

Stockbridge: Red Lion Inn
A cool hand in the kitchen
Dining Out



Brian J. Alberg is the new executive chef at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge. Photo by Ben Garver

STOCKBRIDGE -- "I always wanted to come back to the Berkshires," said newly appointed Red Lion Inn Executive Chef Brian Alberg. "There were only three or four properties I would have considered and this was one of them so when the opportunity presented itself, I made the call."

Red Lion general manager Bruce Finn nodded his head vigorously. He had previously stated that he and owner Nancy Fitzpatrick were delighted to have as a member of their team someone with Brian's broad experience in upscale New England cuisine and proven ability to cater large functions.

A native of nearby Beacon, N.Y., Alberg started making "omelets with my mom" at the age of 9 and at 14 went to work as an apprentice under chef-owner Jean Morel at the l'Hostellerie Bressane in Hillsdale, N.Y.

Alberg's job was preparing cold salads but by the time he left the inn two years later he was making souffls and gateaux.

Although to some people, including customers, the late Jean Morel could be abrupt, to Alberg he was "loving and fatherly."

"He called me 'my little chef,'" said Alberg, "and he became quite annoyed when I told him I didn't want to go to France to train."

While still in high school, Alberg received early acceptance to the Culinary Institute of America and graduated from there at the age of 19.

There then ensued the wanderings of a chef determined to obtain greater experience and expertise in his craft and steps upward in his career.

Alberg started as sous chef at the New Yorker Restaurant in Millerton, N.Y., and after two years shifted to the Underhill Inn in Hillsdale, N.Y., where he designed the kitchen and laid down the menu.

Two years later he moved on to the Egremont Inn and then the Old Inn on the Green before moving out of the area to Dudley's Restaurant in Westchester, which was only two blocks from Sing Sing prison.

He said he did not remember cooking for any famous criminals.

Escaping Westchester and embracing biblical example, Alberg moved on to the Saybrook Inn & Spa in Saybrook, Conn., where he stayed for seven years.

In 2001, he opened the restaurant in the new Marriott Hotel in Hartford, Conn., where he was executive chef until coming to the Berkshires.

A very articulate man, the 36-year-old Alberg stirs your taste buds when he is discussing cuisine. He said there is no real title for the cuisine he proposes for the Red Lion and its subsidiary eateries.

"It will be traditional and New England in keeping with the history of the Red Lion and the area," he said, "plus the emphasis will be on fresh ingredients. It will, of course, reflect what the ownership wants."

When asked what dishes might be introduced for the fall menu, Alberg said he was thinking of a slow roasted veal ragout with white truffle cavatelli and maybe a version of bouillabaisse and for a vegetarian dish perhaps a white polenta cake with chanterelle mushrooms.

What about the Atkins diet?

"There will be some portions of Atkins," he said, "because Atkins is not just a fad anymore. On some dishes we will cut back on the starches by using celery root, for instance. I like celery root. I use it a lot. It is tough to categorize cuisine nowadays because chefs have everything at their fingertips. You can get razor clams and Buddha lemons..."

"What are Buddha lemons?" he was interrupted.

"It's a fruit vegetable and looks like a hand with fingers," he said. "It is totally usable as zest."

Alberg began his new job at the height of the season and is currently serving 800 to 1,000 meals a day at the Red Lion Inn and 200 a day at Jack's Restaurant in Housatonic. However, since the Red Lion hopes to expand its wedding and banquet business, this is only practice for when bigger times arrive.

You can tell when conversing with this experienced chef that no matter how hot it gets in the kitchen things are going to be cool.

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