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**Tastemakers**  
**Rick Coates**

Stafford Smith is a legend in culinary and hospitality circles around the Midwest. He helped to put the capital S into service. As proprietor of four popular establishments, The Pier Restaurant in Harbor Springs, The Bay View Inn and Perry Hotel in Petoskey and the Weathervane Restaurant in Charlevoix, Smith has built his own culinary and lodging dynasty and helped to pre-serve some important cultural and historical landmarks in the area along the way. Each location is known for its hospitality and culinary excellence.

A true test of whether a restaurant has a high standard of culinary and service excellence is by dropping in minutes before they stop serving dinner. I did that recently at Stafford's The Weathervane, arriving five minutes before the kitchen closed and they never missed a beat. The place was packed (a norm for Stafford's properties) and my server paid attention to detail from start to finish. A pet peeve of mine is that when you don't order alcohol, the attitude of a server seems to sour at some places. Not at Stafford's – the server was unfazed, and when I presented him with a coupon to further reduce my tab, he went to great lengths to show that he had discounted my bill.

The atmosphere is delightful at the Weathervane year-round (summer offers stunning views along the Pine River Channel, which connects Lake Michigan and Round Lake), especially with the massive stone fireplace made of glacial boulders shaped like Michigan's lower peninsula, replicating a map of the state, including its highways.

I was quite impressed with the presentation of my Oak Planked Whitefish, considering the chef had been swamped and it was nearing his time to go home. It was absolutely exquisite and is a must try for anyone who enjoys whitefish. The oakiness from the plank permeates the fish creating a subtle woody sensation that is balanced out nicely with the Remoulade Sauce and half a lemon. Equally impressive were the Duchesse Potatoes and Parmesan Tomato Crown "crusted" to perfection along with the whitefish. A nice oaked Chardonnay is the perfect wine pairing for this meal. The Weathervane is a winner on all three counts: service, atmosphere and quality. To learn more and to see menus of all Stafford's properties visit

[www.staffords.com](http://www.staffords.com)

