

# **A culinary educator and local dining expert breaks down Michelin's debut Philly list – and gives zero stars to the inspectors**

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Working in restaurants is physically, mentally and emotionally taxing and often thankless work. So it was wonderful to see so many hardworking friends in the Philadelphia dining industry recognized at the Michelin Guide's 2025 Northeast Cities Ceremony in Philadelphia on Nov. 18, 2025.

Three Philadelphia restaurants each received a star: Provenance, Friday Saturday Sunday and Her Place Supper Club. In addition, 10 other food destinations received a Bib Gourmand for providing “exceptionally good food at moderate prices,” and 21 received Michelin-Recommended status. Pietramala was the sole winner of a green star for sustainability.

I'm especially proud that the Culinary Arts and Science program at Drexel University, where I teach, has had student co-ops and employees, as well as alumni, at all three starred restaurants.

As a classically trained chef, culinary educator and author of the textbook “Culinary Improvisation,” which teaches culinary creativity, I've been following the Michelin developments in Philadelphia closely. I am also a contributor to The Infatuation Philly, whose mission is to bring you honest and trustworthy opinions about where to eat. I spend a good amount of time experiencing and reviewing restaurants.

In “Culinary Improvisation,” my co-authors and I discuss the “ingredients” needed to foster culinary innovation: mastery of culinary technique, access to a diverse range of ingredients and flavors, and a collaborative and supportive environment to take risks and make mistakes.

I worried that Michelin, while good for bringing more tourist dollars and recognition to the city, would be bad for fostering some of the very qualities that already make Philadelphia one of the most innovative and high-quality dining cities in the country.

I was particularly concerned that the freedom to experiment, create and innovate would be stifled under the spotlight of outside inspectors.

According to the Michelin Guide, stars are awarded to outstanding restaurants based on: “quality of ingredients, mastery of cooking techniques and flavors, the personality of the chef as expressed in the cuisine, value for money, and consistency of the dining experience both across the menu and over time.”

The criteria do not mention innovation.



2025 Michelin star winners Hannah and Chad Williams, the husband-and-wife team behind Friday, Saturday, Sunday, accept the award for Outstanding Restaurant at the 2023 James Beard Restaurant And Chef Awards.

*Jeff Schear/Getty Images for The James Beard Foundation*

## Some confounding snubs

The three Philly restaurants that were awarded stars are all deserving, but I believe there are so many oversights, especially on the creativity and innovation front. Reviewing the reviewers, I don't think they deserve a star.

Within the city boundaries, Emmett, Fork, Vernick Fish, Ogawa, Rice and Sambal, Elwood, Alice, Fiore, a.kitchen, Perla, Bastia, Blue Corn, Little Fish, Mawn, Lacroix and Le Virtu all stand out to me as places that embody the creative energy of Philly's dining scene and should be at least recommended.

While the guide refers to “Philadelphia and surroundings,” and a Michelin representative reportedly indicated that suburban restaurants would be considered, no restaurants outside the city limits were honored. Did the inspectors not want to battle rush-hour traffic to visit the comforting yet exciting things happening at Cornerstone, June BYOB, Hearthside, Zeppoli, Park Place, Ripplewood, Andiario, Lark and The Choice?

The three recommended cheesesteak places – Dalessandro’s, Del Rossi’s and Angelo’s – are arguably fine, but it’s a tourist stereotype to include so many.

In contrast, China Gourmet, Nom Wah, Bai Wei, E-Mei, Café Nhan, South Philly Barbacoa, Black Dragon, Doro Bet, Farina di Vita and John’s Roast Pork received no mention by Michelin – while all are on my short list to recommend to visitors looking for great food at a good value.

Philadelphians know that cheesesteak may be obligatory for visitors, but the roast pork sandwich – ideally with provolone, broccoli rabe and long hots – is the real reason to visit.

James Beard darling Mawn didn’t make the list, nor did the [omakase experience at Royal Sushi and Izakaya], which Philly food media thought was a given for a star. The casual izakaya part of the restaurant did receive a Bib Gourmand, but the review doesn’t mention the food at the omakase bar, leading chef-owner Jesse Ito and Philly food critic Craig LaBan to speculate that Michelin inspectors couldn’t get a reservation. If that’s the case, it’s inexcusable. When asked, a Michelin spokesperson said they don’t “reveal specifics.” Michelin inspectors should do the work to get into the critically acclaimed places.

As for Mawn: Wait in line for their no-reservation lunch like the rest of Philly.

## Where to eat now?

As a strategy for building tourism, filling seats during lunch hours and early in the week, and recruiting out-of-town restaurant talent, Michelin makes a lot of sense for Philly. But many people don’t realize that Michelin is pay-to-play in the locations included in its guides, so Philly’s lack of Michelin stars before last month should not indicate that the city’s restaurant scene was not already Michelin-worthy. We just hadn’t paid for the privilege of being inspected.

Additionally, Michelin awards are just one of many awards and accolades that Philly restaurants can get.

The Philadelphia Convention and Visitors Bureau has not stated how much they paid to have an outside for-profit company come and confirm that Philly indeed has good restaurants. But in 2024, Houston reportedly agreed to pay the Michelin Guide \$270,000 for the privilege. Assuming Philadelphia paid a similar amount, if not more, that averages to about 100K per star.

In Philadelphia, that money could have been used for scholarships for culinary students, workforce development training ahead of the city's celebration of the nation's 250th birthday or strengthening high school and community college culinary and hospitality programs. It could have gone to tax incentives or lowering hurdles for underrepresented or emerging restaurateurs – uses I believe would make Philly's food scene even stronger.

Instead it was used to give restaurants that had already received prestigious James Beard awards and other recognition even more kudos – making them even more difficult to get into for Philadelphians and tourists alike.

In a city known for its grit, doing its thing whether you like it or not, and thumbing its nose at New York and Washington, D.C., this whole thing strikes me as very un-Philly.

I'm going to make it a point to visit all the restaurants I love that haven't gotten the credit they deserve. With over 6,000 restaurants in Philadelphia, I'll be busy. The tourists can have the Michelin places until the hype dies down.

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