

# THE DUTCH

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Even though I'd been dying to eat here for months (it's Andrew Carminelli and it's his take on American regional cooking! A definite must go!) we ended up—as one does—not going for lunch or dinner, or supper for that matter. What we managed to do, however, was to steal an hour at around 3.30 p.m., if only to slake our thirst in between shopping for Ugg boots and winter gear, to see what the fuss was all about.

And it was such a wrong call—in the sense that there isn't anything worse than being in a place you instantly know is the real thing at the wrong time.

Even though we had just eaten a big meal, there I was longingly studying the lunch menu—all those nods to Mexico, (the trout *a la plancha* with smoked potato, *cippolini* and balsamico; the grilled red chicken with housemade *tamale* and *mole poblano*) AND those damn odes to Southern comfort food I hadn't had since New Orleans, pre-Katrina, 2005: the peel n' eat red shrimp with red remoulade, the hot fried chicken with honey butter biscuits and slaw, and the fried green tomatoes (served with fresh ruby-red shrimp!!)—only to be told that we could only have drinks and a few bar snack items. And one look at my daughter, who is only seventeen, instantly sent us from the fringes of the bar to one of the booths at the back, where it felt silly ordering a single cocktail for mum and an iced tea for underaged daughter with a platter of eggplant dip with savory crackers in a near-empty room.

And yet. That eggplant dip was damn right addictive. So were the savory crackers. Even the celery and peaches cocktail that had caught my eye at the very outset was so good I had to ask for a second.

My mind wandered. I tried not to think of dinner, of the Korean-style hanger steak with kimchi fried rice and eggs I had been hearing from friends all month, or the rabbit pot pie with mustard cider, mustard and fall vegetables on the dinner menu. I looked around the room and realized how comfortable it was, all white brick and massaged wood and a tasteful placement of chandeliers, with the gentle afternoon light streaming through the wide windows overlooking Prince Street.

I tried not to think of the lobster roll served with the decidedly un-Maine like-sounding tobiko, cucumber and yuzu, or the beer-braised tripe served on a frizzled bed of Fritos, with lime and avocado, much less which part of the United States of A. they were supposed to pay homage to.

I tried not to think of the superb steaks they said Mr Carmellini had perfected, the charred 18-ounce New York strip steak to be exact, with the outstanding house fries, which had reportedly given Minetta Tavern up the road a run for its money.

I tried not to think of the dishes that hailed from the chef's own homeland: the *agnolotti* with butter and sage he lovingly stuffed with chestnut, or the sublime simplicity of his homemade *rigatoni* tossed with braised lamb, pecorino and black olive.

I tried not to think of the darker secrets behind Mr Carmellini's success—what made his joints so instantly likable, and in no time became tantamount to holy writ.

But yes, for now the room was warm and gorgeous and homey—egged on, undoubtedly, by the low-key, neighborhood thrust of its DNA, and even without really tasting the food, woah, we were in love already.





Photo taken from The Dutch NY IG