

# Steak Out

Our Morton's Neighbor to the North Sizzles Beef With the Best of Them

**M**orton's Steak House (4 Avenue Rd. at Prince Arthur, Toronto, 416-925-0648, [www.mortons.com](http://www.mortons.com)) doesn't have quite as much pizzazz as in Chicago or New York (551 Fifth Ave., at 45th Street, 212-972-3315), and the beef isn't precisely the same character, nor does it proffer a veal chop, but this T.O. branch of that famous steakhouse has definite rewards.

Steak, of course, is the main element at Morton's — aged, richly marbled and reliable, if not glorious. The thickly cut steaks are trimmed of excess fat, charred crusty outside, juicy within, tender, flavorful and grilled rare when you ask.

The masculine setting is pleasant and lively, with off-white walls bracing striking Leroy Neiman paintings and fully stocked wine racks. The floor holds an extraordinarily bustling open kitchen, all under a flood of soft lighting. Tables are a bit close for intimate feasting, but then steak was never intended



**Beef:** What's for dinner at Morton's.

for romantic meals. The service is dependably courteous and reasonably efficient.

Servers roll up carts of raw meat for inspection: Samples include a 24-ounce Porterhouse steak; a tender, juicy 20-ounce New York strip steak; 14-ounce double-cut filet mignon; Chicago-style plump and succulent bone-in rib eye; and generous portions of prime rib.

For something different from beef, there's chicken Christopher in a garlic *beurre-blanc* sauce, an array of fish and shellfish, such as the excellent,



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flavorsome jumbo lump crabcakes, grilled Canadian salmon or colossal shrimp Alexander in a fine butter sauce.

À la carte fresh vegetables, such as the steamed jumbo asparagus festooned with roasted red peppers, are a favorite. If you can't decide between the highly recommended hash browns or mashed potatoes, try them both and share.

North Atlantic lobsters are big, but one could cost more than your monthly food budget. Pass on the \$21 lobster cocktail — it might turn up tougher than a shoe. Also eschew the flavorless, watery lobster bisque.

Start instead with the sweet sea scallops deftly packaged in savory bacon and bathed in a zesty Dijon mustard salsa. À la carte salads are good, but the chopped salad fashioned with iceberg and romaine lettuce, hearts of palm, artichoke hearts, bacon, blue cheese, chopped egg, purple onion, tomato and avocado then tossed in mustard vinaigrette is thoroughly outstanding. Morton's house salad and spinach salad likewise make good appetizers.

You will find the large, freshly baked, bubble-shaped loaves of fragrant bread and lashings of butter simply impossible to resist. If you still want dessert, there's virtuous but not great soufflés and a standard cheesecake. The wine inventory is well-matched to the fare, generally heady and robust, like most everything else at Morton's. This restaurant is expensive, with entrées running \$42 to \$106, but its steaks are some of the best in Toronto. ■

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