



# Howard's Agenda

At the Alvah Stone in Montague, every detail matters

BY DANIEL PASTAN | PHOTOGRAPHY BY PAUL SHOUL

**H**oward Wein clunks down the stairs, a bottle of Del Maguey single-village tequila in hand, and pours us two glasses. He's a heavily bearded fellow who gestures more with his eyebrows than his hands. He glows with parental adoration for his restaurant's riverside patio, which backdrops our two-hour conversation. Though he appears right at home in this quaint New England town, Wein emits a distinct sense of worldliness and confidence. This is a man who's got Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto on speed dial, and yet shops regularly at the Brattleboro Co-op.

Every aspect of The Alvah Stone has been precisely designed to suit the space's concept—perfectly executed, authentic American fare in a down-to-earth, pastoral setting. Wein is at once creative visionary and busboy, owner and architect. The decade he spent working as Executive-this and Chief-that in NYC and Philly might seem far-removed from the Alvah's feel-good mission statement, but the years of boardroom meetings and redeye flights were all building toward this, his self-proclaimed "baby." With the tequila flowing steadily, Howard and I chatted.

**Daniel Pastan:** What originally brought you to Western Mass?

**Howard Wein:** I grew up outside New York in Westchester, and then I went to Pitzer College in Claremont, California for a couple years, and then transferred to Hampshire, where I met my wife. We've been married now 16 years. She graduated a couple years

after I did, so we lived in Montague while she finished, and I worked as the Food and Beverage Director and Executive Chef at Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival.

**DP:** Did you study food and hospitality at Hampshire?

**HW:** Yeah. I studied Culinary Arts and Business. When my wife finished up, we moved from here to Ithaca, and I got my MBA at Cornell's School of Hotel Administration.

**DP:** Have you always known you wanted to work in the food business?

**HW:** Totally. I've always wanted to have my own business. But I was scared that I didn't know enough about finance and accounting and things that don't interest me. Cornell was mind-blowing. I came out and I decided to take this big corporate job in White Plains, four minutes from where I grew up. So I was like: OK, I'm going to take a job at a public, multibillion-dollar, multinational company. And to people that look at the world in a certain kind of way, no matter what I want to do, that will make a lot of sense—which wasn't necessarily my way, but I understood it, so I did it.

**DP:** How do you reconcile those disparate experiences—from Hampshire to Cornell, from New York to Montague?

**HW:** I don't know; it's just all part of the mix. It comes back to the alternative education thing, the Hampshire. To me, Cornell was a lemon, and I was making lemonade. Everything has been about