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## Getting to Know Northeast Dutchess County

Rural Refinement in Millerton, Amenia, Millbrook

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Samantha Bea at The Music Cellar in Millerton.

Northeast Dutchess County is home to a lot more than gorgeous fall foliage and rolling hills. Farmers tend to their livestock and horses graze, but New York City (under two hours away) also ushers in scores of weekend visitors seeking rural respite amongst a charming trio of small towns: Millerton, Amenia, and Millbrook. Connected by Route 44, these three communities offer farm-to-table delicacies, unique shopping opportunities, and indie theaters to rival what you might find in a big city—without any traffic jams. Parks, golf clubs, and a recreational rail trail round out an endless slate of outdoor activities, and new businesses spring up often as the towns continue to swell in size and popularity.



Taconic Distillery Founder Paul Coughlin in Stanfordville.

### Millerton

With less than 1,000 permanent residents, Millerton was once a junction where three railroads converged; when the trains departed in 1980, the local economy faltered and many farms shut down. Eventually, moneyed second-home owners began to move in, as well as those who considered Millerton a convenient alternative to the pricier Connecticut. The hamlet was revived.

Should you crave a caffeinated pick-me-up, **Irving Farm Coffee House**, on Main Street, is the place to go. The coffee comes fresh from a roastery in town, and over the past year, Irving Farms has grown considerably; the Millerton location is now one of nine stores, but still the only choice outside Manhattan. New on their menu is cold brew (in addition to iced coffee), both a classic and seasonal blend. Those who prefer tea can head over to **Harney & Sons**, another outlet with a sister site in New York. They offer 250 varieties of tea in their tasting room, plus a lunch menu in the back lounge. Good grub can be found at Main Street eateries like **52 Main**, a tapas restaurant, and **Oakhurst Diner**, a retro boxcar-style joint dating back to the 1940s.



Cole Peck, assistant winemaker at Millbrook Vineyards & Winery.

For those who prefer their entertainment old school, the **Four Brothers Drive-In** is a nice change of pace from the modern-day cinema experience. Open March through October, the drive-in screens evening double features and will add a larger concession stand, mini-golf course, and airstream trailer to house traveling moviegoers by 2018. According to John Stephanopoulos (who runs the drive-in and **Four Brothers Pizza** next door with his brother Paul), visitors are common from towns two to three hours away, so he now offers pre-movie music and magic shows, to keep early parkers busy. Nostalgia is heightened by carhop service, with food brought directly to your vehicle, and in addition to new releases the drive-in hosts a Throwback Thursday, during which classic films are screened.

A small hamlet in the town of Amenia called Wassaic is home to the **Wassaic Project**, a nonprofit born of a 2008 arts festival that still happens every August. It has since grown to become a year-round organization with rotating gallery exhibitions and art workshops.

Housed inside a formidable, milky-white former grain mill, the facility offers artist residencies in the summer and winter; chosen residents are primarily visual creators, though co-executive director Jeff Barnett-Winsby hopes to develop a dance residency in the future.

These artists engage with nearby public schools, creating curriculums with the goal being cultural exposure for local kids. At the end of this month, the Wassaic Project will host its Mill Warming event at the Maxon Mills, a new winter exhibition called "What We Don't Realize When We See Things."



Eman Alshawaf, artist in residency at The Wassaic Project.

### Millbrook

Millbrook is the most affluent village on our list, host to both generations-old families and weekend newcomers. Celebs like Liam Neeson keep country estates here, and expensive equestrian are common, with events like polo matches and the Millbrook Hunt (fox hunting). The Orvis Sandanona shooting grounds is the oldest permitted shotgun shooting club in the country, where millionaires and tradesmen alike congregate to puff cigars and practice their aim.

A thriving science center might seem out of place in such a swanky setting, but Millbrook's **Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies** does important environmental research into topics like Lyme disease prevention and climate change, plus it hosts regular guest speakers to inform the community. On February 13, there will be a road salt science and management forum for discussion regarding icy winter roads and how to keep them safe while not damaging the land with saline. The institute's passion for global warming education is also a constant.

According to President Josh Ginsberg, "it's important to give people the science of climate change, rather than just the rhetoric, in this current political climate."



Brennan Kearney and Antonia Salvato, antique dealers at Millbrook Antiques Mall.

Get further in touch with the natural world at the **Trevor Zoo**, home to 80 different species, eight of them endangered. The zoo is open every day of the year (including holidays), making it the perfect destination for a family outing. There are 200 animals total—among them red pandas, wolves, and lemurs. To see how the animals behave after hours, watch the zoo's livestream of the pandas on their website.

If you're looking to carouse, hit up the **Taconic Distillery** (just outside town, in Stanfordville) for some barrel-aged spirits, or try **Millbrook Vineyards & Winery**; since last year, the winery doubled the size of its tasting room, added a space for reserve tastings, and opened up a Vineyard Tap Room with wine by the glass on draft. In the summer it hosts Food Truck Fridays, where trucks bearing tasty treats roll up to the winery and help revelers soak up all that vino. Just a hop, skip, and a jump from the winery is **Wing's Castle**, a strange structure straight out of a fairytale, built entirely from reclaimed materials! The castle offers several B&B options, ranging from the Dungeon Room (spooky!) to The Cottage (much cozier!)



Marten Rosse feeding Zhu, a young male red panda, at Trevor Zoo at Millbrook School.

As for shopping, there are plenty of high-end boutiques to peruse. **Alicia Adams Alpacas** specializes in the design and production of clothing made from alpaca wool (the alpaca herd lives in nearby Stanfordville). New in the store is the Rainbow Collection (scarves, hats, sweaters, all unisex, in every color of the rainbow); a percentage of proceeds go to an LGBT organization. Adams moved to Millbrook from Germany and says she wishes the town's "melting pot" atmosphere, with so many weekenders from New York City and large communities of Spanish speakers and international families. Partake of more retail therapy at **Absolutely Wild Home**, an upscale home furnishings store that opened last December, or **Arrowsmith Forge**, where custom metal designs like steel chandeliers and wrought-iron gates are produced. It remains one of the few ornamental and architectural forges in the Hudson Valley.

Another recent addition to Millbrook is **Maura's Kitchen**, a family-owned restaurant that prides itself on providing "the comfort of a mother's home cooked meal" and serving "feel good food." If you crave more sophisticated cuisine, **Cafe Les Baux** has eclectic French nosh and Charlotte's take on a rural, family-owned restaurant in the warmer months and a cozy fireplace in winter. **Slammin' Salmon** serves lunch with an "old school" gourmet shop feel; specialties include hand-cut aged steaks, artisan cheese, and the freshest fish around.

Whether you're strolling down the Harlem Valley Rail Trail via Millerton, snuggling up with a sweetheart at the drive-in, or hanging with the animals at Millbrook's Trevor Zoo, you'll never be starved for amusement or culture in Northeast Dutchess County.