

# finedining

By Peter M. Gianotti  
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## Monsoon

FOOD ★★★★★

48 Deer Park Ave., Babylon  
631-587-4400  
monsoonny.com

COST \$\$-\$\$\$\$

SERVICE Excellent

AMBIENCE Very good

ESSENTIALS Dinner six days, from 5 p.m. on Monday and Wednesday to Saturday; and from 4 p.m. on Sunday. Lunch, Monday and Wednesday to Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Closed Tuesday. Weekend dinner reservations necessary; recommended weekdays. Credit cards accepted. Wheelchair access at side of building.



Executive chef Michael Wilson



Monsoon's home: the renovated Bank of Babylon building

PHOTOS BY DOUG YOUNG

**M**onsoon sweeps into Babylon. And it's where you want to eat now.

This electric, pan-Asian reverie is the newest and boldest table from the Bohlsen Restaurant Group, which also owns Prime in Huntington, H2O in Smithtown and both Verace and Tellers Chophouse in Islip.

Monsoon, like Tellers, rises in a grand, transformed bank building. The illuminated, gray-stone 1922 Bank of Babylon houses a two-level fantasy with a 35-foot ceiling clad in red tile and black lattice.

The show also goes on at a bright, 30-foot bar, and on an 8-by-12-foot video screen, which presents a made-for-Monsoon movie of Asian images,

complete with a martial arts tale — entertainment in case anyone thinks the vivid food isn't enough.

Michael and Kurt Bohlsen stirred up Monsoon after traveling in Asia. Their ambitious, clever, full-flavored adaptation of cuisines Chinese, Thai, Vietnamese and more comes alive via executive chef Michael Wilson. The colorful result reflects less Manhattan's Chinatown and Flushing's Asian repertoire than it does a precisely calibrated gauge of Long Island's appetite.

Wilson worked with BRG's former corporate chef, Cornelius Gallagher. He has been chef at Verace and a sous-chef at Prime. Here, Wilson oversees a kitchen sure to keep everyone's chopsticks on overdrive.

Begin with the outstanding vegetable dumplings, made with silky, translucent dough; and plump, puffy steamed buns, especially the pork or duck variety. Nibble on the kimchee pancake, sparked by spicy sesame mayonnaise. Refresh yourself with the shrimp-and-pork Vietnamese summer rolls, finished with chili-peanut sauce; and the green papaya salad, with shimmering cubes of aloe vera.

Enjoy the whimsy and the taste of kung pao monkfish, a delectable creation spiked with Sichuan chili sauce. Aromatic and rich: "millionaire's curry crab," colossal in every way. Shaking beef, a classic Vietnamese dish, effortlessly balances heat and herbs.

Wilson playfully sends out an updated, refined spin on chicken chow mein,

under a crisp dome of bean-thread noodles. But his big bird is a terrific one-course service of Beijing duck, easily the best in Nassau or Suffolk, from lacquered skin and tender meat to the steamed buns and accompaniments.

Pick from well-chosen wines, beers, sakes and very good cocktails, among them the vodka-driven Babylon Express, a green-tea mojito and a reborn Singapore Sling.

For dessert, the fanciful mango sundae, chocolate torte with a chili accent and cheesecake with a gingery crust precede the fortune cookies. A recent one confidently read: "It's all downhill from here." So, make a reservation.

A monsoon signals major change. Bank on it.



Dumplings in a sesame-soy sauce



Beijing duck for two



The Monsoon roll includes lobster



The dramatic, second-floor dining room

AVERAGE MEAL PRICE PER PERSON \$ = \$15 \$\$ = \$30 \$\$\$ = \$60 \$\$\$\$ = \$100

★★★★★ Exceptional ★★★★★ Excellent ★★★★★ Very good ★★★★★ Good none Poor

## Revisiting Prime

**S**ince it opened in 2006, Prime has been one of Huntington's destination restaurants, a big and buoyant sparkler. Gregg Lauletta became executive chef in 2008; he still runs the kitchen and keeps its three-star rating.

Steak and seafood remain the attractions, plus the grand waterfront site,

sharp design and perpetual buzz. They could lower the decibels, but maybe that's integral to the experience.

What definitely is: excellent filet mignon, strip steak and the Tellers rib eye, a reference to another eatery from the Bohlsen Restaurant Group, Tellers Chophouse in Islip. Even the "Wellington," the

cliche of pastry-encased filet mignon with mushroom duxelles, could make you reconsider this dish. You'll also enjoy the "millennium" lobster, with a flash of spice atop lush mashed potatoes. The house-made Tater Tots are superspuds, too.

Prime periodically adds "road trip"

American fare. Recently, Lauletta highlighted California with a delicious spring-onion custard, organic chicken and two fine desserts — a fig-and-almond tart with mascarpone cream, and an individual lemon-meringue pie.

117 New York Ave., Huntington; 631-385-1515 \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$ — PETER M. GIANOTTI

# explore LI

## 2012's top 20 RESTAURANTS

OUR CRITICS RANK THEIR FAVORITES

### FINEDINING

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The last time two restaurants earned four stars during 12 months in Newsday, the Berlin Wall came down, Harry met Sally and a gallon of gas was 97 cents.

So, 2012 stands out for diners across Long Island, and not just for Monsoon in Babylon and Topping Rose House in Bridgehampton. The Plaza Café in Southampton was upgraded to 3½ stars. And a record nine restaurants earned three stars, including an overdue one to 24-year-old celeb-magnet Nick & Toni's in East Hampton under chef Joseph Realmuto.

In this year of so many challenges, economic and otherwise, you could count on finding a stellar meal.

Here are my Top 10 new or remade kitchens.

#### 1. Monsoon

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Babylon  
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monsoony.com

**COST** \$\$-\$\$\$\$

**WHY** For its electric, pan-Asian reverie, set in a dramatically remade bank building.

Monsoon reinvigorated dining in Babylon. It's the latest showcase from the Bohlsen Restaurant Group, which also operates Prime in Huntington, H2O in Smithtown, and both Tellers Chophouse and Verace in Islip. The chef is Michael

#### ON THE COVER

Salmon rolls at J. Michaels Tuscan Steakhouse in Northport



PHOTO BY DOUG YOUNG

Kung pao monkfish at Monsoon

Wilson, a Bohlsen veteran. And the style is as vivid as the food. Recommended: dumplings, steamed buns, kung pao monkfish, curry crab, shaking beef, chocolate torte, cheese-cake and the best Beijing duck in Nassau and Suffolk.

#### HOW WE RATE THEM

★★★★★ Exceptional   ★★★★★ Excellent   ★★★ Very good   ★ Good   none Poor