

## Dining Out

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### RESTAURANTS

Frank Bruni

# For Bond Traders and Other Carnivores

THESE are good times for cardiologists, bad times for cattle. The steakhouse reigns anew, in fashionable neighborhoods and trumperier ones, as if Mayor Bloomberg had updated the call for a chicken in every pot by decreeing a porterhouse on every block. Everywhere's the beef, meaning these are fraught times for devoted carnivores. They can easily miss a charmer like Harry's Steak and the charms of its bone-on strip.

I nearly did. I was distracted — by Quality Meats and a second branch of Wolfgang's Steakhouse, by Staghorn Steakhouse and of course Craftsteak. All trotted out their rib-eyes around the time Harry's opened in mid-May. Even though Harry's was the progeny and echo of a once-proud institution near Wall Street, it got lost in the crowd.

But a friend had a friend who had raved about Harry's, and I read somewhere that part of the dining room was in a sunken nook carved from a wine cellar. So I went. And fate was with me, because my three companions and I ended up at the lone table in that nook. We weren't seated there at first, but a little groveling goes a long way.

We quickly noticed that Harry's was trying and succeeding, with crucial bits of courtesy and innovation, to stand out from the pack. A cold shellfish platter arrived, and each of us got, in addition to sweet crab and supple shrimp, his or her own set of three dishes with the three condi-



Robert Smalzer for The New York Times

CHOPS AND FLOURISHES Harry's Steak, in the Financial District, shares a kitchen with a larger cafe.

and roomy profit margins of the steakhouse formula, they don't want the constraints, so they simultaneously buy into and buck it, winding up with restaurants that overreach or seem muddled.

Conjoined with Harry's Steak is Harry's Cafe, a different facet of the same restaurant, served by the same kitchen. And in Harry's Cafe the menu metastasizes in ways that often turn out to be ill-advised. There was a shrimp bisque this enough to be rechristened a consommé, an unwieldy Kobe-style beef hot dog with no more appeal than a ballpark frank, and a "crackling pork shank" that wore its cloak of fried skin and fat like a straitjacket.

The spark of old-timers like Sparks, Peter Luger and the Palm is the trust they place in established lures. Their kind of bluff call to beefy overindulgence is mired at Harry's, even in the steakhouse wing of the restaurant, where the digressions are fewer than in the cafe but also indicative of a counterproductive ambition.

Salmon was served with a precious, cloying blood orange glaze. A pasty sauce of cashews, butter and chicken stock smothered grilled swordfish, which would have been better left to sink or swim on its own.

Harry's Steak consists of about 65 seats spread throughout a narrow barroom with stone walls, a dining room with goody murals of monks making wine, and that sunken, soothing nook. It feels aged, in a good way, and intimate.

Harry's Cafe has more than twice that number of seats in a larger, less distinctive dining room with its own bar area, filled on a recent night with equal numbers of men and women, nearly all of them drinking beer instead of martinis, even though Harry's makes a mean one with Hendrick's gin. Times have changed.

Both the steakhouse and cafe inhabit what used to be Harry's at Hanover Square, which for three decades was an archetypal retreat for traders and raiders, who went there to cut their adrenaline and steel their nerves with cigars and magnums of

expensive wine. Its owner, Harry Poulakakos, closed it in 2003. His son, Peter, manages this reconfigured version and owns it with several partners.

The Poulakakos family has a long history and deep investment in the neighborhood around Hanover Square. In 1998 Peter opened Bayard's, just above Harry's at Hanover Square. (It recently scaled back to private parties only.) And over the last few years he and his partners have added a pastry shop, a bar and a pizza place to the neighborhood.

They haven't tapped into a source of reliable help. Service at Harry's was wildly erratic — better in the steakhouse but flawed even there. A server told us the tart of the day was peach. What came was lemon — and unremarkable, like the flourless chocolate cake (will it ever stop?) and cheesecake.

The wine list commands serious attention, reflecting a cellar long in the making, and it's aptly focused on substantial reds. They're what you want to drink with hefty slabs of meat, which are what you want to eat at Harry's. You want to start with the bacon, the shellfish platter, roasted clams with a benevolent sprinkling of pancetta, or a triptych of beefsteak tomato preparations involving blue cheese, Vidalia onions and mozzarella.

The kitchen is run by Patrick Vaccariello, an alumnus of Maloney & Porcelli and student of David Burke. When he applies Mr. Burke's ideas or his own creativity to stalwarts like tomatoes or pork chops, he and Harry's make a strong case for themselves.

For terrific double-cut lamb chops, he replaces mint jelly with a lighter, headier mix of orange marmalade, fresh mint, star anise and cilantro. If that lamb is combined with the strip and savored under one of those murals, the legions of other steakhouses fade away. There is only Harry's, and it's the best of times.

### Diner's Journal

BY FRANK BRUNI

A blog on restaurants, trends and notes from the field: [nytimes.com/dinersjournal](http://nytimes.com/dinersjournal)

ments: a cocktail sauce, a mignonette and an Old Bay mayonnaise. There was no passing, reaching or awkward dribbling.

What was presented as an appetizer of house-made Canadian bacon was actually a small chop that had been brined, smoked and sliced with the bone still attached: an inspired departure.

A much larger pork chop entree, grilled over hickory chips, rose from a bed of unconventional sauerkraut laced with poppy seeds and pineapple. Beside the chop was a Mason jar with applesauce, but not just any old applesauce. Serrano pepper gave it glimmers of heat.

Flourishes like these weren't what distinguished the bone-on strip, which we also had that night. It spoke to the timeless glories of aged prime beef, a sensible marinade (oil, garlic, paprika) and a high-temperature broiler, agent of a crucial char. Thick and juicy, the strip was the best of the steaks at Harry's, though the porterhouse for two had absolutely nothing to be ashamed of.

But there's trouble with Harry's, and it's the trouble with many newfangled steakhouses. Their sponsors aren't content to do a limited lineup of expected dishes well, to apply clever tweaks to enduring traditions.

Although they want the security

### Harry's Steak and Cafe

One Hanover Square (Pearl Street), Financial District, (212) 785-9200.

**ATMOSPHERE** An intimate steakhouse with stone walls and murals of monks is joined to a more informal, larger cafe with a partly overlapping menu.

**SOUND LEVEL** Moderately loud in cafe, relatively quiet in steakhouse.

**RECOMMENDED DISHES** Cold shellfish platter; clams with pancetta; Canadian bacon; beetroot tomatoes; strip steak; rib steak; porterhouse; lamb chops; pork chop; apple crumble.

**WINE LIST** Lengthy, international, widely varied in price and supplemented by a special "select" book of older, more expensive vintages.

**PRICE RANGE** Appetizers, \$7.50 to \$13.75. Entrees, \$12.50 to \$41. Desserts, \$6 to \$8.

**HOURS** For the cafe, 11:30 a.m. to mid-

night seven days a week. For the steakhouse, 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Friday. Additional hours to come.

**RESERVATIONS** For primo diner times in the steakhouse in particular, call a few days ahead.

**CREDIT CARDS** All major cards.

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS** Inaccessible.

**WHAT THE STARS MEAN:**

(None) Poor to satisfactory

\* Good

\*\* Very good

\*\*\* Excellent

\*\*\*\* Extraordinary

Ratings reflect the reviewer's reaction to food, ambience and service, with price taken into consideration. Menu listings and prices are subject to change.

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