

Beef'd up

The Upstairs to serve Prime beef
BY [RESTAURANTARAMA](#)

Where's the Prime beef? You may be asking yourself this question. Turns out, the USDA's grading for top-quality beef—after Prime, it's Choice, then Select, then...you don't really want to know—isn't readily available around here. There are probably two reasons for that: One, it's not readily available anywhere—only about 3 percent of beef produced in this country achieves the level of marbling that garners a Prime rating—and two, it's darn expensive. Luckily for you beef connoisseurs, however, **Mark Brown**, who owns **Escafé** and is opening a new upscale establishment called **The Upstairs** in the space above (at the former site of **Ristorante Al Dente**), isn't afraid of either of those things. At his new place, he's going to be hawking Prime beef, in addition to the freshest seafood he can get to this area (some of it caught in Hawaii on Wednesdays and flown into CHO on Thursdays), a several-hundred-bottle wine list with most bottles in the \$75 to \$150 range and premium liquor (think \$300-400 cognac offered alongside your standard Jim Beam).



Chipping away at it: General Manager Chip Sawyer (pictured) and owner Mark Brown will soon be opening The Upstairs upstairs from Escafé, and serving Prime beef without the typical steakhouse set up.

As to whether there's a market for such finery, Brown is casual and upbeat. "That's what we're going to find out," he says. "If not, I'll have a pretty nice liquor cabinet to drown my sorrows." (Give Restaurantarama a holler if you need help with that, Mark).

Brown says that he isn't aware of anyone else around here offering Prime, and that's probably true. We called **Robert Sawrey** of The Downtown Grille, who told us that his New York strip steaks are Choice. Sawrey also told us that his biggest seller is tenderloin (e.g., filet mignon), which is rarely ever Prime anyway, as the cut is boneless. The Aberdeen Barn advertises Certified Angus Beef, which is a brand, and not a USDA rating. The USDA, however, helps administer the certifications, and one of them is that the meat meets a Choice rating.

Now, with all this talk of beef you might be thinking that The Upstairs is a steakhouse, but Brown and his general manager, **Chip Sawyer**, tell us that's not the case. Sawyer says that unlike other upscale restaurants, The Upstairs won't have an à la carte menu—which can lead to price gouging, in his opinion—but it also won't offer your typical steakhouse set up either (i.e., beef, beef, beef, with a side of two broccoli florets and a bland baked potato.) Sawyer says two sides will come with each entrée, but they will be seasonal and selected carefully for each dish.

The space itself is getting careful attention as well. Brown ripped down 6" of plaster to expose the brick walls in the lounge area and has added a new oak bar, a temperature-controlled wine cellar and lots of high-tech kitchen gadgets, including an infrared charbroiler and a sous vide machine. Dinner will be served Tuesday-Saturday, 5:30pm-10pm. Look for an opening in mid-April.

