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Murray's: good food for thought

Imaginative preparation of local ingredients is a taste treat in Tivoli

by [Kathryn Matthews](#) • September 5, 2012

The transformation of Murray's in Tivoli over the past year has been gradual. Each time my husband, Christopher, and I stopped in, it seemed that something was different. It wasn't our imagination.

"Our original vision was to open a small specialty foods market and coffee shop that served good, as well as sustainable, coffee," says Jake Stortini, who opened Murray's last July with fellow Bard student Jesse Feldmus. They succeeded in finding a sustainable roaster—La Colombe based in Philadelphia—and attracted a happy patronage.

By January, their edible offerings had expanded from coffee, baked goods and sandwiches, to breakfast, then lunch, all prepared by locavore chef Amy Lawton, who had previously cooked at Wild Hive in Clinton. "We got such great feedback about breakfast and lunch that we decided to expand to dinner," says Stortini. This summer, Murray's began offering outdoor seating (in a charming white-canopied fieldstone patio in the back) and is now open for dinner most nights of the week.

Last December, Lawton, who had just moved to the area, applied for a job at Murray's—as a barrista. But when Stortini and Feldmus interviewed her, they immediately knew that they had found their executive chef. "Amy was a perfect fit. She is more passionate than anyone we know about local food; she is also deeply connected to the Hudson Valley and its farmers," says Stortini.

Lawton has taken full charge of the kitchen—sourcing local ingredients, foraging, cooking and catering, even taking time to plant a thriving

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garden behind the restaurant.

One recent Saturday evening, we popped into Murray's for dinner.

The interior is spare but attractive, with a handsome bar, wooden tables, white metal chairs, burnished wood floors and repurposed church pews running the length of the white-wainscoted dining room. Artwork adorns the blue-gray walls.

Inspired by the seasons, Lawton focuses on using local, fresh foods. "I work hard not to screw up what was perfect when it was plucked from the earth," she says.

Our server, Bea, a Bard student, was amiable and professional in her demeanor, and we were also impressed by her knowledge of how dishes were prepared and the provenance of many ingredients.

The menu, which changes weekly, features deceptively simple-sounding items, like "summer mac + cheese", "grain + bean" and "salad of the night." But, as we soon discovered, Lawton's cooking is thoughtful, imaginative, accomplished...and delicious.

An amuse bouche of black bean hummus with a stack of grilled bread (from Loaf in Hudson) was a wonderful prelude of things to come. I'm not particularly keen on hummus, but this had a distinct kick. "Good, huh?" Bea asked knowingly: "Amy uses that garlic from Ethel Barone of Red Hook Farm—it's spicy!"

To start, Christopher ordered a tomato-free version of the dandelion salad (\$11). My husband doesn't eat raw tomato. (Yep, I don't get it either!) What Bea set down before him was a lovely mess of dandelion greens (also from Red Hook Farm), peppered with goat cheese and house-made herb croutons in a lemon vinaigrette. And a side of local cherry tomatoes. I ate them all, relishing each juicy bomb of sweetness. We found the dandelion greens fresh and lively, an astringent summer tonic. "Anyone who has a bitter bud will love this salad," Christopher said.

My "raw brassica" (\$10) was a vibrant raw kale salad: shredded kale, marinated in a cider vinaigrette, studded with Sprout Creek Farm ouray cheese and raisins and garnished with toasted walnuts and finely diced peaches. Served with grilled bread, the raw brassica is a meal in itself. Artfully presented, it was a wonderful study of contrasting flavors and textures: earthy, bright, sweet, salty, crunchy and chewy.

For his entree, Christopher had the lamb meatballs (\$19). Lawton procures her lamb from Buckwheat Bridge Angoras in Elizaville and Sparrowbush Farm in Livingston. The dish was as visually enticing as it was savory and satisfying. The meatballs, spiked with cinnamon and garlic, were served over creamy polenta, garnished with ricotta and roasted pistachios and accompanied by a generous portion of sautéed summer vegetables. "This is comfort food with a lighter, cleaner touch," Christopher noted.

I felt the same way—wonderfully nourished by my monster "veggie burger". My patty was a delectable mash of seasonal roots (like parsley) and vegetables (there were seven in mine), oats and beans. Topped with an over-easy egg (Featheridge Farms in Elizaville) and ensconced between two slabs of grilled quinoa multigrain, it came with two sides—dill cream cheese and a parsley almond pesto —and a Bibb lettuce salad.

While we don't quite share Lawton's affinity for copious bread and grains (perhaps natural after her five-year tenure at Wild Hive), we appreciate the generous effort she puts forth to feed delicious, real food that fills and nourishes.

We shouldn't have, but we ordered dessert. And it didn't disappoint: Lawton's plum crisp served with crème fraiche hit the spot with its homey goodness.

"We're not fancy," Lawton stressed, adding: "My main goal is to build community through good food that leaves people feeling good afterwards."

From what we've tasted so far, she has succeeded.

Murray's

www.murraystivoli.com

76 Broadway

Tivoli

845-757-6003

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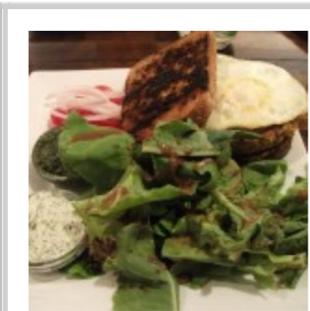
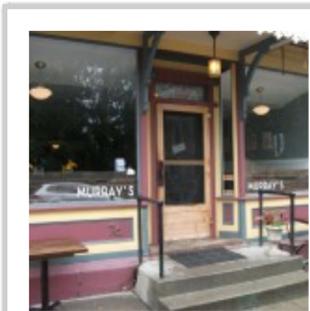
Dinner: Mon., Tue., Thurs.: 5:30pm-9:30pm; Fri.-Sun.: 5:30-10pm



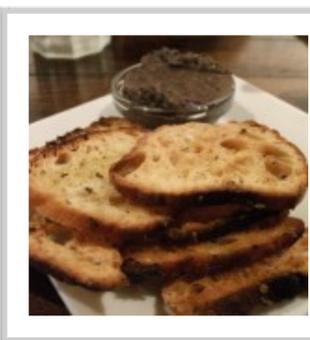
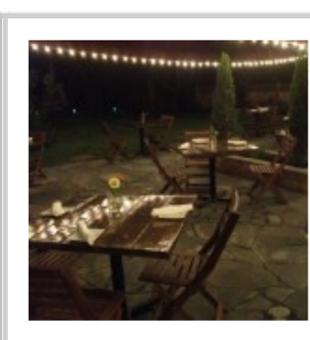
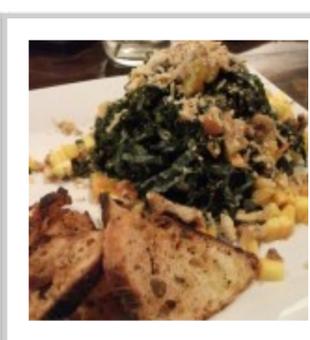
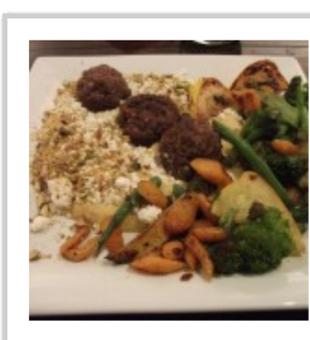
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