



The team at the newly renovated Exeter Inn and Epoch Restaurant and Bar is ready to open Thursday, June 26. From left, sous chef David Harbilas, chef Stephen Harding, General Manager Tom Petot and Sales Manager Tom O'Gorman
.Lara Bricker Photo

Exeter News-Letter

Epoch Restaurant and Bar set to open at Exeter Inn

Renovations, new restaurant complete

By [Lara Bricker](#)

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EXETER — After a several million dollar makeover, the Epoch Restaurant and Bar inside the Exeter Inn will finally open for business on Thursday, June 26.

"It's just going to be fabulous," said Tom O'Gorman, sales manager for the Exeter Inn and its newly transformed restaurant and bar. "The place to be seen at is the bar in the Exeter Inn."

The restaurant and bar's opening is the last part of a \$5 million renovation to the entire inn undertaken by the new owners, Hay Creek Hospitality, which bought the historic inn in 2007. The company also owns the Centennial Hotel in Concord.

The restaurant, formerly known as the Terrace Restaurant, was renamed The Epoch to symbolize a new era and beginning. That era includes not only a new look but also a new menu and chef.

Chef Stephen Harding, who most recently worked at the Wentworth-by-the-Sea Hotel, brings enthusiasm and experience to the menu, along with his sous chef David Harbilas, who previously worked at the Three Chimneys Inn in Durham.

"We are delighted to welcome a chef with Stephen's energy, knowledge of the local area and passion for food," said Exeter Inn General Manager Tom Petot. "Stephen brings a wealth of experience and is eager to establish Epoch among the most noteworthy restaurants on the Seacoast."

Harding was hired and got to work on the initial menu two days before Thanksgiving and is eager to serve.

"We just want to get cooking," Harding said. "Everybody's really excited."

The Epoch will feature more than 100 wines and an upscale menu featuring local produce and cheeses, as well as Kobe beef and seafood.

"Epoch will offer our guests the ambiance and culinary sophistication of a New York restaurant at reasonable New Hampshire prices," Harding said. "Our menus will often change daily, to allow our kitchen team to create from the freshest ingredients obtained directly from local fishermen and growers. Signature items like corn encrusted lobster-crab cakes, fennel seared Chilean sea bass or our succulent hoisin-grilled Nieman Farms pork chop should appeal to nearly any palate."

The entrance to the inn, as well as the bar and restaurant have all been changed in the renovation. The former lobby and registration desk, which was on the left upon entering the inn's front door, was transformed into an enormous U-shaped, marble-topped bar. With the removal of a wall, the bar now overlooks the restaurant below, which aims to create a flow between the two areas. A comfortable lounge that includes deep red window seats, was created in the area that once housed the inn's registration desk.

"It's not pretentious, it's very relaxing," O'Gorman said of the lounge.

Guests can walk down to the restaurant on red stairs, which will be lit from underneath, where they can dine at any number of tables or several new banquet seats, which will sit slightly higher than the tables. They can also enter from a main entrance off Pine Street where they will be greeted by maitre d' Shawn Richardson. Gorman described the decorating style, which includes warm hues of red, patterned wood floors and patterned brown cushions, as an intimate Ralph Lauren-type decor. But while it is more contemporary, the inn's new owners wanted to hold on to the historic architecture of the property.

"We tried to preserve as much as we could," O'Gorman said. "We're invested in maintaining the property and ensuring the property is always moving forward."

Off the dining room, the Daniel Webster Room, often used for weddings and functions, now has the use of the grand hallway, which includes intimate tables and chairs. That hallway is more private as it is not directly open to the bar as it was previously. There is also a private dining area off the back of the main dining room that can be reserved for a group of 10 to 12 people.

The menu features a smaller "nosh"-type section for those who want a light meal in the bar. The nosh menu includes Kobe beef sliders, crab and cheddar potato skins and an imported cheese plate, which will change on a regular basis. Harding recently acquired a locally produced brie from the Sandwich Creamery. "It's probably one of the best bries I've had," he said.

The restaurant will also offer breakfast and lunch and expects to begin serving brunch toward the end of the summer.

AN EPOCH START

The Epoch Restaurant and Bar inside the Exeter Inn opens on Thursday, June 26. For more information go to www.theexeterinn.com.