

Walloon Lake's culinary footprint expanded last fall with the opening of Walloon Watershed, a fashionable eatery and bar.

Like many, including Nobel and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Ernest Hemingway, Meghan Thatcher spent her childhood summers on Walloon Lake. Magical memories of those family vacations led her and her husband, Matt, to invest in this thriving small waterfront community.

The Thatchers launched Walloon Lake Boat Co., offering tours aboard a vintage-inspired electric Duffy boat, in 2023. Last September they opened the doors to Walloon Watershed, a year-round restaurant with comfy yet elegant resort vibes that serves savory shared plates and first-class beverages, along with live music. Walloon Watershed quickly became a favorite gathering spot for visitors and locals looking for a distinctive epicurean experience.

Matt selects the wines himself and always includes a handful from the local Petoskey wine region, along with global offerings that he hopes will surprise and please his guests. Classic and signature cocktails are crafted with spirits from regional distilleries such as Foggy Mountain in Boyne Falls and Mammoth Distilling in Central Lake. Distinctive brews come from Michigan and beyond, including Million Dollar Dog — an exclusive Walloon Watershed lager from the nearby Mackinaw Trail Winery & Brewery.

The curated food menu encourages sharing, and charcuterie boards feature a collection of cured meats, cheeses, and seasonal accompaniments. There's also a local smoked whitefish spread with crudités and crackers; and a trio of flatbreads like the margarita, BBQ chicken, and the Bee Sting, a Roman-style crust topped with traditional red sauce, a mozzarella cheese blend, and pepperoni with a drizzle of hot honey. A Walloon Watershed signature dish is the one-pound soft pretzel served with warm beer cheese, jalapeño honey, mustard, and cornichons.

The 2,700-square-foot restaurant is anchored by a 15-seat marble bar which, along with the various custom built-ins, was designed by Justin Sharer of Sharer Design Group in Plymouth. Interior



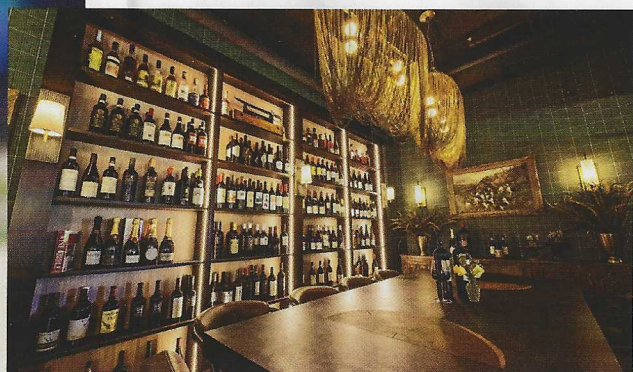
DINING OUT

Savory Shared Plates

New year-round Walloon Watershed eatery and bar becomes an instant gathering place for locals and visitors

BY
Dianna Stampfler

PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALLOON WATERSHED



designer Kali Weber of Chatham House in Bay Harbor was challenged with designing the bar stools and furniture for the intimate seating areas sprinkled throughout, utilizing high-end fabrics and wallpaper from Schumacher.

Meanwhile, many of the rugs — some are more than 100 years old — found within the establishment are antique Persian, and foster a unique balance between elegance and northern Michigan rustic. Even a trip to the Walloon Watershed restroom is fun, as guests will find a collage of kitschy décor and design elements.

In the 10-seat semiprivate dining space there's a 24-inch-tall bronze bust of Hemingway, designed by the late Martha Sulfridge of Boyne City. It's one of a handful of tributes to Walloon Lake's most famous summer resident that can be found in town. Many of these nods to Hemingway are being highlighted this summer as part of a new, village-wide progressive cultural project known as "Consenses." Walloon Watershed is one of the featured collaborators along the self-guided art walk, which was developed by Sally Taylor (daughter of legendary entertainers Carly Simon and James Taylor).

During warm weather, the two large garage-style glass doors on the north end of the building open onto a 1,300-square-foot outdoor patio with seating for 50 and glimpses of Walloon Lake. They're the hottest seats in town during the peak summer season.

"Walloon Watershed is exactly what this village — and the whole region — has been missing," notes Challis Hodge, a chef and restaurant owner from the Cincinnati area. His wife, Lauren, has a family place on Walloon Lake and she has spent time there her whole life. The couple was married on the family dock, had their reception in the village, and still visit as often as work allows.

"The owners of Walloon Watershed are the real deal — welcoming, knowledgeable, and genuinely invested in creating something meaningful for the village and the region," Hodge notes. "They've developed something special here, a place that brings real intention to the wine, spirits, and food program. The wine list is smart, the cocktails and bourbon selection are excellent, and the small plates are thoughtful and well-executed. The space strikes that perfect balance between elevated and approachable. It's comfortable, welcoming, and elegant without being pretentious."

Located a half mile west of U.S. 131 on M-75, Walloon Watershed complements the current village businesses that have opened within the last decade, such as Hotel Walloon, Barrel Back, and the Walloon Village General Store. Nearby long-standing establishments include the Vintage Mercantile, the Sweet Tooth candy and ice cream shop, and the historic 1891 Walloon Lake Inn.

Walloon Watershed shares a building with Iron Goat Coffee, Vilah Bloom, and Sweetwater Floral on the street level, with upscale condos above. ≈

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Both pages, clockwise from left: Walloon Watershed's charcuterie boards feature all the goodies (you can also opt for a local smoked whitefish spread that's out of this world). Chatham House in Bay Harbor waved a magic interior-design wand in the intimate bar area. Owners Matt and Meghan Thatcher toast to their lovely establishment.