

Chronogram



food & drink

Home Again

TROUTBECK

By Albert Stern

As a resort and spa destination, Troutbeck has not exactly flown underneath the radar.

This fall, this 37-room estate hotel sited on 250 acres in the Hudson Valley town of Amenia garnered a number 3 rating in the *Condé Nast Traveler* Reader's Choice poll of best resorts in the Northeast, not to mention a number 49 rating among the top resorts *in the world*. Troutbeck earned a 19.4 score on a 20-point scale by readers polled for the current *Michelin Guide*, which notes that Troutbeck is “perhaps most remarkable for its continuity...[it] didn't just wake up one morning and decide to style itself a creative retreat—it's been walking the walk for well over a century, having welcomed Mark Twain, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Henry David Thoreau, and many others along the way.” Not only that, but the *New York Times* prominently featured Troutbeck in an article titled “Savoring Summer's End at 5 Country Getaways.”

Above: Herondale chicken, roasted Hakurei turnips, poached quince, roasted sunchokes, sunchoke puree, local radicchio (bottom left), sunflower brioche, maple aji dulce butter (top center), and honeynut squash, candied pine nut, apple, labneh, zatar (bottom right). Photo by Jim Henkens.

Opposite, clockwise from top left: Chef Vincent Gilberti makes pasta; squash & ricotta agnolotti with Koginut squash and black trumpet mushrooms. Photos by Jim Henkens. The dining room at Troutbeck. Photo by Nicole Franzen.

As these heavy-duty accolades were rolling in, Troutbeck brought in a new executive chef to helm its farm-to-table restaurant—no pressure, right?

A Prodigal Chef

If he's feeling any pressure, Executive Chef Vincent Gilberti is handling it creatively. A Hudson Valley native, he formerly worked as chef de cuisine at Troutbeck after stints at Paulino's in Manhattan and three acclaimed Brooklyn restaurants that specialized in New American seasonal dishes: Battersby, Dover, and the Finch. He left his first position at Troutbeck in the autumn of 2022 to work in San Francisco's contemporary Italian SPQR, a 10-time Michelin star recipient, before returning to take over the kitchen last July.

At the meal I enjoyed from the October menu at Troutbeck, ideas and approaches that Gilberti must have absorbed along his professional journey

were much in evidence—I was particularly impressed with the light touch he showed with the earthy flavors and textures of ingredients sourced from the Hudson Valley region. Seriously, after Gilberti finishes roasting a humble potato, it will have been elevated to the status of *potab*—to without losing any of its hearty, nutty *spudliness*—I mean, I had to use two adjectives and make up a word to describe how much I liked the Upstate Abundance Potatoes that accompanied my Hudson Valley steelhead trout main course (\$42). The other root vegetables and the fish were also really tasty, plated and very lightly dressed with a creamy black garlic emulsion that provided a rich umami flavor.

Gilberti explained that he continues in the path of the chefs who preceded him, cultivating relationships with area farms and purveyors to take advantage of the agricultural bounty of the Hudson Valley, an outreach he combines with his own local knowledge of the region and





its offerings. His menus, he said, will change constantly to reflect the availability of the freshest and most interesting ingredients local growers and markets offer. He added that the hunt for the best that's out there is an enjoyable undertaking that gets him out and about and connected to what's going on in the surrounding community.

Rustic Vibe, Contemporary Design

As a food writer, my instinct is to be wary of opining that the food being served fits the feel of the space in which it is being served—but in this case, I'll take the plunge. I've resided long enough in the Berkshire/Hudson Valley region and dined in enough restored grand estates that when I first got this assignment at Troutbeck, which first operated as a tavern way back in the 1700s, my expectation was that the hotel and the menu might be a bit fusty. I could not have been more mistaken. The interior of the hotel and its dining room were reimaged by New York's Champalimaud Design, a studio that specializes in melding historic structures with a contemporary interior. The firm was founded by Alexandra Champalimaud, who is the mother and mother-in-law of Troutbeck's owners.

They pulled off a neat trick at Troutbeck—a dining room that retains its rustic vibe while seamlessly incorporating contemporary and Mid-Century Modern-inspired design elements. Somehow, the two aesthetics coexist harmoniously, not only in the 76-seat dining room—which is comfortable, spacious, and *not noisy*—but in the cozy lounges just off the restaurant on the first floor. Next time, I won't neglect to make time before my meal to try one of the seasonal cocktails. In hindsight, I regretted missing the opportunity to try one of October's "Spooky Spirits": the "Never Sleep Again" made of Reposado Tequila, cold brew, and caramel—I like a cocktail that also throws down a challenge.

Merroir and Mignonette

I started with an appetizer of six Boomamoto oysters (\$27), bivalves with a Cape Cod merroir (a word I didn't make up, but that I did have to look up to ensure it wasn't someone else's dumb joke) and a clean and briny taste complemented by a vinegary apple mignonette with basil oil.

Next was the dish I considered the highlight of the meal, a koginut squash risotto (\$40) incorporating an abundance of chanterelles and topped with an indulgent shaving of Burgundy truffle. Each mouthful provided a satisfying blend of creamy risotto, slightly chewy mushroom, and truffle earthiness.

My main course was the fine trout and root vegetable dish I mentioned earlier, and my dining companion had the scallops in a vegetable broth, with spinach and the rich flavor of brown butter (\$48). The scallops were perfectly seared and cooked through—a lighter meal than some of the other menu offerings, but with deep flavors that were satisfying on an autumn night. Additionally, the wine list is extensive, international, and well-chosen.

My companion and I also enjoyed pastry chef Emma Isakoff's deconstructionist approach to dessert—all the elements are attractively arranged on a plate and you get to explore your own way through them. We had an apple tartine with a spelt puff, caramel, and vanilla ice cream, and also the sweet corn mochi with sweet corn ice cream, peach, brown butter, and yogurt (both \$13). The deconstructionist approach encourages you to play with your food a bit, and I especially liked combining the components of the sweet corn confection in different ways for different tastes and textures. I suppose every serving of these desserts tastes a little different for each person eating it, even from bite to bite. It was a fun way to end a meal.

The restaurant at Troutbeck serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner and is open to the public. Expect an upscale dining experience that, as befits its resort setting, is relaxing and low-key. By any measure, Chef Gilberti is off to an auspicious start—I look forward to finding out what he comes up with (and what the Hudson Valley food community provides) in the chilly months ahead. ©

