

WESTCHESTER MAGAZINE

For Insatiable Westchester Diners
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EAT. Drink. Post.

EDP: Pinch, Alain Ducasse's Casino Restaurant at Yonkers Raceway

Free Corn Roast at Ridge Hill; Blissing Out on Brazilian Cheese Puffs at Mambo 64; French Wine Month at Legal Sea Foods

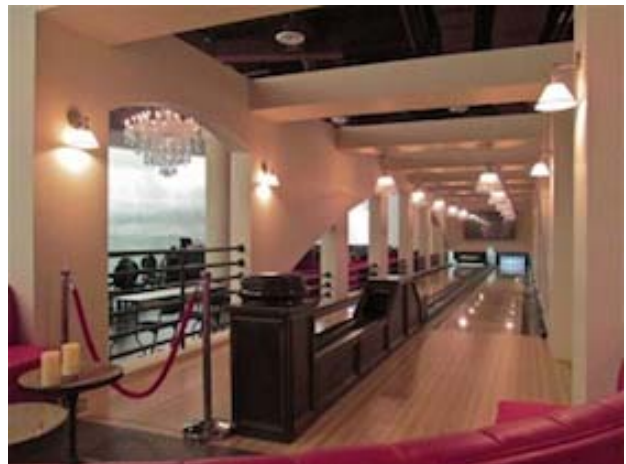
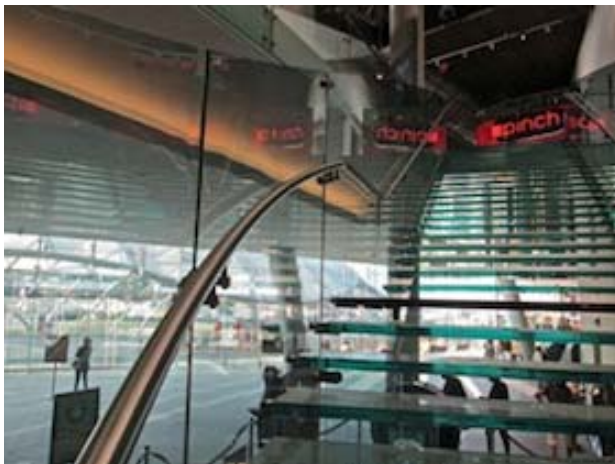
By Leslie-Anne Brill

First Taste: Pinch

Even if you don't normally go to casinos—heck, maybe *especially* if you don't—you might get a kick out of month-old [Pinch](#) at the renovated Empire City Casino at Yonkers Raceway. You might go because Alain Ducasse backs it. You might go for the unusual setting. But you could go just for the beer: we're talking 100 New York craft beers on tap! Eventually, you'll even be able to pour your own beer from a tableside tap system.

But if you're not a casino rat, your challenge, should you choose to accept it, will be finding the place. We lucked into a parking spot within walking distance, but the lot is huge, with a shuttle bus, and not much signage yet. There's valet parking near Central Avenue, but we landed elsewhere and had to walk the length of the casino—about the size of Connecticut—to find Pinch.

But the sights along the way! Harness racers zipping along the racetrack, a dizzying array of slot machines, a stage show—are we still in Westchester?—and finally, a sweeping transparent staircase leading up to Pinch's neon sign. Outside the door is the craft cocktail lounge, Alley 801, with its own two-lane bowling alley.



Maybe casinos are old hat to you, but Pinch boasts many novel touches, including a glassed-in keg room suspended from the ceiling over an open kitchen. A blend of retro-inspired fixtures and modern design makes the most of high ceilings and a mezzanine perch. Even with 245 seats (some closely packed), getting in isn't a given: early on a Thursday night it started out busy and became downright crowded. Signs or no, people are finding this place (mainly casinogoers, I'll wager).

The beverage menu arrives on an iPad (cute!), but you order through your waiter. And let's talk about the beer: everything from Fire Island Lighthouse Ale to Jonas Bronck Kingsbridge Kolsch. Four tasting paddles are available, and there's a growler shop. If you're not a beer geek, check out the mostly American wine list, or the cocktails for "Non Beer Lovers."



First Tastes aren't critical reviews, because it's too soon to judge, but we arrived hoping for great food: executive chef Fabienne Eymard is a Ducasse veteran who's also worked at Taillevent in Paris. The menu is mostly updated classics, and you can expect to eat well. A standout was the gratinéed onion soup with a lager shooter: everything you could want in an onion soup—and then there's the beer, an ideal chaser. We enjoyed a large half portion of Cobb salad, and had to ask whether we had indeed received only a side of the signature mac and cheese with ham. Atlantic Cod Brandade was excellent, the flaky fish served with capers, tomatoes, cooked lemon, and delightfully rich croutons, on a bed of "potato purée" that turned out to be a classic preparation containing salted cod (they can also do it without, if that's not a taste you're used to). Looking around, we might also have done well to order from the seafood bar or try the tasting of three ceviches, and the burger is clearly a crowd favorite. High rollers might opt for rib eye for two or a shellfish tower for six.

Casino restaurants aren't known for being quiet, and this is no exception. But loud rock doesn't bother this crowd—and anyway, it covers some of the casino hubbub (you know, cha-chinging, PA announcements). More potentially bothersome: slow service, with the friendly and knowledgeable staff spread too thin. But we're betting they'll scale up to success.

The iPad menu makes another appearance with dessert choices, including tart Tatin, sophisticated s'mores, and beer floats (if you need an excuse to have more beer!). We adored the Key lime pie cup—and PS, it's not a pie: pieces of meringue atop layers of magnificent lime ice cream and flaky homemade sugar cookies, with a bottom layer of quite tart lemon lime gelatin—wow. We'll be returning to check out those beer pull booths, and lunch, when it starts.

