

# Steakhouse with a Point of View—NYC’s Porter House Bar & Grill By John Mariani

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**John Mariani, Contributor** Publisher of Mariani’s Virtual Gourmet

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Photo by Francesco Tonelli

By a wide margin, when out-of-town friends ask me where to dine in NYC—which is like asking what animals one should see in Kenya—they mean either an Italian restaurant or a steakhouse. (Oddly enough, the latter grew from Italian-American roots back in the 1930s, when midtown saw the emergence of steakhouses whose owners always included Italian food on the menu.)

It would be easy enough to bring up iconic places like Peter Luger’s in Brooklyn, but it’s almost impossible to get a table at a decent hour there and, aside from the quality of the beef, there’s nothing else about the place to recommend it. There’s Spark’s, but the management has an attitude problem towards newcomers, as can be the case at the original Smith & Wollensky. And I’m certainly not going to recommend a chain steakhouse out of New Orleans or Dallas, however good they might be, to a visitor to NYC. Thus, for a whole lot more reasons, I recommend Porter House Bar & Grill, which overall has the same high quality of food as the best of them, cordial hospitality overseen by g-m Alex Kurland, wine and cocktail service under Brad Nugent, and an ambiance that is unique, even in Manhattan. PHBG is set above Columbus Circle and Central Park, with a view all the way across the skyscrapers on Central Park South and those that line Fifth Avenue. Four flights up in the vast Time-Warner Center (which also houses Per Se, A Voce, Masa, Bouchon, and Landmarc), Porter House is celebrating ten years in business with a dining room packed for lunch and dinner daily.



After all those years, the owners, who include chef-and-managing partner Michael Lomonaco, decided the place needed a facelift, without destroying all that was quite beautiful about the place. A year ago Jeffrey Beers International, its original designers, re-did the lounge (above) in a somewhat more sophisticated style, with a floor-to-ceiling glass wine cabinet and leather panel. The broad and deep main dining room was done up with polished nickel finishes, bronze tinted mirrors, and pearlescent wall coverings with dark blue accents throughout. They also tacked on “Bar & Grill” to the name.

Lomonaco has fiddled a little with the menu—clams Casino are gone, so is the hamburger, but the marrow bones are still there and now a poached two-pound lobster—but most of its classic steakhouse items are intact, perfected over the last decade by a chef who has never been interested in simply flipping beefsteaks and frying onion rings. Indeed, contrary to most NYC steakhouses, where chefs are rarely known to the public or only have their names on the door, at Porter House Lomonaco is on premises and has been for all the restaurant’s existence. Prices have of course risen but not by that much at a time when beef prices are through the roof.



The chilled seafood platter (\$97 to \$125) teems with lobster, oysters, clams, shrimp and King crab, and the jumbo lump crab cake with a horseradish-mustard sauce (\$25) is as good as any in a competitive market. If you really can't do without facsimile caviar, there is American ossetra with blini and accompaniments (\$125). There are three pastas listed, and I'm very happy I ordered the excellent *spaghetti alla gitarra* (\$24), whose spicy tomato and basil coated every strand of the perfectly cooked pasta. With a name like Porter House, the stakes (no pun intended) are high, especially since Peter Luger built its rep on that cut of strip and filet mignon. The meat is USDA Prime, of course, and its true flavor shows in the impeccable searing and maintaining an interior medium-rare warmth in the porterhouse for two (\$124). The same goes for the on-the-bone strip (\$63) and the delicious veal chop (\$59), which comes with sage-glazed gnocchi, baby onions and thyme. The lamb chops are from Colorado (\$57), the porterhouse pork chop from Niman Ranch (\$43).



PHBG also offers Japanese wagyu (12 ounces \$185) and American wagyu-style (\$96), but I, among many beef lovers, have no appetite for such absurdities. On the side go for either the nonpareil onion rings or the creamed spinach enhanced with bacon. PHBG's wine list is very well chosen. It's got its trophy bottlings, but doesn't go in for ten vintages of hyped California cult wines (although someone sometime bought a helluva lot of Williams Selyem). There are plenty of wines by the glass (\$12-\$95), and four pages of half-bottles. Mark-ups overall are steakhouse high, but you can find some good buys, like Jean Marc Brocard Chablis Premier Cru 2013 for \$85. It's true, aching temptation to decide among Porter House's warm cookie plate (\$12), an ice cream fudge sundae with maple walnuts (\$12) or seven-layer South Carolina coconut cake (\$14), all meant to be shared. If you live in or nearby NYC, PHBG is a terrific choice to take someone who is not, and for those coming in on their own, you won't find a better New York state of mind than dining here.

*Porter House Bar & Grill is open daily for lunch and dinner,*  
**PORTER HOUSE BAR & GRILL**, 10 Columbus Circle, 212-823-9500.