



NEWS:
our accolades
Putnam Palate Pleaser

By Michael Gannon,
Fork On The Left

It was a mild August morning, my birthday, and a much-needed day off from work, so I grabbed a friend and drove to Putnam in search of Heywood-Wakefield furniture and a peppermill.

Putnam is old news to most local collectors of antiques and other secondhand finds, but it was my first visit, and I was utterly charmed. The downtown core is cozy, walkable, and brimming with shops full of salvaged fireplace mantles, gleaming nautical instruments, Bohemian blown glass, and 1950s kitsch. With patience and a careful eye, one could find anything the heart desires.

Better yet, Putnam seems to draw a quirky, talkative crowd. One man regaled us with his lines from the upcoming town play. A woman gave us hard candy and told us about the man across the street who does a brisk business selling milk jugs. Everywhere I turned, there was a stranger eager to strike up conversation.

After three hours of shopping, much talking to strangers, and the purchase of three cast-iron frying pans, a tattered blue bar-try, and a demure silver peppermill, we'd worked up an appetite. We found ourselves in **85 main**. The newest restaurant in the antiques district. It had everything I love most: sharply designed dishes, a quick-witted waitstaff, and an energetic, stylish decor that's trendy but still appealing. Bold colors light up the two graciously sized dining rooms; the lounge area is even funkier, with a curved bar dressed in mosaic tiles and a blue-black ceiling dotted with star-like sparkles. Floor to ceiling windows face out to the street; in warm weather, they slide open to let in the breeze and the eavesdropped chatter of passing shoppers.

On that first visit, we enjoyed a perfect playday lunch; carpaccio with roasted capers, a crab cake with Dijon dill cream, a veal meatloaf sandwich, and an arugula salad with blue cheese and candied walnuts. Everything was very good. "And dinner's even better," commented our affable waitress.

My second visit proved her right: on the dinner menu, the chef has space to truly impress. We started with a subtle butternut squash and apple soup, a fabulous clam and corn chowder,



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and a simply presented dish of roasted littlenecks with thyme, ponzu and Sriracha hot sauce. For entrees, I enjoyed an orange and corrandor chicken with chipotle potatoes and yucca salad, and went crazy for the lamb. Not only was the meat screaming with flavor, it was joined by a manchego polenta that was the best-tasting side dish that I've had in recent memory.

Less impressive was the "DeVine Eggplant." In addition to having a goofy name, the composition was confusing-not much eggplant, excessive ricotta, and a sauce that seemed lazy beside the bawdier flavors on the table. I'm not much for vegetable entrees, and dishes like these tend to further my resolve.

Not listed on the menu was Sandra, undoubtedly the evening's most entertaining dish. A recent divorcee, Sandra was out with her girlfriends for cocktails and giggles, and in true Putnam style, had decided to break her dating dry spell by assaulting the first unattached gentlemen to enter the bar.

"You boys are so handsome," she said as she pulled out a chair and sat down at our table. "Mind if I sit?"

We learned Sandra's life story, and she learned our names. The conversation turned creepy.

"I'm sorry," said Sandra, taking my hand. "Do you feel like I am just using you?" She leaned in. "Give me one minute alone with you, and I'll change all that."

My friend nudged me, whispering. "That sounds like using, doesn't it?"

"Quiet," I hissed. "Keep her going, this is great material."

Sandra stayed with us for about 15 minutes, downing Shiraz and petting us like bunnies, until she spotted the chef across the room. "Now he's really a cutie!" she said "I need three minutes alone with him!"

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Sandra had lost her charm. When she got up from the table to refill her glass, our waitress rushed to our rescue. Rearranging our dishware and tucking Sandra's chair to the side, making her perch decidedly unwelcome. Sandra glanced over, shrugged, and returned to her gaggle. "Sorry guys," said our waitress. "That's crazy, huh? I thought that you knew her."

"We do now." I said.
"What's for dessert?"

85 main Street
Putnam, CT
860-928-1660
Starters \$3.50-\$12
Dinner Entrees \$13-\$25
Desserts \$7
Hours:
Lunch Monday-Sunday 11:30am-3pm
Dinner Sunday-Thursday 5-9:00pm
Dinner Friday-Saturday 5-10:00pm
Bar Menu Monday - Sunday
11:30am-11:00pm*
*Not available in the Dining Room
on Friday & Saturday



Front elevation of 85 main with the floor
to ceiling windows that open-up.
Photos by Jen Dean Brown



www.85main.com

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NEWS:
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**85 main Whips Up Satisfying,
Contemporary Fare**

By Joan Gordon,
Norwich Bulletin
September 15, 2005

Downtown Putnam has retooled itself into a major antique center. Man cannot live by collecting alone, however, and so an eclectic group of eateries has sprung up to service the shoppers and the area's growing population.

One of these was the Vine Restaurant. It's now been redecorated, renamed, reopened and flourishing under new Partners, Barry and Brian Jessurun (of Pomfret's Vanilla Bean) and Chef/Owner, James Martin.

Located in a vintage building itself, **85 main** is a modern, cutting edge restaurant. The entire front-which includes an additional store front [that was] not part of the old Vine-is cleverly designed with floor to ceiling sliding glass window-walls. On our recent visit they were wide open, letting balmy breezes fill the room.

One room sported an iced display of freshly opened oysters on a curvy black & white tiled counter. A well stocked wall of wines was just behind the bar at the end of the room.

An early lunch at the eatery included two hearty sandwiches from the separate bar menu. A slab of veal meatloaf, a tad peppery, was served on a crusty roll with a light salad and yummy, crusty fries. An oyster pobo, shades of New Orleans (which will rise again) was slathered with a house-made remoulade and paired with a zippy tomato salsa.

In the main dining room, furniture is mostly held over from the previous establishment. Dinner for four can become somewhat of a juggling act on the too small table tops.

A peppery olive oil was served along with four small half-slices of an excellent asiago cheese bread. Several refills were requested, and delivered.

The calamari appetizer proved more than enough for sharing. House-pickled cherry peppers and an "angry" marinara sauce were available to give the cornmeal crusted morsels a jolt.

Little necks were highlighted by roasting, with a light citrus ponzu sauce and hits from chili peppers.



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Contemporary Fare**, continued

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85 Main
85 Main St., Putnam
860-928-1660 www.85main.com

Hours: Open every day. Lunch 11:30 - 3:00 dinner Sunday - Thursday 5 - 9 p.m., Friday - Saturday 5 - 10 p.m. Bar menu 11:30 a.m. - 11:00 p.m. Reservations for parties of six or more. Major credit cards accepted. Wheelchair accessible. **Soups, salads and starters \$3.50 - \$12; entrées \$18 - \$29, desserts \$3.50.**

Price: \$\$+

Price Guide: \$ less than \$20 per person; \$\$ \$20-\$35 per person; \$\$\$ more than

\$35 per person.
Rating: ★★★½
★★★★ Excellent
★★★ Good
★★ Fair
★ Poor

In a nutshell: Inventive, well executed, contemporary cuisine. A treat for the taste buds.

Joan Gordon writes a restaurant review that appears Thursdays. Reach her at joansplate@hotmail.com.



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An assortment of oysters-Raspberry Points, Kumamotos and Mpeques-were savored. A classic French mignonnette sauce was a welcome addition. The cocktail sauce was too spicy for our palates. Carrot and ginger soup, a chilled Summer treat, mimicked the orange rays of the sunset. Accented with a dallop of yogurt and a sprig of mint, every spoonful was refreshing.

85 main's clam chowder garnered accolades. Sweet, fresh clams and small bits of roasted potatoes lurked within a lighter milky broth, but the addition of fresh-from-the farm kernels of roasted sweet corn added a toothsome we loved.

Grilled Salmon Salad arrived on a bed of field greens tossed with fava beans. Pickled red onions and a grilled peach half glowed in golden splendor. The greens were dressed with a light dressing.

Dinner found us presented with one of the freshest seafood emulsions we have yet to experience. A lush, saffron-fennel-tomato broth was ladled into an oversized bowl, languishing with firm-fleshed whitefish, diver scallops, meaty shrimp, mussels, clams and a curvaceous, X-rated, naked lobster tail. Two hunks of grilled peasant bread cried out for dipping. We were compelled to oblige. It was a masterpiece.

We hadn't experienced blackfish in eons. It was accented by a balsamic reduction and relish of sliced grape tomatoes, edamame beans, diced red pepper and roasted corn. Every morsel was divine.

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