



A'vert's Croque Madame, a baked ham and cheese sandwich with baby greens salad.

# Bravo to Brunch

A favorite weekend tradition gets a gourmet twist

From Mother's Day to graduations, springtime celebrations and relaxing Sundays are better with brunch. Whether you prefer an upscale a la carte selection or the variety of a buffet, the beloved overlap of breakfast and lunch can sate any palate at Hartford County's most celebrated brunch spots. With very different, yet equally popular offerings, A'vert Brasserie, Seasons Restaurant and Evergreens at The Simsbury Inn are premier destinations to experience a leisurely weekend meal.

A'vert Brasserie entered the local restaurant scene in late 2013 and now features one of West Hartford's most enticing a la carte brunch menus. A sister restaurant to Treva in West Hartford (and its very name spelled backward), A'vert is a welcome addition to the town's culinary epicenter. With brunch served from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. each Saturday and Sunday, the timeless French-inspired offerings emphasize seasonality and local sourcing; all eggs and dairy come from Connecticut. "We only feature produce at the peak of its season," says executive chef and co-owner David Borselle. "You won't find a single tomato at the restaurant through winter and spring."

At brunch, the garlic-roasted shrimp omelet with poached fennel, chives and aromatic lobster sauce continues to be a customer favorite. "We could've opened a restaurant serving that omelet alone," he jokes. Other standouts include the classic Croque Madame, Belgian waffles with blueberry compote and crème fraîche, and duck leg confit with French green lentils.

The menu balances sweet, rich and savory options to ensure a completely satisfying meal. Pairing sophisticated European-style dishes with a relaxed atmosphere, A'vert is the ideal setting for weekend indulging. "We offer everything from fresh croissants to a wide variety of champagnes and cocktails," Borselle says.

At Evergreens at The Simsbury Inn, any preconceived notions of buffet dining will be replaced with exquisite visions of mouthwatering carving stations and lavish culinary displays. With seatings from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. each Sunday, the restaurant's elegant gourmet brunch has been a destination for 25 years.

Since 2000, Chef Samantha Tooker has transformed the offerings into a weekly showcase. From antipasto and smoked seafood platters to an endless array of salads, artisanal cheeses and just-baked breads, the presentation is masterful. "It's the whole package," says general manager Jan Losee. "The taste of the food and the quality matters, but it's also about presentation and feeling



Simsbury Inn's Belgium waffles with bourbon berries and salted caramel sauce.

DELICIOUS



Simsbury Inn's Mediterranean chicken with artichokes, capers and Aromatto basil.

like there's something classic and fresh about what you're having."

Brunch offerings change frequently, which keeps Chef Tooker, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America, in the throes of kitchen creativity. "That's the fun part," she says. "We don't want to be caught doing the same thing over and over. In fact, nothing is the same from week to week – not even the featured vegetable or starch option."

Whether that means introducing a made-to-order stuffed French toast station or tantalizing taste buds with her signature lobster macaroni in three-cheese sauce, Tooker offers a fresh dining experience each week. Tooker's culinary team plays a crucial role in recipe development and taste testing.

In addition to the poultry, seafood and pasta-based entrees and sides, brunch always features a poached egg variation, which may be topped with lobster one week and transformed into eggs Benedict crowned with ale-battered onions the next.

Concluding the meal on a sweet note, a dessert table beckons with house-made tarts, truffles, parfaits and a plethora of other confections. In balmy weather, sit outside for the decadent

midday meal, featuring live acoustic music. Sunday brunch is \$29 for adults (including a complimentary glass of champagne, mimosa or Bloody Mary), half price for children ages 5 to 12, and free for kids under 5. Prices are \$40 to \$45 during special holiday seatings (including Mother's Day and Easter celebrations).

With its quintessential New England charm, the rustic country appeal of the Avon Old Farms Hotel is enhanced by Seasons Restaurant, led by executive chef Jared Talarski. True to its name, the restaurant focuses on dishes featuring locally grown, seasonally inspired ingredients, and is a popular choice for hotel guests and local residents.

While the restaurant serves breakfast, lunch and dinner daily, Sunday brunch has been a favorite at Avon Old Farms Hotel for many years, says general manager Jeff Hoess-Brooks. Served from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. each Sunday, the buffet-style brunch includes gourmet entrees and comforting breakfast staples. At \$27 for adults, the spread also includes complimentary mimosas. Accompanying a large selection of artfully presented pastries, bagels, salads and seafood platters, traditional dishes like

eggs Benedict and cheese blintzes make a weekly appearance, while poultry-and seafood-based entree selections change frequently. The smoked salmon Florentine eggs Benedict is among the classics with a twist in Chef Talarski's rotation.

According to Hoess-Brooks, customers favor the chef-attended carving station, custom omelet station and waffle station with fresh seasonal toppings. The dessert selection is a perfect way to end the meal, while enjoying music by local pianist Jeff Wieselberg. A seasonal patio complements the main dining room; both provide lovely panoramic views of Talcott Mountain Stream. ■

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**SEASONS RESTAURANT AT  
AVON OLD FARMS HOTEL**

**SMOKED SALMON FLORENTINE EGGS BENEDICT**

2 large frozen sheets of puff pastry  
Egg wash  
2 tablespoons salted butter  
1 large bag fresh baby spinach  
Splash of white wine  
2 teaspoons fresh squeezed lemon juice  
Salt and pepper, to taste  
12 ounces smoked salmon  
2 teaspoons white vinegar  
6 farm fresh eggs  
1 cup fresh Hollandaise sauce (prepare using your favorite recipe)  
2 ounces fresh dill

Thaw puff pastry and cut out 12 circles, each about the size of an English muffin. Score the top layer of pastry, and then brush lightly with egg wash. Bake at 350° until puffed and golden brown. (Puff pastry is best fresh from the oven, so plan to serve this dish immediately.)

Melt butter in a heated sauté pan. Add fresh spinach. When spinach starts to wilt, add white wine, lemon juice, and salt and pepper to taste. Cook off the alcohol. Drain juice out of spinach mixture to avoid making pastry soggy. Set aside.

Place two puff pastry rounds on each plate; layer 2 ounces of smoked salmon on top of each round.

Fill a 12-inch pan halfway with water. Add white vinegar. (White vinegar is essential, as it keeps eggs together as they poach.) Bring to a slow boil. Gently crack eggs and ease into boiling water. Do not break. Reduce heat and slow boil eggs for 3 minutes, or until whites are set and yolk is still soft. Remove eggs gently from water with a slotted spoon.

Place cooked spinach on top of each round, creating a nest for the poached egg. Place egg on spinach. Top with warm Hollandaise sauce and a sprig of fresh dill. Serves 6.



Simsbury Inn's roasted shrimp omelette with fennel and lobster sauce.

**EVERGREENS AT THE SIMSBURY INN  
HERBED LOBSTER PAPPARDELLE**

- 1 package pappardelle pasta
- 3 garlic cloves, sliced
- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/3 cups dry white wine
- 2 cups fish stock
- 1 thyme sprig
- 4 (5-ounce) lobsters tails
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 ounce cognac
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped parsley
- 1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves
- 1 teaspoon tarragon

Cook pasta according to package directions. Sauté garlic in oil. Add wine, fish stock and thyme sprig. Bring to a boil. Add lobster and cook for four minutes. Remove lobster from stock and pick meat from tails. Chop coarsely. Add salt and pepper to stock and reduce to a cup. Discard thyme sprig. Stir in heavy cream, cognac, lobster meat, parsley, thyme, tarragon and cooked pasta. Serves 6.

**A'VERT BRASSERIE  
FINES HERBES OMELET**

- 3 fresh farm eggs
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon water
- 1 teaspoon fines herbes (parsley, tarragon, chervil, chives), finely chopped
- Salt and pepper

Preheat oven to 375°F. Crack eggs into mixing bowl; add water. Place non-stick 8-inch or 9-inch pan on medium heat. Add oil. Add a pinch of salt to eggs. Whisk together for about a minute. Once the pan is warm (not hot), add the egg mix. Cook gently, until the bottom of the mix starts to solidify (this should be a slow process). Add teaspoon of chopped fines herbes.

Transfer pan to oven for 2 to 3 minutes until the omelet is cooked but not puffy or brown. Remove from oven and flip onto plate. Garnish with remaining fines herbes and sprinkle with salt and pepper. Serves 1.

**DRAMATIC | BOLD | PASSIONATE**



**A few of our favorite spots:** Priam Vineyards, The Palace Theater and Wadsworth Mansion

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