

## SO MANY LUNCHES (SO LITTLE TIME)

The Maroon Bells serve as a majestic backdrop to Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro, located on Aspen Highlands.



A delicious meal awaits at Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro.



In the evening, dinner guests arrive by snowcat.



# the inn crowds

WHERE DO THE FABULOUS AND MOST FINICKY EAT WHEN THEY'RE IN TOWN? **AIMEE WHITE BEAZLEY** DISHES ON THREE VENUES CREATING BUZZ AND PULLING IN THE CROWDS.

There's a little-known fact in Aspen that rings louder than the lunchtime whistle atop the Aspen Volunteer Fire Department: Dinnertime is for schmoozing, but lunch is when the real deals take place. Real estate agents, artists, ski pros, architects, and those whose only job is to lunch, make the rounds to the hot spots where ideas are created, hands are clasped, and people fall in love. Here is where it all goes down:

### CLOUD NINE ALPINE BISTRO: LAST-RUN CREW

Ask any local skier or snowboarder about Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro nearly 11,000 feet atop Aspen Highlands, just beneath the Cloud Nine chairlift, and you might hear "great food," "a place to party," or "Andreas!"

Chef Andreas Fischbacher has been the executive chef and general manager at Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro since it opened in its current form in 1999, and has turned the former ski patrol shack into one of the most memorable, unique, old-world lunch experiences in town.

Fischbacher's native Austrian dining experience includes a glass of glühwein upon your arrival at the snowcat lift at the base of Aspen Highlands and hours of dining on fondue, raclette (cooked right on the griddle), and other Euro-inspired entrees such as the delectable venison ragout and elk osso bucco. Afterward, take your drinks to the deck and spend a sunny afternoon greeting friends long after the lifts close.

The restaurant, complete with linens and fine wine list, has 65 seats and a private dining room that seats another 25. When the deck facing Maroon Bells and Buttermilk Mountain is in play, there's room for 120 more. Even before the snow flies, people begin planning their first trip to Cloud Nine. So make those reservations early.

"We bond with our customers," says Fischbacher. "I really take care of these guys and I keep in touch with a lot of people. I select a caring, warm, and welcoming staff. The best recognition is when a customer comes in and they have a great experience. That is one of my best biggest accomplishments."

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## ABOVE ALL

Cloud Nine Alpine Bistro offers a unique dining experience.

LOCAL LEGEND: Cloud Nine is known for great food and good times. Legend has it that on closing day of Highlands, executive chef Andreas Fischbacher pours his Infinite White Lightning grappa and skiers climb onto tables to dance. "It's a great scene," says Fischbacher. "Everything is possible. It certainly can develop into a party scene in late spring, with dancing on the deck, or a wild skier coming by and jumping the lip out there."

MOST REQUESTED TABLE: The eight-top next to the window overlooking Maroon Bells.

MOST ORDERED DISH: Fondue and raclette, which must be ordered 24 hours in advance.

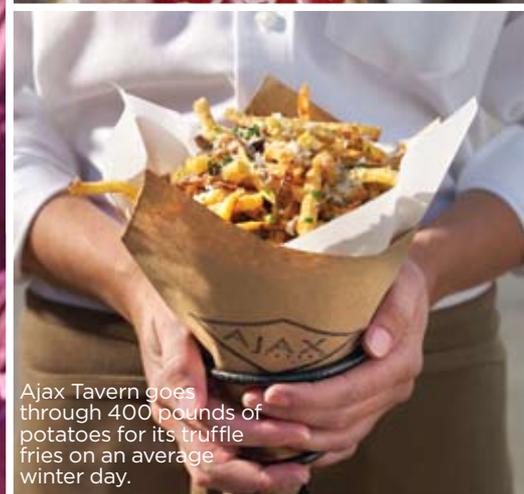


PHOTOGRAPHY BY GETTY IMAGES (KLUG, OATES)

Charlotte Berlin, Chris Klug and John Oates

## SO MANY LUNCHES (SO LITTLE TIME)

The fondue at Ajax Tavern is a treat that warms a chilly afternoon.



Ajax Tavern goes through 400 pounds of potatoes for its truffle fries on an average winter day.

Allison Jenkins took charge of Ajax Tavern's kitchen in 2010.



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### **AJAX TAVERN: THE POWER ELITE**

The name is befitting this bistro located between the Silver Queen Gondola and The Little Nell hotel because Ajax is at the top of Aspen's lunch-food chain. People come for the grand outdoor patio and stay for the menu, which includes such favorites as the Ajax double cheeseburger (the Tavern's most requested item), truffle fries, Colorado lamb Bolognese, onion soup gratinee, and the Tavern salad.

Aspen Skiing Company purchased Ajax Tavern in 2008, but such former standout chefs as Dena Marino and Jim Butchart established Ajax's reputation for great food and atmosphere. In 2010 Allison Jenkins took charge of the kitchen, where she collaborates with The Little Nell's executive chef, Robert McCormick, on Ajax's seasonal menus.

And the lunch-to-après scene is always strong thanks to the following of young Aspen profession-

als. This winter, restaurant manager Mark Yaeger and bartenders Nick Glavas, Erik Wardell, and Clint Coerdts will helm the bar, serving Colorado beers and seasonal, handcrafted cocktails like the Hot Drunken Pumpkin (house-infused vanilla vodka, Godiva liqueur, and house-made pumpkin puree) and the It's All Greek To Me Bloody Mary (arguably the best Bloody in the country).

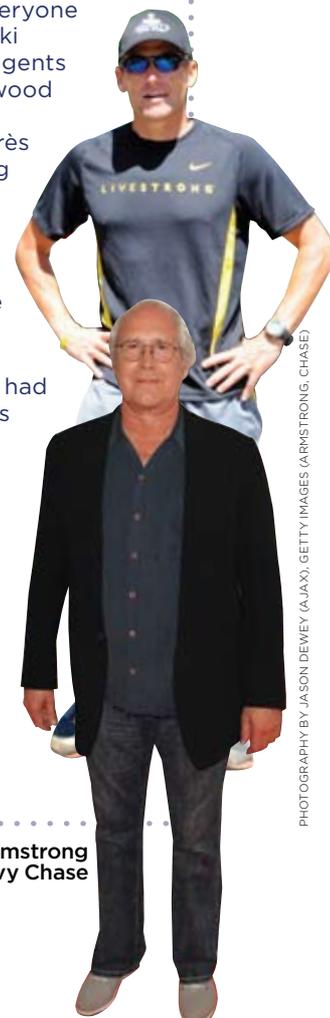
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## TOP TAVERN

**Aspenites can't get enough of Ajax Tavern's fine food and drink.**

**CROWD PLEASERS:** Everyone from ski instructors to ski executives, real estate agents to sports agents, Hollywood stars to athletic stars convenes to eat and après at Ajax Tavern, including Aspen Skiing Company CEO Mike Kaplan, Kevin Costner, Chevy Chase, and former Le Tour de France champion Lance Armstrong.

**ALL'S A TRUFFLE:** Ajax had been making truffle fries long before The Little Nell took over the restaurant, but former Little Nell executive chef Ryan Hardy revamped the recipe, making the fries what they are today. Absolutely addictive, they are made fresh by hand every day. On an average winter day, the Tavern sells more than 100 orders of fries.



**Lance Armstrong and Chevy Chase**

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON DEWEY (AJAX), GETTY IMAGES (ARMSTRONG, CHASE)



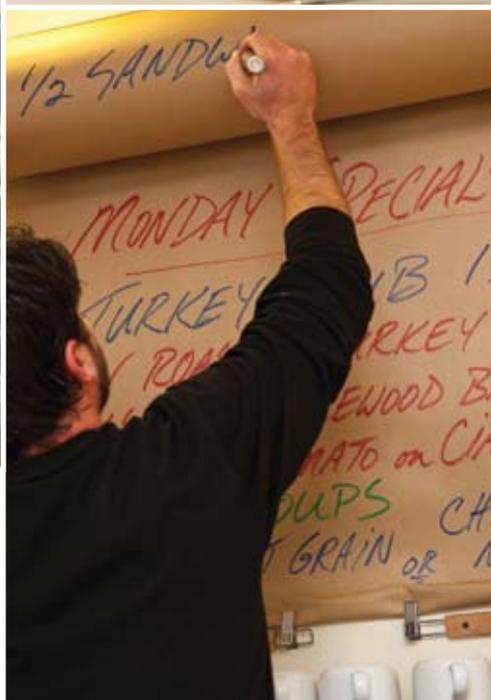
Veggie quiche at Peach's features a farm stand's worth of seasonal produce.



The scene at Peaches.



The lunch menu.



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**PEACH'S CORNER CAFÉ: SEE AND BE SEEN**

In every town there's a corner where people instinctively gather. Perhaps it's due to geography, the view, or people-watching. And there's usually a small café on said corner, where people always order dessert and are eager to chat with a friend or neighbor. In Aspen this coveted locale is Peach's Corner Café.

On any given day you'll find locals rubbing elbows beneath the orange umbrellas with the likes of Chelsea Clinton, Elle Macpherson, and Kate Hudson, who drop in for the fair-trade, shade-grown coffees and delicious organic food. The bright and sunny space is the embodiment of owner Lisa Haisfield. "Lisa's personality is everywhere here," says co-owner and chef David Roth. (Haisfield's sister-in-law, Tracy Eggleston, is also an owner.)

Peach's location, next to City Hall at the corner

of Hopkins and Galena, is arguably the best in town, but Roth says location doesn't define Peach's. Rather, it's the food and community that make it a hot spot.

Menu favorites include the kale salad and the signature open-face breakfast sandwich with poached eggs on toasted bread, "peach" butter, heirloom tomatoes, arugula, bacon, extra-virgin olive oil and shaved Parmesan, as well as daily specials such as the Yakisoba Noodle Bowl with shiitake mushrooms and the outstanding Reuben sandwich—thinly sliced corned beef on rye, with sauerkraut, Swiss cheese, and Thousand Island dressing. **AP**

**SWEET SPOT**

**Peach's has it all: organic food and location, location, location.**

**FARM-TO-TABLE:** Roth buys fresh eggs and produce from local sources, including Jack Reed, who mans a farmers' market outside of Peach's three days a week. "The way we see it, 'local' is not about being cliché," says Roth. "At the end of the day that's what tastes the best."

**IN THE KNOW:** Patrons can order soup and a half-sandwich for \$9, and the wild salmon and ahi tuna are sushi-grade.

**MOST SELECTED TABLE:** The community table. Meet Mayor Mick Ireland (a frequent customer) and talk politics over a smoothie.



Kate Hudson, Elle Macpherson, and Chelsea Clinton

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JASON DEWEY (PEACH'S); GETTY IMAGES (HUDSON, MACPHERSON, CLINTON)