

# Eat, Learn, Savor



## All things culinary at The Essex Resort & Spa

A multimillion-dollar renovation at The Essex, Vermont's Culinary Resort & Spa, took guest rooms down to the bare walls and cemented its mission since its 1989 opening: to educate chefs.

Wall to wall, floor to ceiling, everything in every room is new—furniture, paint, carpeting, linens, lighting, and bathroom décor.

Junction, an intimate, fine dining restaurant and winner of a 2017 Wine Spectator Award, has a new look too, as do the lobby and hallways. “It’s really a new product but in keeping with the tradition of The Essex,” says Tom Smith, director of sales and marketing.

### AN OUTSTANDING DESTINATION HOTEL

The 28-year-old hotel represents all things culinary. From the décor to the gardens to its Cook Academy, food infuses everything on the 18-acre property 25 minutes from Burlington. Grapevines frame The Tavern's patio, and hops cover the arched trellis at the entrance. Red Ursa kale, rainbow chard, bush beans, tomatoes, and herbs fill the gardens.











Above: The chef prepares vegetables grown on-site in the organic vegetable garden. The Essex harvests many of their own vegetables and herbs for their AAA Four Diamond, Wine Spectator Awarded Junction restaurant.

Right: Flourless chocolate cake is a favorite dessert at The Essex. Served with local raspberries, it's truly a mouthwatering treat.

Opposite top: A delicious gourmet cheese board presented on local granite. This cheese platter is far from ordinary!

Bottom: Your culinary experience begins immediately! Guest services agents serve up espresso and wine at check-in.



Penelope and Stewart, sibling Nigerian dwarf goats, graze at the edge of the lawn, while chickens peck in an adjacent pen, a nod to Vermont's agricultural industry and a subtle reminder of where food originates. Even the Chasworth Farm Soaps for sale in the spa carry out the theme. Choose from Lavender Thyme, Cocoa, Vermont Maple, and Our Farm Soap, made with egg yolks and honey.

The hotel, formerly known as The Inn at

Essex, began as a collaboration with the New England Culinary Institute. The Montpelier-based school wanted to open a Burlington-area campus, and it served as the hotel's food and

beverage operator for 10 years, giving budding chefs real-world experience.

But the goals of a culinary school and a hotel don't fully align, says Peter Edlmann,





co-owner of The Essex. “Our goal was to fill rooms and to provide good, consistent service.” NECI’s goal was to teach chefs. Peter explains, “You might get a great meal, but you could also get a meal [prepared] by a student who wasn’t properly supervised.” In addition, the costs fell to the inn, so the arrangement didn’t work. But it did leave the resort’s owners with a restaurant kitchen, a professional bakery, and a template for an outstanding destination hotel.

**GASTRONOMIC DELIGHTS ABOUND**

“The cooking classes, for us, were a natural,” Peter says. The focus has simply shifted

from the professional chef to the home cook. Amore Cucina, A Taste of Austria, Cooking with Vermont Beer, and crepe and baking workshops are all on the Cook Academy’s curriculum. And students enjoy the fruits of their labor, often in the form of a three- or four-course meal.

Couples who marry at The Essex come back on their anniversary to take classes, which, Tom Smith says, are also great for corporate team building. “There’s no better way to bond with people than when you’re cooking together.”

The academy also runs chocolate and wine tours and a fall leaf-peeping drive over back

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Above and right: A taste of what the fully renovated guest rooms have to offer. Culinary themed artwork and locally sourced amenities complement your stay at the culinary resort.

roads and past a covered bridge to a cider mill, where guests can sample apples, local cider, and the must-have, melt-in-your-mouth, local fall favorite—cider doughnuts.

Eat, learn, savor is the mantra of The Essex. Hired to carry the culinary concept throughout the entire remodel was Burlington interior designer Christine Burdick, who attended to every detail.

The experience starts in the lobby. Arriving guests check in next to a pastry case that holds house-made sandwiches, mini quiches, and an array of desserts enrobed in chocolate or bejeweled with berries. “The concept is like checking into a bakery,” Tom says. Now there’s a concept most people can embrace!



The wallpaper behind the counter looks like the French ticking aprons are made of. Guests can order a cappuccino or a glass of wine to sip in the lobby's culinary library or its buzzing Internet café. Across the lobby in the farm kitchen, a house chef may be cooking and handing out samples.

The carpeting in the lobby and hallway is a lacy mottle of plums and neutrals, suggesting a French country tablecloth, "something you would find in your grandmother's kitchen," Christine says. Guest room carpeting, a light neutral, might remind you of wicker baskets, while the headboards evoke butcher block.

Christine considered the 120 guest rooms, ranging from single king rooms to two-bedroom suites that sleep six, and divided them into three themes: The Art of Baking, featuring flour-colored walls and tea-towel-inspired throws; Harvest Fresh, which incorporates shades that suggest herbs, vegetables, and stone-ground wheat; and Spice Rack, popping with the vibrant hues of turmeric, coriander, and cayenne.

#### INSPIRATION SPRINGS FROM RECIPES

Varieties within each theme ensure a new experience for returning guests. Each room is inspired by a recipe from an Essex chef. It may be Roasted Heritage Carrots with Dill and Shallots, Italian Sausage with Fennel, Artichokes and Cabbage, or Easy Whole-Wheat Bread. The recipe hangs in the bathroom, its flavor infused throughout the room.

A Harvest Room may feature a large-scale head of lettuce, an artichoke, and a red onion mounted above beds. Spice Rack rooms might display large, silver measuring spoons holding curry powder and paprika, while a baking room may hold a sculpted rolling pin, wheat, oats, and cranberries. These are the works of Barre artist Mike Turner.

Maine photographer Lynn Karlin photographed kitchen utensils as part of her Tray Series, which Martin Feldman of Light-Works, Inc. in Winooski printed on metal to hang in the rooms. Torrey Valyou of New Duds in Winooski created custom artwork for bed scarves, pillows, and window treatments. His clean line drawings depict herbs, vegetables, whisks, and stand mixers.

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Christopher Boffoli, *Blowpop Jackhammer* (detail), 2012. The number of licks to the bubble gum center became a moot point with Big Jake around. C-print on metallic paper, 24 x 36 inches. Courtesy of Christopher Boffoli / Big Appetites.

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Right: This may look like a bakery, but it's the guest services desk where agents serve delicious treats and beverages for a memorable stay.

Below: Guests will enjoy a touch of whimsy at Junction restaurant.

Below right and bottom: Participants in The Essex's Cook Academy classes enjoy hands-on fun.

Opposite top: Professionally trained Junction chefs provide constant entertainment to diners.

Bottom: The Essex designs and bakes all of their pastries as well as beautiful wedding cakes on-site. Guests can view pastry chefs (Heather Wallace pictured) baking daily.



### A TOUCH OF WHIMSY

The concept for the restaurant, Junction, is Place Setting. “It sets the stage for sharing a bottle of wine, great conversation, and bites from a neighbor’s plate,” says Christine. One wall is painted black to resemble trivets while another is cork. Potato ricers are mounted in a circle on another wall. Whimsical light fixtures made from colanders and spoons hang in the private dining room.

Diners enjoying a Vermont cheese and charcuterie board or saffron risotto are advised to savor each bite—but between courses, look up. Place settings are mounted on the ceiling, ranging from chopsticks and a soup bowl to a sippy cup and a flip phone. The inspiration for that, Christine says, was a bad date. She and Steve Conant of Burlington’s Conant Metal & Light wanted to incorporate a fea-





ture for people struggling to carry on conversation. “If you’re stuck on a bad date,” she says, “you have something to talk about.” ☀

### The Essex Resort & Spa

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## ONLINE EXTRA



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