



Contessa, a Glitzy Rooftop Restaurant, Will Open by the Public Garden in June

The all-day restaurant is the first Massachusetts project for hospitality powerhouse Major Food Group, which is behind Carbone in New York, Las Vegas, and beyond



Rooftop restaurants are a bit of a rarity in the Boston area; [they do exist](#), but an addition to the group is always welcome. Two are gearing up to open in the coming months — [Blue Owl in Cambridge's Central Square](#), finally opening this summer after hitting understandable 2020 delays, and [a rooftop restaurant](#) at soon-to-open hotel the Newbury alongside Boston's Public Garden. (It's a rebirth of the nearly 100-year-old hotel most recently known as the Taj, and before that, one of the first Ritz-Carltons in the United States. Real estate and hospitality management company Highgate spearheaded the transformation.)

While the Newbury itself [will open on May 18](#), along with its lobby bar called Street Bar, the rooftop restaurant — which will be named Contessa, the hotel is announcing today — is set to follow in mid-June, serving Italian food and Back Bay views.

Major Food Group, which operates nearly two dozen restaurants in New York, Las Vegas, Miami, Hong Kong, and Tel Aviv, is behind Contessa as well as the hotel's other dining options; it's the hospitality group's first foray into Massachusetts. Founded by Mario Carbone, Rich Torrisi, and Jeff Zalaznick, Major Food Group may be particularly familiar to local readers for its portfolio of New York City restaurants, including Carbone, Sadelle's, and Dirty French.

While the group has expanded some of its restaurants to multiple cities — Carbone, for example, is also in Las Vegas, Hong Kong, and Miami — Contessa is brand new. It will be open for all-day dining under a glass roof with retractable panels.

[Ken Fulk](#) designed the restaurant; he also worked on the Las Vegas outposts of Carbone and Sadelle's. He intends for Contessa to evoke places “where dinner and dancing, three-martini lunches, or high tea were the perfect excuse to dress up and hit the town,” Fulk says in a press release from the Newbury.

While Major Food Group isn't sharing specific menu details yet, Contessa will serve Italian cuisine, which is a running theme through some of the group's other restaurants, particularly Carbone.

Three Eater critics took on Carbone [in a 2014 review](#), “frantic to bask in the midcentury red-sauce swankness reimaged by Mario Carbone, Rich Torrisi, and Jeff Zalaznick.” While Contessa sounds like it'll have a different vibe than Carbone, the observations of critics Ryan Sutton, Robert Sietsema, and Bill Addison give a sneak peek into the philosophy of the restaurant group.

“What's particularly fun about Carbone,” they wrote in 2014, “is that it doesn't simply pay homage to the red-sauce palaces that simmered their way into popular culture fifty years ago. It also winks at midcentury Continental cuisine and explores the ways the two genres overlapped. Gigantic, pricy, nuanced versions of Italian-American standards populate the menu ... but a retro Palm Springs coolness informs the meal, too.”

Sutton described it as “a place that [he] send[s] out-of-towners ... a quintessential New York restaurant you just can't find elsewhere.” (Well, aside from the Hong Kong location that existed at the time — and the others that have opened since.)

The group's other New York restaurants tend to get similarly enthusiastic reactions. They're beautifully designed, they have that see-and-be-seen vibe that trendsetters love, and they're a bit of a *scene* (which all feels like the exact combination you'd expect at a rooftop restaurant in a hotel on Newbury Street). At Sadelle's, for example, [staffers yell "HOT BAGELS"](#) while delivering them to tables that might also be set with \$100 lox plateaus and \$29 club sandwiches. It's "almost" a perfect brunch, per Sutton. Dirty French, meanwhile, is [packed at 11 p.m. on a weeknight](#) with well-dressed folks eating huge, expensive steaks and sipping \$16 cocktails. Another restaurant from the group, the Grill, "is the city's only four-star ode to the past" and the most ambitious opening of 2017, [Sutton wrote at the time](#).

Contessa is arriving in Back Bay at a pivotal time. The Back Bay restaurant scene was hit quite hard during the pandemic, with 2020 seeing the permanent closures of numerous restaurants on and near Newbury Street, [especially nearby on Boylston Street](#). Restaurants that temporarily closed, though, [are beginning to reopen](#). Over a third of the state is fully vaccinated and outdoor dining season [is picking up](#). Will Bostonians be looking for a summer of excess, gathering to eat fancy food and drinking fancy cocktails on rooftops after over a year of isolation? Time will tell. Stay tuned for updates as Contessa approaches a mid-June debut.