

## Winooski, Vt: Welcome to the Brooklyn of Burlington

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Main St. in Winooski, Vt. On a sunny Wednesday afternoon, the street is lively with people lingering over lunch at a row of sidewalk terrasses that hug the roundabout that coils through town. Vincenzo D'Alto / Montreal Gazette

WINOOSKI, VT. — The Sunday farmer's market offers a few clues about the kind of place this once-sleepy mill town is becoming.

The farmers and artisans from the surrounding countryside have brought organic and heirloom fruits and vegetables, of course. And baked goods and hand-tied flower bouquets. But there are unexpected offerings too: wood-fired *pain au levain* and fermented kimchee, homemade sauerkraut and kombucha. Indian street food and Himalayan stews from Nepal; old-school Jewish baked goods and new-age tinctures and teas made from the medicinal mushroom known as chaga.

Welcome to the town that's been nicknamed "the Brooklyn of Burlington." Just one exit north of Vermont's largest city along Highway 89, Winooski was, for a long time, easy to miss. Located at the mouth of the Winooski River, it was once a centre for wool processing and later a prosperous town where yarn and cloth were manufactured. But the textile mills closed back in the '50s and for decades Winooski struggled as Burlington's poor cousin.

## Gallery: Winooski, Vermont

[1]

The little town in the shadow of Burlington is quickly becoming a hot spot for food and drink.

Now, with a thriving farmer's market and a string of new bars and restaurants populating Main St., Winooski has found a new foodie vibe. On a sunny Wednesday afternoon, the street is lively with people lingering over lunch at a row of sidewalk terrasses that hug the roundabout that coils through town. By the weekend, downtown Winooski, with its exquisite red-brick and clapboard buildings, is positively humming.

Okay, so maybe this town of 7,500 nestled in the hills of northern Vermont isn't quite Brooklyn, N.Y. But there really is something exciting going on. Winooski's aging population is being replaced by students, young families and couples in their 20s and 30s, drawn by cheaper rents and real estate more affordable than it is just across the river in bustling Burlington. Among them is a tight-knit community of chefs, shopkeepers, food crafters, brewers and bartenders who are getting creative with the wealth of local, organic, small-batch fare that makes Vermont one of the best places to eat and drink in the northeastern United States. Add to that a mix of Asian grocery stores, noodle restaurants and Thai and Vietnamese restaurants that cater to one of the most ethnically-diverse communities in New England.





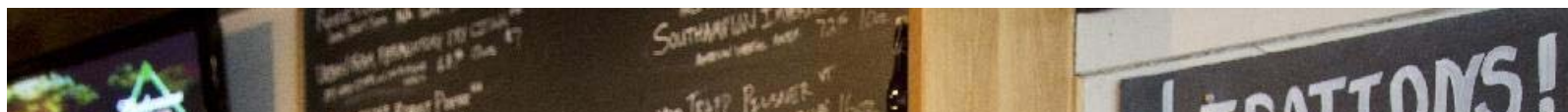


Chefs and co-owners Nathaniel Wade and Aaron Josinsky at their restaurant, Misery Loves Company. Vincenzo D'Alto / Montreal Gazette

At the heart of Winooski's foodie revival is Misery Loves Company, a three-year-old restaurant with ceiling fans and beadboard wainscoting owned by chef Aaron Josinsky, his wife Laura Wade and brother-in-law Nathaniel Wade. It was always meant to be a neighbourhood place, with quick and friendly service and old-fashioned comfort food like fried chicken, pickle plates and grilled cheese sandwiches. But Josinsky is more than a bit particular when it comes to food, and he's a purist and an experimentalist. So he salt-cures ham and waits a year before he slices into it. For the dinnertime bread and butter plates, the restaurant cultures its own butter, using organic cream from Butterworks Farm<sup>[2]</sup>. This spring another local farmer was enlisted to grow celtuse, a slightly-bitter romaine-like lettuce that grows on a thick stalk with a plume of leaves at its top (which Epicurious<sup>[3]</sup> touts as "the next big thing" in vegetables). Josinsky is a firm believer in using local ingredients and supporting nearby farmers and food crafters, and staying true to the homemade food of his childhood.

In winter, he serves perch and smelts that ice fishermen bring in from nearby Lake Champlain. In spring he infuses honey with lilac blossoms from his own backyard. In summer, he seasons rib steaks with salted and cured juniper berries that one of the kitchen staff forages.

"Our work is important to us, but we try to have fun and keep things not so serious," says Josinsky, who grew up in Vermont and worked in kitchens in New York City before returning to his home state. "It takes a lot of labour to cook like this, but it feels better."







Andrew Leichthammer is the bar manager at Mule Bar. Vincenzo D'Alto / Montreal Gazette

It's a refrain you hear often in Winooski. Down the street at Mule Bar, blackened rough-sawn boards give this former noodle shop a woosy feel. Bar manager Andrew Leichthammer has put together a cocktail menu that changes regularly, always showcasing award-winning local craft beers and spirits and house-made syrups and bitters. Mule Bar also boasts one of the most impressive and eclectic tap lists in the state with up to nine different offerings – a mix of Vermont, Belgian, German and Quebec beers and a house-made ginger beer plus apple cider – at a time on weekends.

Leichthammer says he can't help playing around. A few weeks ago he surprised himself with the silky smokiness of his remixed Sazerac, which featured whiskey infused with house-cured pork belly. He's also been experimenting with aged cocktails, shaking up corn whisky, vermouth and orange bitters, for example, and



letting them steep in an oak barrel for a month to round out the flavours. For summer, he's carbonating cocktails like the rum tiki (three kinds of rum, pineapple and lime juices, house-made grenadine, honey syrup and blood orange cordial put through a soda-pop maker.

Leichthammer says Winooski's diminutive size (the whole town is just 1 1/2 square miles) and small town ethos fosters a sense of close camaraderie among the restaurant and bar owners and their customers.

"We all know each other. And half the people who come in are regular," he says.





The Winooski River can be seen through the windows of Waterworks Food + Drink. Vincenzo D'Alto / Montreal Gazette

A short walk away, down by the Winooski River, an old architectural jewel is sparkling again. Waterworks Food + Drink opened last December in a massive old mill, one of four in the area. Just about every seat in the house has a spectacular view of the waterfront and the roaring falls nearby – and if that's not close enough to the scenery, there's a terrasse that juts right out over the water. It's an extraordinary red-brick structure built in 1912 in the Italianate style, with towering archways, massive wooden beams and high windows that let the daylight right into the centre of the room. It was once the Champlain Mill, which manufactured fine worsted wool uniforms, men's suits and fashion fabrics. But it closed in 1954 and – except for a stint as a restaurant in the 1990s – the building mostly sat idle, filled with broken glass and occupied by pigeons. The new restaurant's owners have renovated, opened the kitchen up to the rest of the room and hired a husband and wife team of chefs who have cooked in Miami and Chicago and San Francisco.

Back up the street at Misery Loves Co., Josinsky is sitting for a few minutes at a table overlooking the roundabout that brings visitors in and out of town. He and Wade were in New York City not long ago, invited to cook an all-Vermont dinner at the James Beard Foundation's Beard House<sup>[4]</sup>. It wasn't so long ago, he says, that Vermont producers were sending most of what they grew, raised and crafted to restaurants in Boston and New York City.

“But now so many really good local restaurants have opened that there is a home right here for all these really great local ingredients,” he says.

#### AT A GLANCE

Winooski is an easy two-hour drive south of Montreal, via Quebec Autoroute 35 S. Cross the border into the United States at Highgate and continue on Vermont I-89 S to exit 16. To continue to Burlington afterward, cross the bridge over the Winooski River and take Route 2, which will lead you right into downtown Burlington within 10 minutes.

## 6 things for a foodie to check out while poking around in Winooski:

### Misery Loves Company

46 Main St.

1-802-497-3989

[miserylovescvt.com](http://miserylovescvt.com)<sup>[5]</sup>

Really friendly staff and a bright and airy ambience are the backdrop for inventive and delicious new-American fare for lunch or dinner. Sit at the bar or take a

table in one of two rooms or outside on the sidewalk terrasse. All the appetizers, main dishes and small plates feature seasonal local ingredients. Hint: the bread and butter and pickle plates are famous.

### **Mule Bar**

38 Main St.

1-802-399-2020

[mulebarvt.com](http://mulebarvt.com)<sup>[6]</sup>

Pull up a stool at the rustic bar and order a pint of Heady Topper, the award-winning Vermont craft beer that has won awards all over the world. Or try one of the wild and crazy cocktails Mule Bar is famous for. There's also an extensive menu of good bar food, like wings (from cage-free chickens, of course) or a "bratdawg" – artisanal Vermont bratwurst sausage in a sweet corn batter, but also moules and frites or a cheese plate.

### **Waterworks Food + Drink**

20 Winooski Falls Way

1-802-497-3525

[waterworksvt.com](http://waterworksvt.com)<sup>[7]</sup>

This expansive 250-seat bar and restaurant is located in a converted mill right on the Winooski River. It's one of the most beautiful locations in town. Inside, the wooden beams and brickwork of the restored century-old mill are the backdrop for clusters of tufted leather sofas and a long wooden bar. Outside the terrasse juts right out over the roaring river.

The food and drinks cover a wide price range – from \$3 beers to \$12 cocktails to chicken wings and burgers to baked cod with wild morels.

Open for dinner every night and also brunch on weekends.

### **Tiny Thai Restaurant**

24 Main St.

1-802-655-4888

[tinythairestaurant.net](http://tinythairestaurant.net)<sup>[8]</sup>

There are a number of Asian restaurants in Winooski, but the most popular of them is Tiny Thai, which serves authentic Thai dishes. It's also BYOB, which means diners can head over to the Beverage Warehouse <sup>[9]</sup>(Vermont's largest outlet for craft beer, wine and spirits) at 1 East St., to pick up a bottle of wine or a six-pack of beer.

## Winooski River Walk

After a long drive and a leisurely meal, a nice walk is in order. Opened in 2006, this half-mile path which changes from concrete to gravel to packed dirt is an interesting mix of wild and urban. Start at the Champlain Mill and head past luxury condos to a leafy nature preserve, where the dirt trails begin.

## Winooski Farmer's Market

[facebook.com/winooskifarmers](https://facebook.com/winooskifarmers)<sup>[10]</sup>

It's on every Sunday throughout summer, until Oct. 11. From 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Winooski Falls Way, in front of Champlain Mill. It's fun to sample local cheeses and sweets and see what's come ripe in the fields around this lush agricultural area. There's always live music and a party atmosphere.

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1. <http://montrealgazette.com/gallery/gallery-winooski-vermont>
2. <http://www.butterworksfarm.com/>
3. <http://www.epicurious.com/archive/blogs/editor/2013/07/the-next-big-thing-celtuse.html>
4. <http://www.jamesbeard.org/>
5. <http://miserylovescovt.com/>



6. <http://mulebarvt.com/>
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