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Restaurant Girl



The Standard Grill: High life on the High Line - at a reasonable price



The Standard Grill is a new culinary landmark in the new Highline District in West Chelsea.

Overview

- **Cuisine:** American
- **Vibe:** Bustling High Line haunt
- **Occasion:** Night on the town, date, group dinner
- **Don't Miss:** Octopus with sweet potato & chilies, lamb chops, rainbow trout with currant and pine nut relish, shaved lime-mint ice
- **Price:** Appetizers, \$9; entrees, \$18; dessert, \$7
- **Reservations:** Recommended
- **Phone:** 645-4646
- **Location:** 846 Washington St., at 13th St.

Hip usually comes at a cost. When a restaurant's hip, you can't get a reservation or you can't afford one. If you somehow manage to get a table, it's too noisy to hear yourself eat or too early to eat. The Standard Grill's different. It's undeniably fashionable and entirely affordable. The dining room's filled with celebrities and everybodies.

The restaurant opened in the Meatpacking District, right underneath Andre Balazs' Standard Hotel and the High Line Park. On warm nights, I like the sidewalk seating or the breezy, bistro-style barroom with tile floors and a white oak bar.

The best seats are definitely in the main dining room — a beautifully appointed space with vaulted ceilings, roomy maroon booths, bay windows and a shiny floor covered in 480,000 pennies.

It's the little things — the checkered tablecloths, brown-bagged bread, and bowls of baby radishes and chunks of Parmesan waiting for you on the table — that make it feel warm and accessible, even when Cameron Diaz and Cindy Crawford are sitting at the next table. A side dish, "on the house," brings delights like crispy potatoes with paprika aioli, compliments of the kitchen.

The chef, Dan Silverman, ran the kitchen at Lever House, a place for power meals in the middle of midtown. The Standard Grill is dressed-down food for a downtown crowd. It's an American grill menu with offerings like raw oysters, rib eye, pork chops and a porterhouse. The lamb chops aren't your average chophouse chops. They're smartly marinated in lots of lemon and spices, flash-seared and served with polenta and a basil mint sauce. The burger was good, not great, and the New York strip was so unevenly cooked — cold in the middle and overcooked at the edges — it had to make a round trip right back to the kitchen.

Seafood is really Silverman's forte. He creates wonderfully light, subtle dishes with tons of texture and flavor.

There's a terrific starter of seared squid, stuffed with Merguez sausage, brightened by a side salad of frisée, radish, fennel and tart bits of grapefruit. Even simple dishes stand out — like grilled rainbow trout perfectly paired with a currant and pine nut relish or corn-studded potato bellinis drizzled in Béarnaise sauce. My favorite dish on the menu is the charred octopus tossed with a vibrant mix of sweet potato, onion, lime and chili.

I always get a kick out of dishes with confident names. The Standard Grill's got a "Million Dollar" roast chicken and a dessert called the Deal-Closer. The chicken was good, but for a million dollars, I would've liked the skin to be a lot crispier, and moister meat. The Deal-Closer for two lived up to its name — a decadent bowl of chocolate mousse with a layer of rich chocolate cake, whipped cream and a salty, crunchy fleur de sel foil. It's playfully served with plastic spatulas, and it's the kind of dessert you'd prefer to enjoy in privacy. There's also a first-rate sour cream cheesecake with a blueberry compote and a jolting lime-mint ice.

I'm not sure whether it's the High Line Park or the Standard Grill, but there seems to be a new way of looking at and eating in New York. You might say the Standard Grill is the first great, culinary landmark in the new High Line District.