

# The New York Times

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Dining | White Plains

## Nothing Fancy, but Right for the Times

By [ALICE GABRIEL](#)

EMMA'S ALE HOUSE, a clean-cut new pub in suburban White Plains, has a cute logo that features the square head of a yellow Labrador retriever. The choice is apt, because Emma's is pretty much the restaurant equivalent of a big blond Lab: good natured, energetic, dependable and tolerant of small children.

Emma's, owned by Casey Egan, a White Plains native, is just right for the times. Perhaps seeking comfort in familiar things, diners have embraced the restaurant's easy demeanor, predictable menu and gentle prices (only a handful of entrees are more than \$20). I had to think, as I took my seat on a recent Friday night when every table had been claimed, that the near-instant popularity of Emma's was in some way a rejection of the fancy, high-strung breeds that have proliferated in downtown White Plains. (Just up the street from Emma's, the venerable Sam's of Gedney Way offers a very similar menu — French onion soup, fried calamari, crab cakes — and both were crowded that night.)

But even the most popular breed in the country has a trait that might be perceived as a weakness: a nature that compels it to want to make a friend of everyone within tail-thumping distance. Emma's exuberant, eager-to-please menu calls for a lot of juggling in the kitchen (run by Nick Rizzo, formerly of P. J. Clarke's in Manhattan), and although most offerings aren't particularly ambitious, a fair number of the dishes I tried fell short of their ideal.

That doesn't mean that Emma's can't be a great companion. You might want to drop in on a weeknight when you're exhausted from work and order a glass of Beringer's blackberry-scented pinot noir and the beautifully sliced pepper-crusted pork chop, which comes with good mashed potatoes and a lovely compote of apples and cranberries; or kick off the weekend with a frosty glass of Newcastle Brown Ale and a good, straightforward burger with hand-cut fries.

Emma's offers two experiences: Diners can eat at high tables in the bar, with its three flat-screen TVs and boisterous high spirits, an atmosphere tailor-made for sliders, fish and chips, chili and mac 'n' [cheese](#); or they can repair to the L-shaped dining room, where the high-backed banquettes are lined with whimsical canine-themed upholstery and the walls are hung with cheerful, well-lighted artwork — an environment more conducive to lingering over entrees.

Emma's generous salads can be a good starting point. A mound of baby spinach came with giant slices of roasted beet and rounds of walnut-crusted goat cheese; a thick iceberg wedge was strewn with a confetti of bacon, scallion, tomato and blue cheese. The pedestrian Caesar, however, was loaded with giant capers, a detail not mentioned on the menu — and not welcomed by the guest who ordered it.

Other reliable starters included crispy chicken lollipops decorated with celery curls; portobello mushroom and Gruyère flatbread; and a deep-fried crab cake with a hotsy-totsy chipotle mayonnaise. A smoked duck quesadilla, short on duck and scorched on the underside, was a disappointment.

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A few entrees excelled: the pork chop; Atlantic salmon with a port-wine reduction; and a roasted chicken half with sherry jus. Chicken potpie was underseasoned, although it had tender chunks of chicken, sweet carrots and a neat round of puff pastry. A 14-ounce prime sirloin steak — at \$28 the most expensive thing on the menu — could have used a little aging. I liked the idea of lamb confit served on a baguette — listed as a “ceapaire,” or Irish sandwich — but while the lamb was flavorful, and the basil mayonnaise fragrant, preserved plum [tomatoes](#) and a wan baguette turned the whole thing into a sog fest.

Desserts — some of them enormous — were of mixed quality. The best was an apple cobbler with a soft cookie crust and firm fruit. A walnut-rich brownie was warm and fudgy, and big enough for four. “Crispy Cream” doughnut bread pudding was just what you’d imagine — a dream come true for glazed-doughnut lovers. Black and white [cookies](#) were downright stale. Among frozen offerings, mint chip [ice cream](#) had a cottony texture, but the lemon sorbet was tart and refreshing.

Emma’s Ale House

68 Gedney Way

White Plains

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[emmasalehouse.com](http://emmasalehouse.com)

GOOD

**THE SPACE** Wholesome pub-style restaurant. The eat-in bar has three flat-screen TVs; the informal dining room, with its cheerful artwork, is a little quieter. Certified a green restaurant by the Green Restaurant Association, a national nonprofit.

**THE CROWD** Convivial, casually dressed, all ages; younger adults seem to like the bar seating. Waiters were helpful and efficient.

**THE BAR** Ten beers and ales are on draft; try the grapefruity Captain’s Reserve Imperial I.P.A., a hop-heavy local brew from Captain Lawrence (\$5.50). From the solid, affordable wine list, try the simple, well-made Sterling sauvignon blanc (\$8 per glass) or Beringer’s accessible pinot noir (\$8 per glass).

**THE BILL** Appetizers and salads, \$7 to \$10. Burgers, \$11 and up (sliders are three for \$9). Sandwiches and flatbreads, \$11 to \$15. Entrees, \$14 to \$28. Desserts, \$6 to \$8.

**WHAT WE LIKE** Iceberg wedge, spinach salad, crab cake, portobello and Gruyère flatbread; Emma burger, roasted chicken with sherry jus, salmon with port reduction, pepper-crusting pork chop; apple cobbler, fudge walnut brownie, lemon sorbet.

**IF YOU GO** Open daily, noon to midnight. Parking on the street can be a challenge; we parked right in front on a weeknight, and two blocks away on a Friday night.

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