



Peas & Carrots  
boneless rabbit saddle with Frenched rack



Goat Cheese Ravioli

# dining out

Experience New  
Heights in Fine  
Dining at

## *Dans Restaurant*

By Jon Pacific  
Photos by Heidi Reuter

Reading's premier fine dining establishment now gives you twice as much to enjoy. Dans Restaurant at 11th and Penn in downtown Reading has recently renovated its second floor to expand upon its private dining services.

"We were getting so many requests for private functions that we decided to open up the second floor rather than inconvenience our regular customers," says owner William "Bill" Woolworth. This is the first major change since Bill and his partner M.D. Monir took over the place in February of 2006. The new private dining area is composed of several rooms and

allows Dans to host parties of eight to 50. "We are very fortunate to have a strong customer base that understands fine food and wine," explains Bill. It's that base that has allowed them to be one of the few restaurants that's expanding these days.

But that doesn't mean that the staff at Dans rests on their laurels. Their combined experience sets them apart. Bill, the director of risk management for the First National Bank of Chester County, met his partner Monir when he was working in New York City at Jean George's "V" Steak House. While having dinner at Dans about four years ago, they discussed if owners Dan Smith and Dan Gallagher would ever sell the restaurant. Little did they know, they would be the new owners within six months.

Bill and Monir's first major accomplishment was employing Chef Jason Hook. A Wilson High School graduate, Jason started cooking when he was just 16. While in culinary school at Northampton College he worked at the Ritz Carlton and Le Bec Fin in Philadelphia. After graduating from culinary school he went to work for the Four Seasons in Paris. At the tender age of 20 he was appointed to the high honor of Designated Trainer. "That was probably my biggest accomplishment in my younger years," says Jason, but that was only the beginning. He then went on to work at a total of three of the five four-star restaurants in New York City: The Four Seasons; Sous Chef at Jean George; and finished up his time in New York with a two year stint at Per Se under Alain Ducasse.

The pride Bill and Monir have in their chef is apparent. "We repeatedly hear from our customers about our consistency of quality," says Bill. "For me, as an owner, when I'm with a customer and the product is as good as it is I never have to feel nervous about putting a plate down." The trio has been working together for many years and the expansion of the restaurant is a sign of their growth as restaurateurs.



Diver Sea Scallop



Yellowtail Tuna Sashimi



"Everyone works together so well now," says Jason. "I couldn't do what I do without all the support of the staff, but it's taken us three years to get to a point where we're really satisfied with what

we do. I held back a little bit when we first started, but now I feel like I don't have to pull any punches."

Bill recounts a conversation with a new customer from a few weeks earlier who had been at one of New York's top restaurants the night before visiting Dans. "There's something wrong here," the customer commented. "We were at Le Bernardin last night and spent three times as much, and your food and service are better."

Jason's menu is constantly changing. "I try to never repeat an order for a regular customer," Jason says, "and we've done over 200 menus in just three years with eight or nine items on each menu." Bill says, "We do wine and food pairings several times a year.

It really shows off what Jason can do. Although everything Jason prepares is fantastic, the filet, salmon, duck and scallops are our most popular items."

Chef Jason has been working on the spring menu for months, and it is packed with seasonal items from local farms whenever possible. Jason tells us, "I get my ideas from the market. Sometimes the final dish will be completely different from what it started out as. I'll make three or four versions of the dish before I settle on the final product, but that's just part of the creative process." A perfect example is the new rabbit dish he calls peas & carrots. "This one started out with the baby carrots," Jason explains. It's a delicate Frenched rack of rabbit along with the trussed boneless saddle, with wilted pea shoots and vanilla bean baby carrot veloute.

Another sure hit is the yellow-tail tuna sashimi. This sashimi is set apart by its toasted peanut-brittle crust and ginger-tamarind ketchup, and it is served over local Creekside Farms greens. One of Jason's most popular items, which has evolved and made it back onto the spring menu, is the goat cheese ravioli. Made in-house, these savory ravioli are adorned with smoked breadcrumbs, tomato confit and a quince, caramel and basil puree.

Dans also boasts one of the best Sunday brunches in town. As expected, there are twists on classic brunch dishes such as their beef & eggs, sunny side up eggs over filet tips and potato-onion hash. There's also the popular macaroni & cheese, which consists of pecorino-Romano, asiago, pancetta and white truffle oil, or for those who don't like to choose, Dans offers a four-course tasting menu.

So if you're one of the few who have not been to Dans lately, no need to wait for a special occasion. Dans will make one for you.

**Dans Restaurant**  
 1049 Penn St., Reading  
 610.373.2075  
[www.dansrestaurant.com](http://www.dansrestaurant.com)  
 Wed. - Sat. 5-9:30 p.m.  
 Sun. Brunch 12-3 p.m.  
 Sun. Dinner 3-7 p.m.