

# Dining Inn

Three Monadnock region inns offer food, drinks and community

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY BY KENDAL J. BUSH



Woodbound Inn Owner and Chef Rudy Rosalez practices his craft in the open-concept kitchen.



Our plates (and cocktail glasses) were 100% clean after this meal. The pan-seared salmon with a Jameson bourbon glaze, topped with asparagus and served over jasmine rice, shared perfection status with one of the most delicious craft cocktails: a Bonnie & Clyde made with Casamigos tequila, fresh-squeezed blood orange juice and a housemade rim.

Nestled in the middle of “nowhere,” a trifecta of historic inns creates a trilateral trail across the picturesque Monadnock region. Franconstown’s **Blue Bear Inn**, Temple’s **Birchwood Inn** and Rindge’s **Woodbound Inn** share a heritage dating back to their origins as mid-19th century inns.

Whether you are a world traveler staying a week or a local stopping by for a beer, the town inn is a central spot where friends meet and the community collaborates.

“Just last week we had a couple who were traveling around the United States, and I listened to them talking for hours,” says Brian Faye, bar manager of the Blue Bear Inn. “You really never know what you are going to get or who you are going to be hanging out with.”

The Woodbound and Birchwood Inns also see their share of world travelers. “We

are in the middle of nowhere,” says Rudy Rosalez, chef and owner of the Woodbound Inn. “I’ve had people walk up to that window and say, ‘Wow, this feels like being in New York City.’ We have travelers from all over the world.”

But it’s not just tourists who appreciate the inn experience. Birchwood Inn owner Amy Cabana notes that several of their repeat customers are locals who want to enjoy nearby hiking or just want a change of scenery for a weekend. “We have a couple from Bedford who come every three months for the quiet and the dark skies at night,” Cabana says.

The allure of the Monadnock area inns transcend the necessity of a place to stay for an evening, as all three establishments attract locals who come for the drinks, food and community.

The Woodbound Inn is the largest

establishment in the group with the ability to host big groups and functions with multiple event spaces and 41 rooms, which include lakeside cabins overlooking Con-toocook Lake and Mount Monadnock.

The Blue Bear Inn abuts Crotched Mountain, boasting 13 newly renovated rooms each with unique character. A stay at the inn includes use of the outdoor pool, which overlooks a spectacular view of nearby mountains.

The Birchwood offers a boutique experience with just a few rooms that are all well appointed with amenities. And if you happen to stay at the Woodbound or Birchwood on a Saturday night, you will be treated to a Sunday morning brunch.

If you are just popping in for a beverage or a meal, the inns do not disappoint. Each restaurant has its own distinctive character incorporating historical charm, and each >



An old fashioned at the Birchwood Inn is served with a trio of local chesnut, black oyster and pink oyster fried mushrooms alongside house-made ranch.

pride themselves on exceptional service, fresh food and outstanding cocktails.

The decor of the Birchwood flaunts its history with the “Rufus Porter Room.” The hand-painted murals that date back to the mid-1800s were uncovered during renovations in 1971.

“This inn was built in 1775 and has been an inn for the majority of its life, but it has also been the post office, a tannery, an antique shop and a private home,” Cabana says.

It’s not just the history and the ambiance that attracts folks to the Birchwood. Locals like Emil and Ellen Caron are frequent visitors to the pub who enjoy the fresh, locally-sourced food. On this night, Emil tried the tomahawk pork chop served alongside garlic sautéed broccoli with a fig glaze and balsamic reduction.

“It’s great food, great staff, everything’s always good,” says Emil Caron, who adds with a laugh, “but the portions are way too big!”

Chef Jay Gauthier enjoys engaging with the community and supporting nearby farms and businesses by sourcing ingredients locally. The scallops and pan-seared shrimp entrée is a customer favorite, served with a lobster compound butter made from parsley, rosemary and handmade butter served over a mushroom risotto with red peppers, onions, asparagus and broccoli.

Creating and cooking adventurous cuisine make Gauthier happy, but it is the feedback he receives from the customers that gives him a sense of accomplishment.

“When a server comes back and says the customers are loving the food and said that the scallops or the steak are the best they’ve ever had, chills go through my body,” Gauthier says. “That I just fed that person one of the best meals they’ve ever had is a fantastic feeling.”

Over at the Woodbound, chef and owner Rudy Rosalez spends a good deal of time in the open-concept kitchen overlooking the main dining room.

“I can see my guests dining and enjoying food, and manage my whole restaurant from the kitchen. Seeing them nodding, smiling and taking pictures — it makes you feel good,” says Rosalez, who started his first job in a kitchen as a kid at 17. Five years later he was the executive sous chef running the place.

“Every chef has an ego,” Rosalez says. “They want it to be fed. They say it’s a thankless job, but if you are looking for the right things, you are being thanked all the time.”

The Winslow Tavern at the Blue Bear is an intimate space that offers acoustic music on the weekends, but is devoid of television screens. “I’m a good opener,” Faye says. “I will try to get people to engage, and most people want to. You go to other bars and people are face-down on their phone, not looking up and not talking to people, but that is not this place.”

Lisa and Anker Jensen of Greenfield dropped in to have a beverage before



Chef Jay Gauthier serves up the tomahawk pork chop and pan-seared scallops with an appetizer of locally grown, deep-fried wild mushrooms and ranch dressing.



Birchwood owner Amy Cabana (far right) dances with a young patron on a Tuesday music night at the inn.



Blue Bear Inn owner Lorrie Deyelle Mailhot enjoys a bit of her Canadian heritage as she sips on a Caesar, the official cocktail of Canada.



A marinated, grilled flank steak with hand-cut fries topped with crispy shallots and thyme accompany the farmhouse chicken with grilled broccolini in a lemon butter sauce at the Blue Bear Inn.



Lisa and Anker Jensen of Greenfield enjoy a drink from bartender Brian Faye in the Winslow Tavern at the Blue Bear Inn.

hopping down to the pool for an afternoon swim. As Lisa took a sip of her drink, she beamed. “The bartender, the service, the owners are exceptional,” she said. “The food is wonderful, and we have a bartender who knows how to make a drink. He’s personable and can keep up with everything.”

Blue Bear Inn owner Lorrie Mailhot relocated from her home in Canada to Franconstown about two years ago, and she promptly started renovating the inn. She initially opened Blue Bear as a place to host sewing retreats (which she still offers regularly).

“I want everyone to feel home when they come here,” Mailhot says. “You are not in a hotel. You’re in a place where you can come with your family and be with family.”

She loves the peacefulness and natural setting of the inn, which is close to golfing, hiking and swimming in the warm seasons and skiing or snowshoeing in the winter months. In addition to appreciating the flowers and natural beauty of the inn, the main dining room is a frequent location for painting nights and workshops that are open to the public.

Running and managing an inn isn’t easy work. It is a commitment and a labor of love that this group of entrepreneurs are excelling at. The innkeepers all had challenges with their journeys, but seem to share a happiness knowing that their hard work contributes to the vibrancy of their communities.

Cabana shares that renovating and running the Birchwood Inn with her husband, Matt, is the hardest thing she’s ever done, but they keep going because of the happiness they bring to the community.

“A lot of people who come in here now have relationships with people that they might not have met if it weren’t for this place,” she says.

“I think everybody who stops in is glad they came because, you know, I think they always leave with a little bit more than what they came in with.” **NH**

**Get There**

- Woodbound Inn**  
247 Woodbound Road, Rindge  
woodbound.com / (603) 532-8341
- Blue Bear Inn**  
534 Mountain Road, Franconstown  
bluebearinn.com / (603) 808-0174
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