

Black Bass Hotel

by Linn H. Jeffries



Macadamia-crust mahi mahi with spiked avocado purée, roasted pineapple salsa and tostones

As I crossed River Road from the parking lot, I could already smell enticing aromas wafting from the kitchen at the Black Bass Hotel in Lumberville, PA. Once I'd gone through the door in the flower-decked façade, that special radiance of sunlight on water drew me forward and into the bright dining room, with its long wall of windows overlooking the Delaware River and the Raven Rock Bridge. It would have been so pleasant to order a lovely lunch—maybe a wild-mushroom risotto or a tuna Niçoise salad—and contemplate the flowing water.

Instead, I decided to explore. I investigated the cozy smaller dining room, with its stone walls and fireplace, and the snug bar beyond it, which incorporates a zinc *comptoir* from Maxim's in Paris. Downstairs, another bar is framed by antique stone and wood, including fire-sooted beams original to this venerable 1745 structure. Up on the second floor, I discovered eight suites, all newly decorated by Laura Barnes with lots of marble and dark wood. Some of them overlooked the broad deck and the river below.

Then I sat down for a chat with Chef John Barrett, graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, who has been at the Black Bass since 1997—except for the three years when it was closed because of the floods. “They turned out to be a positive force,” John says, “because when Jack Thompson bought the place and renovated it completely, I had the opportunity to redesign the kitchen. We moved the bakery across the road to the Lumberville General Store, where we now make all of the restaurant’s breads, biscuits and desserts and sell to the public, too.”

In his sparkling new kitchen, John oversees the preparation of an eclectic collection

of dishes that draws inspiration from the Mediterranean and Cajun-Creole regions, Thailand and traditional Americana. “Our guests come from all over—Britain, Japan, California—so it’s only fitting that the food should too.” The Black Bass’s signature dish is Charleston Meeting Street Crab, a classic gratin from Escoffier by way of the South: chunks of fresh crabmeat in cream and sherry, topped by sharp Cheddar cheese.

John holds the river as his muse, so his menus, which change with the seasons, always feature five to seven fish entrées plus a daily fish special. A diner might be tempted, for example, by sautéed salmon with horseradish crust served on a bed of spinach with a lentil ragout and organic red and golden beets from Blue Moon Acres in Buckingham, PA. Oh my!

Of course, beef, pork, lamb, fowl and a vegetarian option are also offered, and the lighter Tavern menu is equally imaginative, proposing drunken wings, catfish po’ boys and Cuban pork sandwiches.

Whatever tempts a diner’s fancy, “Our focus,” John says, “is always on obtaining the finest produce, locally if possible. Then my great crew and I go to work. Our reward is the positive feedback we’ve been getting since the restored inn opened last June. ♥

Breakfast and dinner are served every day; lunch, Monday-Saturday; brunch, Sunday. See Dining Guide.