

TOP LAWYERS OF 2025

# DelawareToday<sup>®</sup>

## *FOOD FÊTE*

WILMINGTON'S HOT  
FRENCH SPOT



WHIST CLUB  
GAMES

WOMEN'S  
ICE HOCKEY

TURKEY  
FIVE WAYS

# FOOD & DRINK

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## MAIN DISH

# NEW FRENCH ACCENT

**LA FÊTE'S PARTNERS BRING  
BIG-CITY EXPERIENCE  
TO WILMINGTON.**

**BY PAM GEORGE | PHOTOGRAPHS BY LILY STEVENS**

Americans can't quit the French. Influencers peddle "French girl style," TikTok glamorizes the "Paris apartment aesthetic," and beauty brands push a less-is-more approach. Even restaurants chase the vibe by adding "bistro," "brasserie," or "café" after their name.

Croissants, quiche, and pastel-colored macarons are readily available. But authentic French restaurants? They're rare in Delaware. True, La Fable in Rehoboth Beach goes full-on Parisian. Le Cavalier in Wilmington combines mussels (moules frites) and steak au poivre with a cheeky Le Cheeseburger. Still, in a state packed with pasta and red-sauce restaurants, French concepts are the underdogs.

Enter La Fête, which opened in late August on Concord Pike (Route 202), next to the Charcoal Pit. It's an unexpected spot, considering the downtown Wilmington restaurant boom. But managing partner Alenrry Iñiguez—formerly of The Quoin—quickly realized that Delaware patrons value easy parking. "We wanted to be in the suburbs," says Iñiguez, who teamed up with fellow hospitality vet Scott Zoccolillo, plus a silent partner honored with a Wilmington

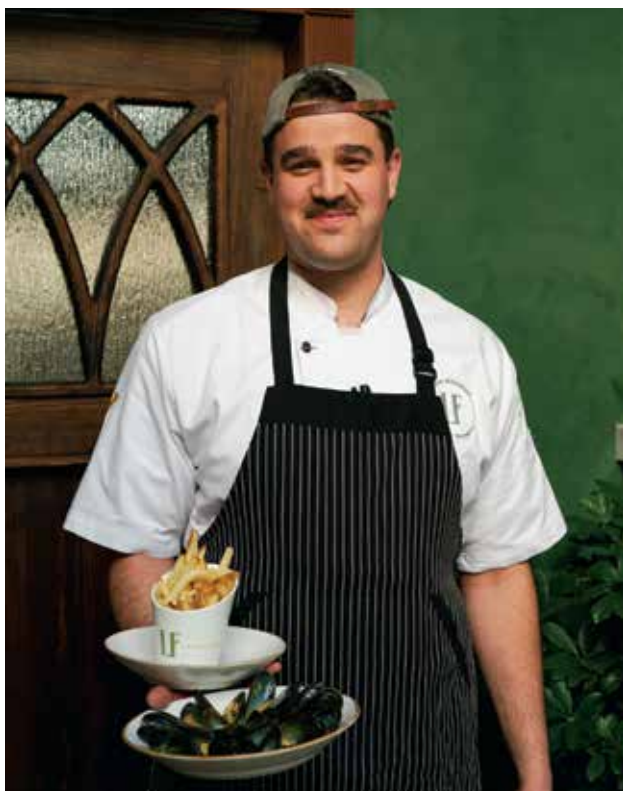
Steak frites, the classic bistro dish, is on the menu at La Fête, the new French-inspired restaurant in north Wilmington. The sliced steak comes with french fries and a side of béarnaise sauce. The restaurant is the brainchild of Scott Zoccolillo and Alenrry Iñiguez, who met at The Quoin.



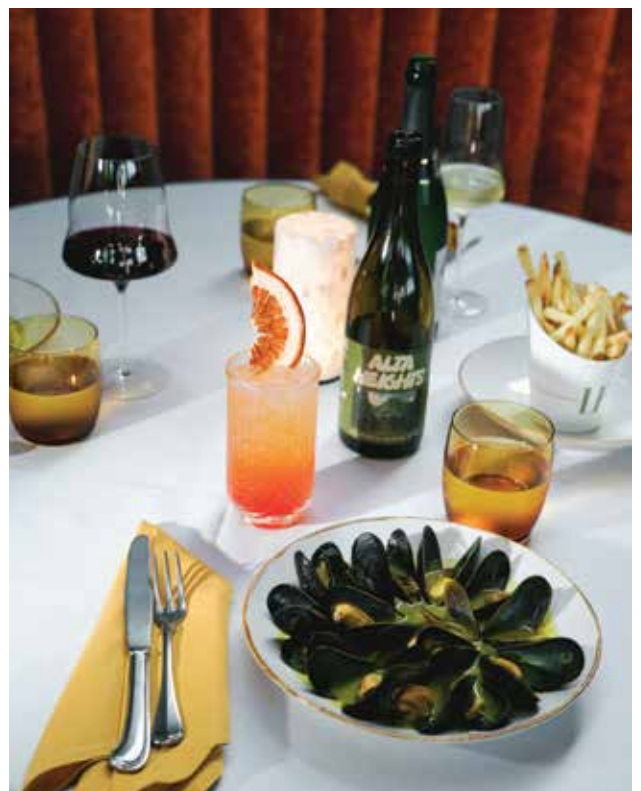
Salade Lyonnaise is an attractive tangle of frisee greens and lardons, accompanied by brioche croutons, a perfectly poached egg, and Dijon dressing.



It's hard to believe that La Fête is in a space formerly occupied by a diner and two Italian restaurants. The ambience is at once approachable and refined.



Executive chef Max Kaklins previously worked at Fiorella under the guidance of celebrity chef Marc Vetri. The native Bostonian is well versed in French techniques.



Moules frites is another bistro dish that includes golden french fries.

“Given the managing **PARTNERS’** major-market **EXPERIENCE**, why choose **DELAWARE?** “It’s an up-and-coming **MARKET**,” Zoccolillo says. “**PHILLY** chefs have **SHOWN** a lot of **INTEREST** in it.”

Brew Works beer named “Silent Partner.”

The duo’s resumes are heavy with experience in major markets—Las Vegas, Philadelphia, and Boston, to name a few. Clearly, they have the chops, but cracking the Delaware dining code takes more than a polished CV.

Fortunately, the look, service, and fare possess that certain *je ne sais quoi*.

### Setting the scene

Since 2014, the freestanding building has housed Italian restaurants Bella Coast and Touch of Italy, as well as the Concord Diner. If you dined at any of these, expect a change. “You won’t recognize the place,” says Zoccolillo, formerly director of restaurants for Method Co., which manages The Quoin in downtown Wilmington.

Gone is the map of Italy, the Peroni artwork, and the pizza oven. A tile mosaic spelling “La Fête” greets guests at the door, as does the art deco poster of a woman sipping Champagne in front of the words “La Fête.”

Inside, curved banquettes and faux trees wrapped in white lights divide a dining room with tablecloths from a more casual bar/lounge. From either, you can see twinkling green lights in the trees; they look like capricious fireflies. The bar features garage-style windows that open, allowing bartenders to serve those on the patio. The theme is clear without being overbearing.

“We wanted to have all the fine-dining touches, but people would be as comfortable in shorts and a T-shirt as they would be in a three-piece suit,” Zoccolillo says. His partner agrees. “We built a restaurant that’s beautiful, but we want an ambience that’s welcoming and a menu that’s comforting,” Iñiguez says.

### Walking the walk

La Fête’s executive chef, Max Kaklins, previously worked under James Beard-

winning chef Marc Vetri at Fiorella in Philadelphia. Kaklins, a Boston native, also honed his skills with chef Carl Dooley, a “Top Chef” alum. Sous chef Kevin Mancari worked under Scott Morozin of Verbena BYOB.

The opening menu features French favorites, including tender escargot in a pastry nest with an addictive garlic-herb velouté and potato puree. Mussels are artfully arranged in a bath of white wine, lemon, and herbs. Beef tartare—3 ounces of chopped New York strip—comes with toast covered in bone marrow and fresh herbs. Another cold dish, the salmon rilette, is a spread with crackers.

As for entrees, count on steak frites, tender roasted chicken, and fish—halibut on one night—served with a row of shelled mussels and tendrils of fennel. Two could share a dry-aged duck, a 30-ounce bone-in rib-eye steak, or a whole branzino.

Undoubtedly, many of these dishes will carry over into the holiday season. The partners also plan to add a cheeseburger and perhaps other bar-friendly dishes for those who want a neighborhood brasserie.

### The secret sauce

The wine and cocktail list reflects Zoccolillo’s credentials. He’s an advanced sommelier with certifications in wine and beer. He relocated to Delaware in 2006 to work at the DuPont Country Club. (His wife is from Delaware.) Zoccolillo later worked at Nectar on the Main Line and Del Frisco’s before joining Method. The Quoin was part of his territory.

Zoccolillo has long wanted to own a restaurant, but the family man didn’t think he would have made the leap without Iñiguez, who has 20 years of experience, starting in Las Vegas at Bobby Flay’s Mesa Grill. Iñiguez later joined The Nine Group, which owns and operates restaurants and nightclubs at the Palms Hotel and Casino. He also helped open

a small French restaurant off the Vegas Strip; managed an Italian restaurant in Vancouver; and co-founded Herbs and Rye, a Las Vegas bar. He moved east to work with culinary guru Stephen Starr, and to Wilmington to launch The Quoin.

Given the managing partners’ major-market experience, why choose Delaware? “It’s an up-and-coming market,” Zoccolillo says. “Philly chefs have shown a lot of interest in it.” He points to Bryan Sikora, who found fame with Django in Philly before opening La Fia in Wilmington, and Tyler Akin, the opening chef/operator at Le Cavalier in the Hotel Du Pont. Lower taxes and accessible liquor licenses are another reason they chose Delaware.

Iñiguez appreciates the Wilmington area’s lifestyle compared to major markets. He also saw the need for a restaurant that “hit on all cylinders”—one with great ambience, an on-point menu, a complementary cocktail program, a fantastic wine program, and excellent service.

“It definitely turned out better than we had originally dreamed—and we had some pretty high expectations,” Zoccolillo says of the new restaurant.

Delaware has seen its share of closings and departures. The Brandywine Brasserie, which had a sprinkling of French flair, closed, and Akin left Le Cavalier to focus on his Philadelphia restaurant.

However, new restaurants are opening in Avenue North, the Bardea Hospitality Group continues to expand in downtown Wilmington, and the suburbs have seen an uptick in culinary activity.

La Fête is positioned to thrive. With a reasonable price range, a unique atmosphere, and seasoned operators, it’s already drawing crowds. Guests can sip, snack, and dine while pretending—at least for a night—that Delaware has its own Left Bank. **DT**