



The bar at American Beech (left); a duck tot and caviar dish at North Fork Table & Inn; the pastry shop at Southold General (below)

# The Hamptons, But Better

With new restaurants and hotels, Long Island's North Fork is acquiring the sheen of its trendy neighbor—but with fewer crowds and at a (slightly) lower cost. *By Jackie Caradonio*

Drive east from New York City, and just before you hit the Peconic River, you'll face a choice: north or south? Option B takes you to the Hamptons, that enviable address where summer dreams of rosé and lawn parties are lived out weekend after weekend. But lately, the road toward the agricultural haven known literally as the North Fork is attracting more and more devoted travelers.

This string of 15 villages has long been considered a quiet alternative to the raucous Hamptons, if it was considered at all. Since the aughts, its laid-back vineyards and farm stands have drawn a smattering of Manhattanites via car or the Long Island Rail Road, including this writer, for affordable day-trips. More indulgent weekends meant a night at the North Fork Table & Inn, where three-hour-long tasting menus were made by a husband and wife team that had earned accolades at power restaurants Gramercy Tavern and Aureole.

Today locals call the area, which stretches 30 miles from Riverhead to Orient Point, "the Brooklyn of East End." It's

more creative and less fussy than the Hamptons but no less attractive, and, these days, it's approaching as expensive. In 2005 the median home price on the North Fork was \$451,000; now it's \$780,000. Local broker Sheri Winter Parker confesses she has a hard time finding any inventory under \$2 million. "We were doing well before, but Covid took it to another level," says Parker, who's lived in the area for 21 years.

To her point, not a single restaurant in boutique-lined Greenport shuttered because of the pandemic. In fact, more opened to meet the demand of urban defectors, including the famed bistro Demarchelier, which relocated from Manhattan's Upper East Side in November. Duryea's, Montauk's purveyor of choice for lobster rolls, expanded to Orient Point in 2020.

Fishing boats in the marina now have the illustrious company of megayachts, including on a recent weekend a matte-black 108-footer available to rent for \$60,000 a week. Buzzy designer Alex Vinash's shop in the American Beech Hotel offers racks of vibrant resort wear set amid funky chairs and

# Drinking Up the North Fork

*Fresh talent—and new investment—has elevated the region's wines, too*

## ROSE HILL

This winery and farmhouse inn in Mattituck has a charming courtyard—perfect for sips of chenin blanc and cabernet franc that uniquely reflect the area.

## RGNY

The first American venture by Mexican winemaker Rivero González, established in 2019, uses low-impact methods to produce light, summery rosé and white merlot in Riverhead.

## BEDELL CELLARS

In Cutchogue, winemaker Richard Olsen-Harbach has shifted production away from Napa copycat reds and now focuses on grapes suited to the East Coast's humidity—bright and fruity melon de Bourgognes and viogniers.

## ONE WOMAN WINES & VINEYARDS

Founded by Claudia Purita on a tiny plot of grüner veltliner in

2002, it's expanded to include a barnlike tasting room in Southold and more than a dozen grape varietals over 36 acres.

## SPARKLING POINTE

Its estate-grown wines are made exclusively in the traditional méthode Champenoise and can be paired with caviar service on the estate's patio in Southold.

# The Inn Crowd

For the most quintessential North Fork vacation, book a B&B—preferably **THE HARVEST INN**. It operates like an intimate boutique hotel, with five rooms and attentive owners serving exquisite multicourse breakfasts on the porch. If it's a beach trip you're after, try **SOUND VIEW** instead. The motor inn turned midcentury modern hotel claims a quarter-mile stretch of pebbly coast; its swimming pool and many of its 55 guest rooms have water views. **AMERICAN BEECH** sits at the beating heart of Greenport, with a bar reminiscent of the Beverly Hills Hotel. And **THE MENHADEN**, with its chic black-and-white awning, has 16 rooms in a prime Greenport location, with beach cruisers that make it easy to explore the entire area.

potted palms. Nearby, at the year-old Sound View hotel, a recently opened concept shop sells swimwear and canvas bags made from recycled materials.

Catch Greenport on a summery Saturday night, and the sundress-clad revelers bouncing between crowded bars along Main Road and Front Street might give the impression you've hopped over the Peconic Bay to frenzied Montauk.

But there's a concerted effort here to ensure that the south stays where it is—and the north maintains its (relatively) quiet appeal. That's being enforced by a coalition of local city boards that conservatively grant building permits, frequently blocking new construction when careful renovations will do, even if they're significantly costlier.

The evolution of the North Fork was subtle at first: a freshly painted sign at one of the old B&Bs or a new farm-to-table food truck. But it picked up in 2015 with the arrival of American Beech, the area's first upscale hotel. Its 13 boldly designed suites and restaurant transformed sleepy Stirling Square in central Greenport into a trendy hub where you actually had to make a reservation. Celebrities and star chefs soon followed: Tom Colicchio and Andrew Carmellini were no longer simply sourcing produce from local farms, they were choosing the North Fork for their second homes.

Among the chefs was serial entrepreneur John Fraser of Dovetail and the Loyal in New York City, who's been coming regularly for more than a decade and is now spearheading a spate of projects he hopes will draw locals just as much as weekenders. In 2019 he realized a longtime goal, acquiring the North Fork Table & Inn, and began breathing new life into it. "The whole idea was preservation, restoration, and reinvention," he says.

The revamped menu leans heavily on the local agricultural bounty such as Shinnecock scallops a la plancha with blackberries, cauliflower, and pine nuts. And the four rooms above the dining area now sport leather headboards and black brass accents, courtesy of designer Thomas Juul-Hansen.

In August, Fraser and his team opened Southold General, an upscale cafe and provisions market where French pastry master François Payard serves up sweet gelato and savory croissants. Next summer the Shoals, the group's second hotel in the town of Southold, will offer 20 rooms, an oyster shack, and a 20-slip marina right off the waterfront lawn.

Not all the area's investors are chefs: In 2021 another locally owned boutique hotel called the Menhaden was acquired for \$8.3 million by New York-based Atlantic Equity Partners. In 2019, San Francisco-based Sightline Hospitality added the Harbor Front Inn (a renovation project) to its nationwide portfolio. So far the development has remained embedded in the fabric of North Fork life, but the influx of outside money may hint at a slow erosion of the local flair.

For now, anyway, you can still drive along either of the area's two main arteries—North and Main roads—and find overflowing stands packed with fresh apples and oysters and lavender and pumpkins. Change may be afoot, but the North Fork has deep roots—and they aren't giving way just yet. **B**



AMERICAN BEECH COURTESY AMERICAN BEECH; NORTH FORK INN; CONOR HARRIGAN; SOUTHOLD GENERAL; PAT DUNFORD