

By Alina Dizik

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Suburbanites have long trekked downtown to dine at buzzy city restaurants. Now some of those restaurants are coming to them, while trying to keep that urban feel intact.

[To attract diners](#) who work increasingly from home or [who have moved out of the city](#), some destination restaurants are planting flags in the suburbs to offer a more polished dining experience without the parking hassles or long trips home. They aim to offer serious wine lists and pricey ingredients that stand out against competition often consisting of chains or more casual dining.

“There’s a lot of pent-up demand,” says David Rekhson, co-founder of DineAmic Hospitality, a Chicago-based restaurant group that opened its first two suburban offerings this year. He estimates that a quarter of diners to his 10 city restaurants come from the suburbs.

This past summer, Mr. Rekhson opened Bar Siena in Skokie, Ill., a second location for his Italian restaurant that launched in Chicago’s West Loop in 2015. He followed with Violi, a Greek restaurant in Oak Brook, Ill., this fall. Its sister restaurant is year-old Lyra, also in Chicago’s West Loop. At Violi, the lights dim and the restaurant turns into a supper club each evening around 10:30 p.m., a tradition that also happens at Lyra in the city.

“Even though we have a little bit of a larger footprint, we’ve chosen to emulate that downtown feel,” he says. The suburban version, which sits in a mall, includes a D.J. booth, valet parking and a large bar area.



A server brings water to a table at the suburban Bar Siena, located in a shopping center in Skokie, Ill.

Taylor Daugherty opened Canard this year in Oregon City, Ore., as an offshoot of his nearby Portland brasserie. Mr. Daugherty wanted to expand to a suburban location that offers an outdoor area with a quality wine list. (The list is more extensive in the Portland location.)

He tweaked the menu to offer what he calls “heartier, homier portions” while using larger serving plates. He also swapped out an adventurous duck dish for a more casual Salisbury steak. To make local families feel welcome, a kids’ section is now printed on the front of each menu. Business is comparable to the Portland location, he says.

There is less dining competition in the new location, and it draws families from a larger geographic area, he says, adding, “Sometimes when you open in the city, it can feel like a flash in the pan.”

Mike Brenner, a 49-year-old who works in construction, lives near Canard’s suburban location. He says visiting the restaurant has turned into a weeknight ritual for his family, including two teenagers. His children often have the burger and fries while Mr. Brenner orders Champagne and oysters as an appetizer. “For me, it’s like eating in Paris,” he says.



The Oregon City, Ore., location of Canard swapped out an adventurous duck dish for a more casual Salisbury steak. PHOTO: AARON LEE

Even before the pandemic, renowned chefs were thinking about [how to appeal to suburbanites](#), says Mark Brandau, associate director of research and insights at Datassential, a food-industry market-research firm in Chicago.

“A lot of those folks who move to the suburbs are bringing their expectations and their tastes with them,” Mr. Brandau says. These moves aren’t always easy: Some suburban locations can be difficult to get off the ground due to staffing constraints, he adds.

The 10 fastest-growing areas for dining in the U.S. are [smaller cities or suburbs](#)—including Doral, Fla.; Carlsbad, Calif.; New Haven, Conn.; and Ontario, Calif.—according to restaurant-reservation company OpenTable, which compared data this year with prepandemic levels in 2019. The

company says it analyzed “seated diners from online, phone, and walk-in reservations by city” from January through October.



Taylor Daugherty says the menu at the suburban Canard location offers ‘heartier, homier portions.’PHOTO: AARON LEE

The latest eatery Tony Foreman opened of the six he now runs with the restaurant group Foreman Wolf was his first in the suburbs, outside Baltimore. With some customers working from home and others hesitant to visit the city, Mr. Foreman felt he needed to diversify.

His restaurant group in 2021 took over the Milton Inn, a 1740s-era stone house in Sparks Glencoe, Md., that closed under previous ownership during the pandemic. The restaurant, reimagined as a French hunting lodge, now offers a \$55 roasted guinea fowl and a \$42 grilled venison leg. “It’s a bit more sophisticated and a little less typical,” Mr. Foreman says.

Dennis O’Neill is a 49-year-old attorney who lives in nearby Phoenix, Md. He says he was a regular at some of Mr. Foreman’s Baltimore restaurants for years, but has stopped most visits because he no longer works downtown. Mr. O’Neill says the options near home have gotten better in the past few years, including the Milton Inn.

“I’m thrilled that there are these nicer options,” he says. Despite the convenience, he says he misses the downtown energy and having more dining choices.

The Milton Inn, outside Baltimore, offers a \$55 roasted guinea fowl.FOREMAN WOLF
Larger, city-based restaurant groups say there is a learning curve with operating in the suburbs.

With 23 restaurants mostly around New York, Jacopo Giustiniani, chief operating officer of SA Hospitality Group, opened a location of his Tuscan restaurant Felice in Roslyn, N.Y. This marks the first suburban Felice location for the company, which has restaurants in Manhattan and Brooklyn, Mr. Giustiniani says.

While the food is mostly the same, Mr. Giustiniani is still learning the particular demands of his Long Island diners. More requests for larger parties require more tables seating six and eight. Cocktails, vodka and tequila tend to be more popular than wine. And he has noticed that some visitors can spend up to four hours at the restaurant on a given evening, which makes it necessary to adjust the service so other diners can get seated on time.

“They are even more demanding—in a good way,” he says.

Since the September opening, the suburban location has had higher check averages than some of the Brooklyn and Manhattan locations, with roughly half of the guests previously familiar with Felice’s offerings, he says. The group is exploring additional offerings in Connecticut, Bethesda, Md., and upstate New York. And he is already seeing some regulars pop in multiple times a week.

“Even though they live in bigger houses, the appetite for partying and going out is still the same,” he says.