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OFF DUTY

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ADVENTURE & TRAVEL

SITES & SIGHTINGS

Power Grub in Powder Hubs

The edibles at American ski meccas get a much-needed lift

VAIL'S EXPANSIVE Back Bowls and Jackson Hole's heart-pounding, out-of-bounds terrain are just two reasons why the American ski scene has little reason to suffer an inferiority complex. Yet when it comes to slope-side dining, there is clearly room for improvement. While visitors to the Alps and Pyrenees routinely pause on the slopes for two-hour, wine-soaked lunches, powder hounds in America have mostly resigned themselves to going out for budget-busting but lackluster meals.

Lately, however, a flurry of new dining outposts at American ski resorts challenges the heat-lamp-warmed pizza and cocoa. Take Vermont's Stowe Mountain Resort, which has made food a priority in a mostly completed \$400 million renovation that began in 2004. Now, lunch on the slopes might mean sinking into a burger made from local, grass-fed beef or snacking on a cheese board comprised of artisanal offerings. "When you're skiing in Europe, dining is an integral part of the day," said Chris Goss, the resort's director of hospitality, food and beverage. "We realized that if we were going to attract our target market, we needed to provide more than just slope-side spas and luxurious lodging."

The focus on eating well is seeping beyond the confines of resorts. Ski areas' beloved dive bars are now competing with award-winning craft breweries, while ambitious farm-to-table restaurants are opening in town, near Main Street's burger joints. Here are four ski destinations with stellar dining to complement those black diamonds.

—Elizabeth Gunnison



▼ WELCOME TO 'BEERVANA' Bend, Ore.

With more than a dozen breweries in the area (including craft-brewing pioneer **Deschutes**), it's no wonder that this high-desert town of nearly 80,000 in central Oregon, which functions as home base for visitors to nearby Mount Bachelor, is earning monikers like "Beertown U.S.A." and "Beervana." When it comes to food, local dining favorites like Zydeco and the Sparrow Bakery are joined by an emerging food-cart scene. Beer geeks will enjoy soaking up the suds with curbside fish and chips from the Codfather or Dump City Dumplings' steaming soup dumplings.



▲ HIGHER-END AT HIGH ALTITUDE Aspen, Colo.

Aspen has long won raves for its sophisticated après-ski scene, and the resort continues to bolster its reputation as the American West's answer to Europe's glitziest destinations. This season, a number of new restaurants prove that Aspen dining is more than just a pretty table setting. Adding to venues such as Nobu Matsuhisa's restaurant and chic Miami transplant Casa Tua, boutique hotel the Little Nell just replaced its Montagna restaurant with Element 47, housed in an elegant Bentel & Bentel-designed room and focusing on Colorado agriculture, brewing and distilling. Last summer the St. Regis debuted **Chefs Club by Food & Wine**, which features menus curated by the magazine's Best New Chef winners.



► FARM-TO-TABLE CHOPS Stowe, Vt.

Beginning with the renovation of on-mountain lunch spot Cliff House in 2006, Stowe Mountain Resort has forged relationships with local farmers, cheesemakers and brewers to showcase the best of the area's artisan food. **Solstice**, an elegant, seasonally driven spot at the lavish resort Stowe Mountain Lodge, has been a successful extension of this ethos. The region's other big culinary draws are in the nearby town of Waterbury: Hen of the Wood, where chef Eric Warnstedt serves unfussy locavore fare; and Michael's on the Hill, housed in an 1820s farmhouse and run by Swiss-born, New York-trained chef Michael Kloeti. Nearby, Prohibition Pig showcases the best of a thriving regional brewing scene by sourcing many of its beers from local producers.



▲ LOCALLY RAISED TALENT Park City, Utah

Jean-Georges Vongerichten may have a toe-hold on the Park City dining scene at the St. Regis, but most of the new culinary firepower in this town is homegrown. Park City-based restaurateur Bill White operates seven restaurants in town, including local favorites Wahso and Windy Ridge Café. Over the last three years, the chef's protégés have gone on to open the recent crop of critical darlings: **Talisker on Main**, the Farm at Canyons, Slopes by Talisker and Apex at Montage Deer Valley (which has a beekeeper on staff and serves a beer brewed from high-altitude hops). Fans of top-notch domestic spirits rave about High West Distillery & Saloon, known for its killer rye whiskey.

Clockwise from top right: Chefs Club by Food & Wine at the St. Regis Aspen (2); Solstice at Stowe Mountain Lodge (2); Deschutes Brewery Bend Public House (2); Talisker on Main (2)