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FEATURED

Robert's Steakhouse at Hard Rock is where to go for great beef

By SCOTT CRONICK Oct 3, 2018 Updated 3 hrs ago



Robert's Steakhouse Executive Chef Will Savarese knows his way around a steak, above, but can also create a beautiful and amazing tuna la plancha, right.

Edward Lea / Staff Photographer

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There is steak. And there is steak from Robert's Steakhouse.

Sure, there are plenty of great steakhouses in Atlantic City, but only one steakhouse in town goes through the meticulous, laborious and expensive process of dry aging their meat the way Robert's does.

Most restaurants age their meat 21 to 28 days — and many are wet aged. But Robert's, the exclusive steakhouse inside the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City, ages its prime meat — delivered several times a week from New York City — at least six weeks, taking the meat to another level that may be rivaled regionally only by the legendary Peter Luger's in New York.

Each cut — from the filet (\$49 8 ounces, \$55 12 ounces) to the bone-in N.Y. strip (\$53) to the ribeye (\$125) or porterhouse (\$110) for two — are hand cut by their in-house butcher in a refrigerated butcher shop before it's broiled at about 1,800 degrees, simply seasoned with salt and pepper and finished with imported olive oil and fresh herbs.

Executive Chef Will Savarese puts it best: "We let the meat do the talking."

He's not kidding. Those who love aged meat call the flavor "funky." Others call that perfect meat sensation "umami." Others simply call it delicious.

"It's about what we buy — it's prime ... the best 2 percent of the beef in the country," Savarese says. "Plus the circulation and controls, the airflow and humidity, how we age it and how long we age it and the process we go through makes it as special as it is. I always say I stand behind our product and our steak 100 percent. The fact that I can jump on the bandsaw and cut you a T-bone or cut what we need on a daily basis makes all of the difference. When you cut that aged meat and you see the beautiful color — and it has that soft texture — there's nothing like it."



5 things to know about Modest Mouse

Even though Robert's has been in Atlantic City since 2012 — with the exception of the closing period as the Taj transformed into the Hard Rock — Savarese says educating people about aged meat is still a challenge sometimes.

"People come in and say they want their steak bloody," Savarese says. "But I tell them maybe we aren't the place for them because the dry-aging process removes that moisture. But if you give it a shot and realize how fresh the meat is — we only cut it when it's ready — then we eventually win them over. Most other steakhouses are getting their steaks pre-cut or cryovaced, and I guarantee they lose flavor and moisture as they are left in the bag with blood. With the dry-aging process, there is no blood running out of the meat, but what you are left with is a super tender cut of meat with a flavor to die for. When it comes off the pass and you smell the meat and the char, there really is nothing else like it."

When Robert's opened inside Trump Taj Mahal in 2012, it changed the way people looked at steakhouses in Atlantic City. Owner Robert Gans wanted to bring a standalone version of his popular New York steakhouse to Atlantic City, vowing Robert's Steakhouse would be one of the top steakhouses in town.

Now, six years and millions of dollars later, Robert's Steakhouse is back open. And Gans' lofty statement has come true.

As good as the steaks are, Robert's is about much more than just its steaks. It's a tremendous overall dining experience, from its knowledgeable, professional servers to its amazing food to its overall appearance ... a 200-seat masculine steakhouse that is modern yet pays homage to traditional steakhouses with its leather banquettes and dark woods. From its swank, cozy lounge area to its rippled glass louvers, a glass-enclosed fireplace and dramatic intersecting ceiling beams, it's easy to see where the millions were spent.

As beautiful as Robert's is, it's the food that keeps getting people back in the doors, and Savarese is the backbone of the kitchen.

Confident and demanding, the executive chef's passion is contagious as he passes on his amazing culinary experience that includes working alongside some of the best chefs in the business such as Daniel Boulud at New York's Le Cirque, Charlie Palmer at Aureole New York and David Burke.



After verdict, friends continue to grieve for April Kauffman

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"I started out as a young kid in the mecca of French cuisine in New York," Savarese says. "I became saucier at Le Cirque and never looked for a job since. The key was to learn every day. You learn that edge and you give back what you learn. Some people think I am arrogant but for me it's just about running a kitchen properly for Bob Gans and my customers. I run the place like it's my own. I always do the best I can."

Savarese's French training can be seen throughout Robert's menu, mixed with American steakhouse sensibilities.

Appetizer standouts include the Asian-style tuna tartar (\$19) with quail egg for creaminess, sesame oil, diced ginger, scallion and Sriracha with sourdough toast; American Wagyu beef carpaccio (\$36) — possibly the best carpaccio in South Jersey — with arugula salad, truffle oil and parmesan; and a Maryland crab cake (\$19) with red pepper aioli that is all crab, no filler.

Split a pasta for an appetizer, including bucatini with crabmeat (\$27), citrus, chili and breadcrumbs for nice texture, or the rigatoni with spicy sausage (\$22), fried eggplant and fresh ricotta.

And while ordering a steak is mandatory, make sure someone strays from the beef and tries the brick-roasted free range chicken (\$32), which is as good as a chicken dish can get thanks to its crispy skin and simple sauce of butter, lemon and roasted garlic.

Robert's, like any good steakhouse, also has some killer seafood, including a gorgeously presented tuna a la plancha (\$34) with chick pea puree, black olives and marinated feta that screams Mediterranean done right; seared sea scallops (\$36) with citrus and roasted baby carrots; and herb and caper-crusting tournedos of salmon (\$33) with braised endive, fingerling potatoes, young spinach and sauce ver jus.

Even the sides (\$12) will blow your mind, such as creamed spinach that is as light as a soufflé; double-smoked Neuske's bacon; potato gratin with bacon; mac and cheese; beer-battered onion rings; and the signature everything fries, which are like a New York-style everything bagel but on hand-cut french fries.

Savarese says Robert's is better than ever since reopening in the Hard Rock, and he says it will get even better.

"Bob Gans had a vision, and we are making that vision come true," Savarese says. "Since reopening in the Hard Rock, the place has just exploded. We definitely underestimated how successful we would be when we reopened, and we are truly grateful to everyone who has come in and dined with us. We are our own toughest critics — we stand by everything we do — and when we see all of the people coming in here to dine every day, we want to make sure they have the greatest experience. We are glad to be back."

Happy hour

Robert's Steakhouse has one of the best happy hours in Atlantic City. Offered 5 to 6:30 p.m. Mondays to Fridays, the menu features plenty of reduced-price food and beverages, but the must-have item is Robert's Signature Burger.

Normally on the regular menu for \$29, happy hour goers can have it for just \$15. Made with Robert's special blend of prime beef, your choice of cheese, lettuce, tomato, onion and served with smoked paprika aioli on a fresh-baked brioche roll, it's one of the best burgers in Atlantic City.

"We grind the meat ourselves every day," Savarese says. "We just started grinding the meat daily to make sure it's as fresh as possible. It's a lot of work, but that daily grind really makes a difference."

Other happy hour menu items include house-made spiced nuts medley and everything french fries and Old Bay chips for \$5; \$6 items include fried calamari with cherry peppers and spicy marinara, hummus with naan bread, homemade beef chili; \$8 items include mac and cheese with seasoned breadcrumbs, shrimp skewers with Sriracha glaze and seared tuna with grated garlic and ginger; and \$1.50 East Coast oysters.

On the beverage side, you can choose between eight wines by the glass for \$8, well drinks for \$7, \$4 domestic beers, \$5 imported and craft beers, and \$8 special cocktails.

DJ Skyler Madison performed at The Pool After Dark

Dj Skyler Madison performs at The Pool After Dark at Harrah's Resort on Friday September 28, 2018 in Atlantic City, New Jersey.

Photo: Mike Manger /PhotoGraphics

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ATLANTIC_CITY_NJ_September_28: Dj Skyler Madison performs at The Pool After Dark at Harrah's Resort on Friday September 28, 2018 in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Photo: Mike Manger /PhotoGraphics

Tom Briglia

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ATLANTIC_CITY_NJ_September_28: D The Pool After Dark at Harrah's Reso in Atlantic City, New Jersey. Photo: M

ROBERT'S STEAKHOUSE

Where: Hard Rock Hotel & Casino Atlantic City

When: Open 5:30 to 10:30 p.m. Sundays through Thursdays, 5:30 to 11 p.m. Fridays, 5 to 11:30 p.m. Saturdays

How much: Appetizers range in price from \$19 to \$36; salads \$12 to \$14; pasta \$22 to \$27; steaks \$49 to \$140; entrees \$29 to \$59; fish and seafood \$33 to \$36; sides \$12; desserts \$12.

Services: Major credit cards accepted. Liquor license. Disabled access through front door. Private parties. Lounge area. Eat in. Takeout. No kids menu. No smoking.

More info: Call 855-500-7623 or go to RobertsAtlanticCity.com.

Between you and me: Robert's offers one of the nicest private rooms in the city. With seating up to 30 people, the room, located in the rear behind the wine case, boasts gray leather walls and an audio-visual set-up that includes two flat-screen TVs and an iPad that controls all of the room's functions, so events from business meetings to dinners can be held. The room is also soundproofed so the dining room can't hear the party, and the party can't hear the dining room.



5 things to know about Firewaters Saloon

