

NEW YORK TIMES

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LONG ISLAND WEEKLY DESK

DINING OUT; Top-Level Dining, at Upper-Level Prices

By Joanne Starkey

The reopening of the 1770 House restaurant has East Hampton abuzz. The word from the grapevine is that the new owners, who took over in April, are experienced restaurateurs who earned their stripes at the popular East Hampton Point. Tongues are also clacking about their coup in attracting Kevin Penner as chef. Mr. Penner, one of the East End's superstars, made a name for himself when he was at Della Femina (also in East Hampton). Last summer, his culinary creations at the Star Room in Wainscott were the talk of the season.

The 1770 House is a lovely venue for this high - powered team. From the flowerpots flanking the door outside to the antique - filled lounge to the airy dining rooms, luxury is apparent. The dining rooms are a wonderful mix of the past and present: dark - wood ceiling beams contrast with contemporary high - backed wicker chairs with comfortable cushions. The patina of the antique wood tables, the Oriental rugs gracing the shiny wood floors, an imposing fireplace and antique plates arranged on creamy walls create a pretty picture. The attentive staff does nothing to shatter this agreeable tableau. Waiters are pleasant, knowledgeable and efficient. They delivered chewy sourdough - onion or black olive rolls that made a favorable first impression.

The staff is professional, the place lovely and there is firepower in the kitchen...

The 1770 House will be a pure pleasure. Mr. Penner was at the top of his game with his foie gras appetizer. Thick slabs of liver were lightly seared and presented alongside a globe of blueberry compote and a toast topped with slices of silky foie gras pate. Another soul satisfier was the ricotta gnocchi covered with a succulent braised rabbit ragout. The dumplings were more light and airy than the familiar potato gnocchi. Other appetizer headliners were the tasty tuna tartar crowned with a thin slice of raw hamachi and a radish - cucumber salad, and the unusual offering of two crisply fried fillets of Dover sole surrounding a centerpiece of caviar remoulade, sieved eggs and fried onions.

The least expensive entree, seared skate (\$26), was one of the best. It was bathed in a tasty brown butter and escorted by asparagus, morel mushrooms and scallions. Other fish striped bass in basil essence, roasted fluke over a mound of pea shoots and chanterelle mushrooms, and grilled salmon atop a cider sauce - were all beautifully cooked.

The meat that scored highest was the duo of grilled sirloin and fall-away tender braised beef cheeks set upon a bed of creamy mashed potatoes. There was praise, too, for the crisp roast chicken and the grilled veal chop over cubed beets, halved radishes and whole spring onions.

The top three desserts were the satiny buttermilk panna cotta paired with sliced nectarines, threads of basil and house-made peach sorbet; the bing cherry Napoleon mated with cherry-red wine sorbet, and the tangy steamed lemon pudding made even better by its platemate of raspberry sorbet.

1770 House Restaurant and Inn
143 Main Street, East Hampton, NY
(631) 324-1770

Very Good

ATMOSPHERE Antique inn meets summer in the Hamptons.

SERVICE Seamless.

SOUND LEVEL Comfortable.

RECOMMENDED DISHES All desserts, tuna tartare, Dover sole, foie gras, gnocchi, all fish, chicken, veal chop, steak-beef cheeks combo.

WINE LIST A list of nearly 200 selected with Hamptons big dippers in mind. The least expensive bottle is \$32.

PRICE RANGE Appetizers \$11 to \$23; entrees \$26 to \$50; desserts \$8 to \$12.

CREDIT CARDS All major cards.

HOURS 6 to 11 p.m. daily.

RESERVATIONS A must. A credit-card number must be given to hold a reservation; \$25 per person no-show penalty.

WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBILITY Four steps at entrance. Restrooms not designed for the disabled.



143 MAIN STREET. EAST HAMPTON NY, 11937
631-324-1770