



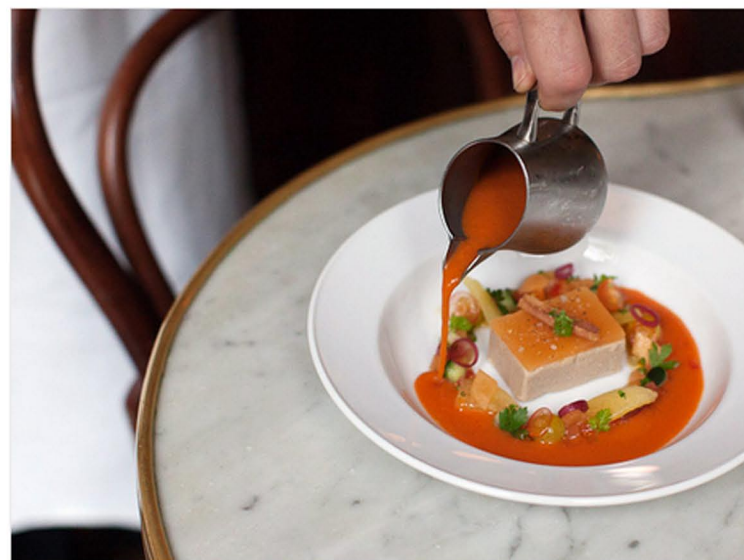
Carey's Favorite New NYC Restaurants of 2012

You know a restaurant opening is an important one when, a few months later, you can't imagine New York without it. 2012, despite plenty of closures even before a catastrophic storm that crippled, closed, or delayed so many restaurants, was a fantastic year for eating in the city. Here are my favorites of the year: not just full-service restaurants, but the odd bakery, cocktail bar, and Mediterranean lunch joint thrown in for good measure.



"I wanted to have that whole section be something like an oyster tower," says Stafford-Hill, "with everything laid out on chilled ice. Everything in its shell. But I wanted it all dressed—there's no work to be done, everything's already composed for you." So a scallop served in-shell appears with a shellfish consomme and dollop of tomato granita, graced with olive oil and espelette pepper; sea urchin from Marin County, "so intense I wanted to tone it down a bit," is wound with thinly sliced watermelon and cucumber.

"I probably do more with garnishes than some chefs would," says Stafford-Hill, "but it's restrained. It's still all about the amazing seafood we're getting."



The "small plates" are more sizable, composed dishes rather than seafood bites. Fish and seafood remain the focus, of course, but not to the exclusion of all else. Poached tuna arrives in a sea of summer gazpacho. Sweetbreads join langoustines.

Take a look through the [slideshow](#) for a tour of Maison Premiere's new menu—a rainbow of seafood with a boozy surprise at the end.

 SLIDESHOW: First Look: The Full Menu at Maison Premiere in

[Photos: Alice Gao]

Note: First Looks give previews of new dishes, drinks, and menus we're curious about. Since they are arranged photo shoots and interviews with restaurants, we do not make critical evaluations or recommendations.

"We have an oyster list, and an absinthe list—we work in lists here," says Jared Stafford-Hill, the new chef at Williamsburg's Maison Premiere. The restaurant has been open for over a year but only launched a full seafood-centric small plates menu last week. "So I got together a list of every seafood I like, including ones you don't really see many of, and crafted a menu out of that."

The elegantly designed salon, drinking parlor in the front, and vine-enclosed garden out back has long been a popular spot for its [absinthe list](#) and [\\$1 oyster happy hour](#). But even though some of us could make a meal of a few strong cocktails and a dozen oysters or two (I'm raising my hand here), Stafford-Hill's menu makes a full meal possible. Dishes range from two-biters to near-entrees, with a whole section devoted to seafood "chilled on ice."