



A TASTING ROOM

"Maine's 2013 Woman-Owned Business of the Year"



OUR LOCATIONS

8 Rodick Place
Bar Harbor, ME 04609
207.801.2580

503 Main Street
Rockland, ME 04841
207.596.0276

88 Main Street
Freeport, ME 04032
207.869.5227

90 Maine Street
Brunswick, ME 04011
207.406.4957

At the Vault
84 Lisbon Street
Lewiston, ME 04240

OPEN YEAR ROUND

FIORELIVEOILS.COM

| INFO@FIORELIVEOILS.COM

| Use Code PORT for 10% Off

Like us on 

Beyond Salt & Pepper

Meet the wizards who **awaken our palates** with oils, spices, and flavors galore. If you can't stand the heat, get out the kitchen.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

Transport yourself to warmer climes via your taste buds with exotic spices and imaginative ingredients.

AWESOME SAUCES

One of the most effective ways to light up your taste buds is to look to the East. Asian cuisine is all about nuance, which is why Portland is in love with pho, ramen, and hot-and-sour soups. Another easy flavor gateway is via dipping sauce.

"We just call it ginger sauce," says Siwaporn Roberts (pictured right), the busy chef at **Thai Esaan** on Forest Avenue, when asked about the dark and powerful mixture she serves with her Khao Mun Gai (below).

We just call that an understatement. Khao Mun Gai is one of the specialties of the Esaan region in Thailand on the concise menu at this pristine little café, owned by

Roberts's son Ben Boonseng, which opened in February. Roberts steams and slices chicken and serves it over rice with the magical ginger sauce alongside for pouring or dipping. "I make it with sweet soy, white vinegar, garlic, ginger, and hot sauce," she says. But this sauce is so much more than the sum of its parts, and this dish is an extraordinary cold-weather comfort.

We can't stop dipping at Cara Stadler's **Bao Bao Dumpling House** on Park Street, either. The day's special is crispy chicken-cashew dumplings served with "a hoisin sauce we make," says server Hannah

D'Errico. "It's nice and plummy."

She points to small condiment containers set on every table. "This is soy, and this is seasoned black vinegar. We suggest mixing them fifty-fifty. And this"—she touches a little medicine bottle of clear orange liquid—"is our chili oil. We steep Thai bird chilis in oil and then strain it."

Bao Bao's chili oil is hot but not incendiary. It's another enchanting use of hot peppers in a city that's crazy for them. The farmer's market is full of fresh chilis in bright colors—cayennes, Cheyennes, serra-





Basil

Elderberry



Nettles

nos, jalapeños, Fresnos, and the once rare and now ubiquitous shishitos. Remember when Scotch bonnets were found only in Caribbean hot sauces? Now you can get them fresh at Hannaford.

ELIXIR FIX

Vena's Fizz House on Fore Street in the heart of the Old Port is a good spot to start your quest to spice up your life. Step inside and you're surrounded by intriguing little bottles and jars of bitters and tinctures, and all sorts of classic bar paraphernalia. Step upstairs into the bar and you're Indiana Jones pausing for a drink in Timbuktu. It's dim, and there's rhythmic music with vocals in faraway languages in the background. The shelves behind the bar are packed with bottles and vintage glassware.

"We call this the Kickstarter," says bar manager Warren Murray as he shakes up a "mocktail" and strains the pretty orange concoction into a Mason jar garnished with an orange slice. "It's made with Fire Cider, which is apple cider vinegar infused with digestives like turmeric, ginger, habanero pepper, and horseradish. Then we add blood-orange juice, fresh ginger, and some of this ghost pepper extract from Belfast, Maine. Ghost peppers are supposedly the hottest of the hot."

You take a sip—overwhelming fizzy, citrusy, sweet-sour brightness. Two seconds later, your lungs feel warm. Despite the peppers, it doesn't burn like hot sauce—it heats up your soul instead, and it's a warmth that stays with you.

Vena's comprehensive drink menu has pages of cocktails, mocktails, fizzes, rickeys, restoratives, digestives, and curatives. Curatives include an Alchemist's punch and a Hemingway Frappé with absinthe, suggesting hangover cures. There's food, too, including chef Stephanie Shershow's chocolate chili fondue. "I use Urfa Biber chili salt from **Ver-vacious**," she says, referring to another spicy shop on Commercial Street committed to making life taste better than ordinary.

Warren Murray points across the street to the **Sweetgrass Winery** tasting room, where the wine and spirits are fermented and distilled on a farm in Union. "We

use their gin in our cocktails. And their bitters." A jolt of Sweetgrass's Maine cranberry bitters adds unexpected dimensions to even plain seltzer water.

"We're trying out some new quick health shots—kind of the opposite of a cigarette break. They're full of herbs and bitters. There's an antioxidant shot, a digestive, and a 'simmer down' shot with lavender." He strains pale green liquid into a stemmed sherry glass. "This is a Joy Tonic, with basil, rosemary, sage bitters, and lemongrass bitters." You'll be smiling when you leave.

TEA TIME

"Would you like to try my Fall Tonic?" asks Sarah Richards. She's behind the bar at her **Homegrown Herb and Tea** shop on Munjoy Hill, which can best be described as a tiny oasis behind a brightly painted store-



Secret Weapons of Flavor



Top chefs agree, good **imported olive oil** is **essential**. Micucci's Grocery on India Street has oils imported from Italy, Greece, Lebanon, and Spain. Fiore's Artisan Olive Oils & Vinegar has five locations across Maine, importing directly from Italy. Taste the difference of a new **vinegar**, balsamic or otherwise, and don't limit its use to salad dressing. Hotshot chefs like Jamie Oliver and Yotam Ottolenghi note that good wine vinegar brightens up red sauces and braises of meat or chicken. Many of us believe deeply in the magic of **anchovies** to bring ho-hum sauces to life. If the slippery little fishies are too visceral for you, try **Asian fish sauce**—it has umami powers beyond soy sauce. And here's a tip from Rob Evans (of Duckfat and Hugo's fame) in *Press Herald* risotto recipe years ago: "Add a pinch each of **ground cumin, ground coriander, black pepper, cayenne, and paprika** to the minced shallots you saute in oil and butter prior to stirring in the rice and stock. You'll find a heady depth to the finished product."



front. Yes, yes, yes. You never drink tea because you're too busy guzzling dark-roast Midnight Jazz from **Coffee By Design** to power through your busy day. So step away from your preconceptions.

"This is my mix of sarsaparilla, nettles, ginger, turmeric, lemongrass, elderberry, and fennel seeds," says Richards. She makes up her own tea bags with her mixtures. It's scalding, delicious, and extremely reviving, even without caffeine. "Most of my house-made blends are herbal," she says of her teas, "but some are tea-based."

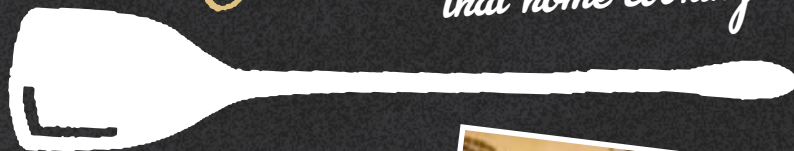
The shop is crowded with jars of herbs, spices, peppercorns, assorted salts, dried chilies, and honey. There's a gallon jar of pickled eggs on the bar. "I hard-boil them and put them in vinegar that's steeped with dried mustard, chili flakes, and salt." She also sells bulk cooking herbs and spices, and she serves "light fare, like crumpets and scones" that she makes herself.

Lest you think this little throwback-hippie cafe will be here today and gone tomorrow, Richards has over 30 wholesale tea accounts, including "Miyake, the Green Elephant, Emelitsa, the Blue Spoon, Sonny's, Local 188, the Press Hotel, and Coffee by Design."

"I'm celebrating my tenth anniversary," she says, "which is why I just put a fresh coat of paint out front." ■

esaan

thai home cooking



COME TRY
WHAT MOM IS
COOKING!



tuesdays – sundays 11am-9pm
THAIESAAN.COM 207-536-0752
849 FOREST AVE. PORTLAND, ME

EL RODEO

MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Authentic Mexican Restaurant & Bar
Locally Owned and Family Operated



Daily Lunch & Happy Hour Specials
Fresh Guacamole • Live Latin Music • Functions
Catering • Delivery • Kids Eat Free on Sundays

147 WESTERN AVE., SOUTH PORTLAND • 773-8851