitting on the grand front porch with its sweeping view, she was sold. “How could you not love that porch?”

After many renovations, the Inn has been restored to its former grandeur—and upgraded for today’s savvy clientele—and Karen said she has no regrets. The move to the Ammonoosuc Inn was “the best thing that could have happened.” Karen loves the slower pace. And, of course, they love that front porch.

Melanie is always looking for ways to improve the inn. Thus, Chef Melanie said that she decided to open the Tapas Lounge because, “up here in this area there’s not a whole lot of places to have a drink and meet friends.” Some patrons come in for a cocktail, a few tapas, and then move on to the acclaimed Melanie’s Bistro next door. Some just come for the tapas. Regardless, the lounge is for people who are “not here to really eat a big meal,” but who nonetheless would like an exotic culinary experience and a place to catch up with friends.

In this spirit, Chef Melanie designed fun specialty drinks. While many of the appetizers have an international appeal, the lounge’s cocktail menu is decidedly local in character. Every drink is named after a local town, such as The Lisbon (Cuervo Clasico Tequila, Grand Marnier, cranberry and orange juice.) According to Chef Melanie, patrons often exclaim, “Wow, they have a drink named after our town!” She also noted, “We tried to get everyone!”

Similarly, the diverse range of food served at the lounge has something for everyone. There is everything from croquettes and salmon cakes to meatballs and chicken wings—and, of course, it changes nightly.

Chef Melanie designed the mix of traditional Spanish, Asian, and Italian cuisine “for people who want to try a lot of things but not eat a hearty meal; not feel at the end of the night like they overspent or are overstuffed.”

The tapas menu is the culmination of an accomplished career that stems back to Chef Melanie’s childhood. She was inspired by her mother and grandmother, who were great cooks, and she recalled that, “I’ve always loved cooking from when I was a

kid.” She said, “I’ve always been in the kitchen,” starting with making bread with her mother. Years later, she decided to pursue her love of cooking by attending culinary school.

That passion for creating food is still strong. When asked if she was intimidated by the idea of starting a new business venture in the middle of a recession, Chef Melanie replied, “Of course! Everything’s intimidating. But you have to be able to try something. You have to be flexible. You can’t live on what-ifs.”

