

# RAISING THE RESTAURANT BAR

STORY AND PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEREMY WAYNE

**If the white-flowered Brazilian jasmine in the planters or the pukka, white Miraval Côtes de Provence umbrellas on the terrace, have so far failed to convince you that Townhouse is an upscale of restaurant, it only takes a quick trip to the restroom for the point to be made beyond any reasonable doubt. Put it this way: If black marble is the kind of material to sink a ship, there's enough of it here to sink an entire flotilla.**

Some history: Helmed by chef Stephen Lewandowski and his friend, Drew Nierpont – of New York's Tribeca Grill, Bâtard and Nobu restaurants fame – Townhouse opened on the site of the former Gabriele's in Greenwich just eight weeks before Covid-19 struck. (You may also know Lewandowski's name from Tribeca Grill or Gotham Bar & Grill, as well as WAG editor-in-chief Georgette Gouveia's profile in July WAG). The third member of the team is operations director and Dobbs Ferry native Dana Cifone, who has enjoyed great success with major hospitality companies like the ONE group and Starr Restaurants at establishments like Pastis and Le Cou Cou – her achievements all the more striking as ops directors tend to be men.

The concept for Townhouse, she says, involved a "lighter and brighter" experience, in

terms of décor, atmosphere and food – something the restaurant's creators were able to achieve without being "in the shadow" of the previous restaurant once dining reopened in Connecticut in May 2020. Another pandemic plus – speedier permits for using the street terrace and rear garden as outdoor dining spaces.

When I asked Cifone, "Why Greenwich?" as opposed to, say, New York City, she barely paused before responding, "You're never going to be a restaurant that is everything for everyone." But Greenwich, she notes, attracts businesspeople, singles, stay-at-home-moms, families and visitors from the city. Above all, she says, "Greenwich is a just a nice place to be."

Over the course of two visits, I was able to try a number of dishes, along with a couple of the restaurant's wines by the bottle and the glass. Since Chef Stephen describes his cuisine as Coastal American, appetizers of tuna tataki crudo, iced jumbo shrimp and colossal crab seemed to be good places to start. I'm always slightly ambivalent about a tataki – those pinkish disks that are often served seared. Either you want your tuna cooked or you don't is my thinking here but at Townhouse, the flavor of the flesh was actually underlined by the two-way treatment, some crisp garlic slivers giving it the subtlest additional kick.

In the jumbo shrimp and crab starter, by contrast, those heavyweight main ingredients come unadorned, allowed to speak for their considerable selves with just a touch of pale-pink, Marie Rose sauce as a dressing. Tagliatelle, meanwhile, with a short-rib Bolognese, delivered a noble pasta hit. The long-cooked, oleaginous sauce had turned a wonderful



shade of orangey-red at the edges and offered tremendous depth of flavor, clinging to the strands and folds of the al dente pasta in a heaven-made union.

Under the section titled "Land," the lemon-thyme chicken with cucumber and charred corn was indeed a fresh and tangy salad but one masquerading as an entrée, with the chicken protein element providing the necessary upgrade from a salad to a main course. And if the grilled flat iron steak, cooked rare as ordered and served with mushroom, corn and ramps, was more of a *tagliata*, with the steak sliced over mashed potatoes, it was none the worse for that. (At dinner, when sea bass, salmon, roast chicken and a rack of lamb flesh out the lunch-



The wine room at Townhouse in Greenwich.



The main dining room.



The street terrace at Townhouse in Greenwich.

time menu, the flat iron transmogrifies into a grilled, 16-ounce New York strip, the steak still served over ramps and truffled potato purée.)

Overall, Townhouse's presentation of dishes is smart, as in "well-dressed," with embellishments such as smudges, smears, shavings, sprinkles and dustings kept to a minimum. And there is a commendable, actually merciful, absence of square plates or otherwise unusually-shaped dishes – so yesteryear, my friends.

Smart – as in well-dressed – could describe the restaurant's interior, too. This came as a pleasant surprise, since it was a great deal more attractive than the solid but rather plain red-brick exterior had suggested. The large main dining room, with its blue velvet upholstered chairs, hardwood floor and

cheerful, splashy art, has an unthreateningly contemporary, almost millennium feel to it and, this being the era of Covid, tables were well-spaced.

Speaking of lighter concepts, caramel stuffed churros – those moreish Spanish spirals of sugary dough that are featured on Townhouse's dessert menu (with a wonderful vanilla crème anglaise) were as light as churros could be. And the crème brûlée wasn't far behind – a superb, generously portioned custard, hiding under a sheet, or lid, of caramelized sugar, correctly served warm.

Not that lighter means any less polished or meticulous, of course. Indeed, as my guest and I sipped glasses of Chambord and smooth Nonino grappa after lunch on my second visit,

we agreed that Townhouse was proving to be a thoroughly grown-up, enjoyable experience, one full of surprises.

They included Townhouse's wine list, on which some wines – the Bacchus Chardonnay from Napa or the Mencia Pétalos from the little-known Bierzo wine region in northwestern Spain – represented fair value for the money. A few nights after my visit, Townhouse offered a cocktail reception and four-course dinner, showcasing the Plumpjack family of wines. With 70 guests, seated in individual parties at their own socially-distant tables, the dinner was by all accounts a great success, and Cifone has indicated that these events will become a regular feature going forward.

**For more, visit [townhousegreenwich.com](http://townhousegreenwich.com).**