

Victoria

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NOVEMBER 2001 \$2.95



chez charlotte

This elegant New England bistro is more than fabulous French cuisine in a scenic setting—it's an antiques-laden haven where everything's up for grabs. *produced by KIM FREEMAN*
photographs by JAMES BASTARDO text by TERRY MICHAEL

GETTING HERE BY CAR IS HALF THE FUN. The small corridor that joins Connecticut and New York offers scenery best described by painters and poets. Wind your way along Route 44 to Lakeville, Connecticut, and stop at the two-story residence built in 1775, known locally as the Lord Haas House. Today it has a new identity as Jamey and Dana Simpson's restaurant, wine bar and antiques salon, named after the older of their two Labradors, Charlotte.

"Almost anything that isn't nailed down is for sale," says Dana of the mix of English, French and American antiques scattered throughout the dining rooms and bar area. "Everything you see we actually use. We don't want it to feel like a museum or a showroom, but we love the atmosphere



Left: Jamey and Dana with Charlotte (foreground), for whom the restaurant is named, and Widgeon. As plans for their own winery take shape, the two may look to Widgeon as the next namesake. Below left: Coffee and chocolate "bavarois." Below: The curve of this sixteenth-century pine settle would trap heat from a nearby hearth. Here it provides cozy seating.





that antiques provide and the stories they tell.”

The idea of combining a restaurant and wine bar with antiques to browse through and buy came naturally to the couple: Dana had always loved antiques (her mother owns Hammertown Barn, a popular home-furnishings and antiques store in Pine Plains, New York); Jamey is a wine connoisseur with a degree from the New England Culinary Institute. “Mom scours the European and American flea markets to refresh our decor—and her shop—with pieces like the oversize Windsor chairs that line the bar,” says Dana. And with so many artists living in the region, “Jamey and I exhibit and sell their paintings,” such as *Indian Summer*, above left, by Bayard Hollins.

Although it’s been in business for only three years, Charlotte has won the Wine Spectator’s Award of Excellence three times. The thousand-bottle wine cellar “continues to grow like a good library,” Jamey says. He and Dana hope to someday serve their own wine from a vineyard they’ve started not far from the restaurant, on land her family owns. “We’ve planted three hundred vines so far,” he says.

And the French cuisine? They praise French chef Guy Birster, who trained with Queen Elizabeth’s former chef, for an outstanding seasonal menu and mouth-watering desserts. Dana explains, “He brings a lot of fun and spontaneity to the kitchen. He’ll suddenly decide to make a chocolate surprise from scratch—and that evening we’re treated to the deliciously unexpected.”

Charlotte Restaurant & Wine Bar, 223 Main St., Lakeville, CT; (860) 435-3551; www.charlottebistro.com. Open Wednesday-Sunday.

This page, clockwise from top left: At Charlotte, paintings are among the many items for sale; a friend built the twenty-eight-foot bar, its top made of boards from a 1780’s Dutch farmhouse; salmon “en croûte”; Widgeon asleep in the upstairs dining room.

