

# Bedminster's Pluckemin Inn has ambience to match the food

Published: September 26, 2014  
By Cody Kendall

## The Star-Ledger



Chef Andrew Lattanzio prepares Spanish Octopus in the Pluckemin Inn kitchen.  
Photo: William Perlman

### FOUR STARS

Remarkable food is only one element of a great dining experience. Without other key components -- comfortable seating, well-spaced tables and staffers who are serious about taking care of their guests, it's just another meal.

The Pluckemin Inn, however, has the entire concept down pat. You will feel cherished. Shortcuts aren't tolerated. There is no element of a memorable evening that escapes the attention of servers or management.

They keep track of patrons' preferences, whether it's a specific table, a special dish or a favorite creative cocktail. Inquire about some of the more obscure items on the menu, and the answer comes instantly. There isn't any "I'll have to ask in the kitchen," and you won't get a sneer or a sigh, no matter how elementary the question. These folks know their stuff, whether you seek an explanation of morcilla (Spanish blood sausage), guanciale (cured pork jowl) or honshimeji (an Asian mushroom) as you go through a menu that often leads to the excitingly unfamiliar.

While it's easy to run up a considerable tab at the inn, half-size portions on many of the entrees offer savings, and coupled with an appetizer, a pasta course or dessert, may well be enough for those with an average appetite.

Andrew Lattanzio retains the tradition of the excellent chefs who have presided over the inn's kitchen during the past nine years, but adds his own style. He has imparted more Italian-inspired dishes to the menu, explaining that's what his public wants. House-cured meats are another addition, and he makes creative use of vegetables, maxing out their potential.

Skate (\$16/\$30) is among his favorite dishes. Light, delicate and nearly translucent, this bottom-dwelling denizen of the sea produces a delightful blur of flavor when coupled with the sweet crunch of corn kernels, fava beans and a touch of okra for texture, elevated by a well-chosen medley of herbs. The seasonal menu makes good use of such impeccable produce coming from Three Meadows Farm just down the road, or the restaurant's own garden.

Oyster mushrooms, crushed potatoes and grilled beans boost the appeal of the Griggstown chicken (\$32), partnered with that contrasting guanciale. For a starter, try one of several salads, compilations that are not just an afterthought, as they often seem to be elsewhere.

A colorful baby beet salad highlighted by goat cheese and pistachio granola (\$13) or a panzanella (\$16) that takes a different turn with feta and fennel both stand strong. A sweet corn broth blends artfully with cilantro, avocado and lime to enhance a Jonah crab salad (\$18) topped by slices of red and yellow peppers.

Lattanzio, who works with sous chef Kevin LaFemina, is an artist in pasta. The distinct voices of morsilla, basil, mint and pecorino assist the appreciation of the ricotta gnocchi (\$17), while fava beans and the sweetness of English peas add to the enjoyment. The work of pastry chef Kimberly Schielke is nothing short of spectacular. While you could skip dessert and just enjoy the little cookies that come with the bill, don't. You'll be missing a treat. Peach pie (\$10) is sparked by ginger and enhanced by house-made peach/verbena ice cream. In the same vein, nectarine-mint sorbet is a marvelous companion for a smooth nectarine semifreddo (\$10), presented with grilled nectarine slices and blackberry accents.

The restaurant is much honored for its wine selection, overseen by sommelier Brian Hider. Value is given as much consideration as the nature of the choices. Wines by the glass start at \$8 for the Fabre Montmayou Malbec Reserve Select, among several others. Some options at that level are most desirable, and not often found at restaurants of this caliber. But there also are premium wines by the glass, your choice of three ounces or six ounces. Those who want to indulge can order the

likes of the 1998 Giuseppe Quinterelli Amarone della Valpolicella Classico (\$60/\$120).

The atmosphere here is tranquil and comfortable, the decor sufficiently stylish but not overwrought. Those seeking something more casual should head over to the Plucky wing of the building, where there's a bar and TV (blissfully far from the main dining area).

Owner Gloria LaGrassa, who founded the inn with her late husband, Carl, has never lost the insightful vision that guided the enterprise from the beginning. The Pluckemin Inn is a place you can count on, whether it's a special occasion or just the desire for a wonderful experience on any day of the week that brings you there.



Pluckemin Inn, Route 206 South and 10 Pluckemin Way, Bedminster.  
(908) 658-9292. [Pluckemininn.com](http://Pluckemininn.com). Lunch: 11:30 a.m.-3 p.m. Mondays-Fridays;  
Dinner: 5:30-9 p.m. Mondays-Thursdays, 5:30-8:30 p.m. Fridays, 5:30-9:30 p.m.  
Fridays and Saturdays; Closed Sundays.