

The New York Times

RESTAURANT REVIEW

Does New York Need a British Steakhouse? Yes, if It's Hawksmoor.

A restaurant group in London has planted its flag in Manhattan, a bastion of beef. But this is more than a case of bringing coals to Newcastle.



For nearly two years, traveling to enjoy delicious meals in other countries has been inadvisable or difficult when it has not been completely impossible. Hawksmoor, a popular British group of nine steakhouses based in London, finally did something about the situation. Since September, there has been a 10th [Hawksmoor](#), on East 22nd Street, ready to serve those Americans who are following the [State Department's warning](#) against travel to Britain.

I'm all in favor of international diplomacy, especially when it starts with a few cocktails. But if I were asked which of all the restaurants from other countries would be the best addition to the New York dining scene, I'm not sure I would choose an English steakhouse, exactly.

When the first Hawksmoor opened in Shoreditch in the East End of London in 2006, the critic Jay Rayner [wrote in The Guardian](#) that it had filled a longstanding void in Britain for "the sort of steak which is so readily available in the U.S." Hawksmoor looked the part, too, he thought, "down to the Manhattan-esque white wall and bare-brick interior."

No doubt this was welcome news in Shoreditch and in the other neighborhoods and cities that soon had Hawksmoors of their own. But in the city that already has [Wolfgang's](#), [Sparks](#), [Minetta Tavern](#), [Smith & Wollensky](#), [Keens](#), [Porter House](#) and [St. Anselm](#), for starters, importing a Hawksmoor initially made as much sense to me as bringing Sbarro to Naples.

I wondered whether this was unfair when I saw the dining room. A former assembly hall built in a soaring, high-minded neo-Classical style in the late 1800s to serve the social-aid charities that were the building's original tenants, it has been given a slightly Anglicized, clubby look with parquet floors, charcoal-blue walls and banquettes in emerald leather. It resembles no other New York steakhouse.

And when I tried the steaks, I knew for sure I'd been wrong. They arrive alarmingly naked, without so much as a sprig of parsley. Blackened and irregular, they look as if they were accidentally left in the oven overnight. Cut into them, though, and the meat inside is a warm, iron-rich red.

The filet, as big and oddly shaped as a fist, did not have that weird tunalike softness that some people expect, but it was tender enough and, for once, it tasted irrefutably like beef.

The rump steak delivered all the things you want from that cut, which is to say densely packed flavor in exchange for a modest amount of chewing and a relatively small sum of money (\$28 for 10 ounces, the cheapest steak in the house).

These two were ordered straight off the menu. One of Hawksmoor's great attractions, though, is its custom of writing out the names and weights of other, larger cuts available that day on chalkboards posted around the dining room. These stretch from bring-your-rugby-teammates gigantic, like a 54-ounce rib chop, to condemned-prisoners'-last-meal huge, like a 38-ounce chateaubriand, on down to slabs of meat that you could conceivably eat by yourself if you could take the next day off to lie very quietly on the couch like a python.

The smaller steaks tend to be crossed off the board early in the evening. One night I was seated in time to get a 16-ounce sirloin grilled on the bone. Under a glittering last-minute application of Maldon salt, it was nearly as tender as the filet, and in flavor approached the hard-edge minerality of the rump steak.

The steaks Hawksmoor serves are not, in fact, all that readily available at steakhouses in the United States. First, the restaurant grills over charcoal. This is what you might do in the backyard but not what happens in most American steakhouse kitchens, where broilers are standard. A minor note of smoke lingers in the dark outer crust. Broiled steaks, even when ferociously charred, can taste antiseptic by comparison.

The chief difference is in the meat itself, which the restaurant says comes from cattle that have been exclusively fed on pastures and hay on small, family-owned farms. According to Hawksmoor's website, these animals lead a "stress-free life," which is more than most of us can say these days. The full, direct flavor of the steaks at Hawksmoor is built into the meat, while a lot of the flavor and texture of typical steakhouse beef comes from the melting of the extra fat the animals pack on during their final, grain-fed weeks.

Because even the more marbled cuts of grass-fed beef are comparatively lean, you may want to pay an extra five or six dollars for a dish of sauce. The peppercorn sauce is curiously unpeppery, but the anchovy hollandaise is so good that I started looking around for other things that could be dunked into it — the skinny beef-fat fries, the thick and crunchy chips cooked three times in accordance with [the teachings of Heston Blumenthal](#), the gumball-size carrots in a mustard-cider glaze, and finally a spoon. My fingers would have been next, but just then the table was cleared.

The sides break with our local customs by allowing British ideas to creep in. One steak that is not grilled, a filet seared in cast iron, is served with a somewhat lightened version of the savory oatmeal preparation from Scotland known as skirlie. Two fine, hollow [Yorkshire puddings](#) accompany a jar of steak-and-bacon rillettes.



Sour cherries are key to Hawksmoor's take on the Negroni. Colin Clark for The New York Times

None of the sides are as compelling as the steaks themselves and a few of the browner items, like the lukewarm bone marrow-onion "gravy" served with the rillettes, seem to have lost their pep on the trans-Atlantic voyage.

Seafood is more energetic: the charcoal-roasted half or whole lobster in garlic butter; the slices of raw steelhead trout the color of peach sorbet, in a ceviche-like dressing; and, best of all, the Massachusetts oysters with a Scotch-bonnet mignonette.

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On the studious and oddly organized cocktail list, what are called Hawksmoor Classics mingle with alcoholic and nonalcoholic tributes to New York. The wine list has its own ideas about what to drink with beef beyond the stiff and self-important Cabernets that most New York steakhouses still push, although too few bottles are priced under \$75.

Desserts, under the practiced hand of Carla Henriques, rise well above cliché. The gâteau of chocolate and hazelnut that Alain Ducasse concocted for [Le Louis XV](#), in Monaco, is given an injection of peanut butter; I'm not sure it's necessary, but it certainly doesn't hurt. Crack open the spectacular snowball of meringue encasing the Meyer lemon meringue bomb and you find a scoop of clotted-cream ice cream with a ripple of lemon curd. And, if you are still not convinced you've left the land of cheesecake and schlag, the exemplary sticky toffee pudding should do the trick.

Hawksmoor NYT Critic's Pick

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Hawksmoor
109 East 22nd Street
(Park Avenue)
212-777-1840
[hawksmoornyc.com](#)

Atmosphere A soaring 19th-century assembly hall has been converted to a clubby dining room, with emerald-leather banquettes and chalkboards listing larger cuts of steak. Servers are well-informed and helpful about translating the menu from English to American.

Noise Level Moderately loud.

Recommended Dishes Dressed oysters; bone-marrow oysters; steelhead crudo; charcoal-grilled steaks; veal chop; anchovy hollandaise; triple-cooked chips; carrots with cider and mustard; Meyer lemon bomb; peanut butter Louis; sticky toffee pudding.

Drinks and Wine There is a lengthy list of several sorts of cocktails, including alcohol-free ones. The wine list is open-minded about what people want to drink in a steakhouse, but could use more bottles under \$75.

Price \$\$\$\$ (very expensive)

Open Tuesday to Saturday for dinner.

Reservations Accepted

Wheelchair Access The ramp at a building entrance to the left of the restaurant's front door can be used to reach the dining room and an accessible restroom; prior notice is recommended.

This information was last updated on Dec. 27, 2021.