

Top to bottom: pork chops; the bar at Modern Barn; seared tuna. Facing page, clockwise from top: crème brûlée; caprese salad; candied bacon; owners Michael and Jessica Stasinos.



DINING

Barn Again

A skiers' hangout in a 19th-century barn in Bethel reopens with a new vibe.

When Funky Red Barn closed its doors in 2019, after 15 years in business, Bethel lost a dive bar that had grown into an après-ski institution, beloved for its live music and dance parties. New owners Jessica and Michael Stasinos purchased the building and preserved the barn, but they dropped the funk. They painted the peeling red exterior a sleek gray, built a wine room where pool tables once stood, and bumped late-night pizza off the menu in favor of oysters on the half shell and charcuterie boards. When they reopened in time for the start of ski season two years ago, some Red Barn loyalists grumbled at the more upscale, more expensive offerings, but the Stasinoses were committed to their concept. "We knew there was an opportunity to have a more distinguished atmosphere and bring something new to Bethel," says Jessica, who, with Michael and their three children, traveled from Boston to Bethel to ski for over a decade before moving into a house less than a mile from the restaurant.

Rustic décor puts the focus on the historical feel of the 1890 barn. The Funky Red Barn's disco ball has been taken down. Birch-branch chandeliers hang above each booth table. Old photos of the barn and town, which Jessica found at the Maine Historical Society, adorn





19 Summer St., Bethel.
207-824-3003.
modernbarn207.com

Price Range

Appetizers \$12–\$18,
entrées \$15–\$38.

Wine Dinners

Modern Barn's lauded wine list comprises more than 175 bottle options, and monthly prix-fixe meals focus on wine-and-food pairings.

Going Clubbing

A \$55 annual membership in the restaurant's mug club fetches 21-ounce pours of beer for the same price as standard 16-ounce pours.

wood-paneled walls alongside old ski-racing jerseys. The barn was once a corn cannery and then a feed-and-grain store, and looking up into the ceiling's wooden beams, one can imagine lingering traces of grain dust. A red sign that spells out the restaurant's name hangs from the rafters and is lit up like a theater marquee.

Jessica previously worked in restaurant management and food manufacturing. Michael spent 25 years building out restaurants across the country before gutting and renovating this one, and now he's deftly running the kitchen. His lamb osso buco is the signature winter dish — a shank braised in red-wine tomato sauce and finished with gremolata — and it's part of a general inclination toward Italian-inspired dishes: caprese salad, haddock piccata, a comfortingly creamy white-sauce pasta with chicken, peas, shallots, and bacon. The lamb osso buco is also the perfect dish to put up against a hearty Tuscan red off the six-page wine list, which garnered an award of excellence from *Wine Spectator* last year.

Wine snobs will have a field day at Modern Barn, but the Stasinoses seem to consciously push back against pretense by mixing in familiar and playful food, like the extra-thick honey-bourbon candied bacon that they cut in-house — even if the \$16 price tag for two strips will have Funky Barn diehards wistful for the old \$12.95 prime-rib special. There's also an American-cheese-topped burger and fish and chips, both generously portioned. The wedge salad, drizzled with blue-cheese dressing and topped with balsamic-glazed bacon, could be a dinner in and of itself (and bacon can turn into something of a motif over the course of a meal).

Michael knows how to play the classics, but with his own spin. And though the restaurant has changed a great deal since its Funky Barn days, it seems to have retained its knack for leaving bellies full and spirits high after a day on the slopes. Jessica says Modern Barn has become pretty much what they initially envisioned, despite the pandemic throwing a hitch early on. The only letdown, she says, is that she doesn't get to ski as much as she thought she would. — CATIE JOYCE-BULAY

Maine Shirt Club

FRESH MAINE DESIGN.
EVERY MONTH.

\$12



SCAN
ME!



maineshirtclub.com