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2013

Maine Restaurant Week

LOCAL FLAVOR GUIDE

It's a 10-day safari, a whirlwind of culinary excursions from **March 1-10**. The question is, do you dare to risk trying something new?



One Thousand and One Bites

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

The first thing to know about the fifth annual MAINE RESTAURANT WEEK is that it isn't actually a week. It's a 10-day opportunity to sample irresistible multi-course menus dreamed up by clever chefs who are just as sick of winter as you are. At very attractive prices. At restaurants all over the state.

From March 1 through 10, most participating restaurants offer 3-course dinners—your choice of appetizer, main course, and dessert—for \$22 or \$32. This sort of value can make you believe in spring again.

And don't discount the fun of being out in restaurants full of people having a good time after a winter of hibernation. Restaurant Week *works*, and that's why more places participate every year. Restaurants cook up some special flash, and we show up. Adding to the buzz, our week is now well-known outside of Maine.

"We do see guests from Boston and beyond in town for Restaurant Week,

FROM TOP: FILE; CYNTHIA FARR-WEINFELD (3); NUNO SILVA

LOCAL FLAVOR



Previous page, from left: From the top: Cocktail hour at El Rayo Cantina, the perfect spot for a fresh, fruity margarita; outside, a flaming brazier warms our way to spring; Cantina treats include a fiesta salad, the pizza-like *tlayuda* (garnished with avocado slices), and hibiscus-pickled deviled eggs.

This page, dockwise from top: juicy little bites at Sea Glass Restaurant in Cape Elizabeth; making the scene at Sonny's; cilantro-marinated grilled shrimp at El Rayo Cantina; salad goes sunny-side up at Bar Lola; El Rayo Taqueria by night; butter-poached lobster enthroned upon a risotto cake at David's Opus Ten.



and we offer packages on room rates," says Portland Harbor Hotel general manager Gerard Kiladjian. 468 Fore St., 775-9090.

✂ "It definitely increases business, and people definitely come in from out of state," says Carolyn Ferraro, manager of TWENTY MILK



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: FRITOSANDFOEGRAS.COM; COURTESY SONNY'S/TED AXELROD; BAR LOUJA; CYNTHIA FARR-WEINFELD; DAVID'S OPIUS TEN; CYNTHIA FARR-WEINFELD

It's all about **blasting** customers "out of their **comfort zone** with something **new** and **different**."

-Kelly Nelson, Sonny's

STREET at the Portland Regency Hotel. "I think it helps everyone." She offers a few tempting examples from her Restaurant Week menu. "Well, we've got an appetizer of duck confit *gougères*, and there's a hanger steak, and sole with avocado and Jonah crab." 20 Milk St., 774-4200.

✂ "We try for bright and interesting, a little fresher than winter food," says Brian Hill,



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LOCAL FLAVOR

chef-owner of glowing and intimate **FRANCINE BISTRO** in Camden and the more casual **SHEPHERD'S PIE** in Rockport. So what is fresh and available in March? "Smelts! We serve fried smelts a lot at this time of year, and I offer pickled smelts at Francine, and maybe a brussels sprout salad with bottarga and fried cheese curds from our cheese makers down the road. Or a smoked haddock and pomelo salad with fried shallots and smoked peanuts." At Shepherd's Pie, the main courses might include a "really good burger, wood-grilled, roasted mussels with lime butter and sea salt, or fried clam tacos with avocado." 55 Chestnut St., Camden, 230-0083, and 18 Central St., Rockport, 236-8500.

▶ The **AZURE CAFE** in Freeport finds inspiration bringing out "lighter dishes, less braised," when the week in March arrives, says chef Christopher Bassett. "We try to brighten up the plate with color—I've done a pea puree, a carrot sauce—and we use whatever fresh little greenhouse things we can get from our farmers, and maybe even lamb for spring. We always feature local, sustainable white fish—a lot of pollock, hake, and whiting. Their textures are great, each a little different, and they've been going over really well with our customers in everything, even things like fish and chips. Whiting is definitely one of my favorites—little filets up to 8 ounces—it's so fresh, available, and delicious." 123 Main St., Freeport, 865-1237.

▶ In the Old Port at **SONNY'S, Restaurant Week** is about participation and camaraderie in the restaurant community, and getting customers "out of their comfort zone with something new and different," says manager Kelly Nelson. Sonny's regular menu is already outside any ordinary zone, with zingy choices like the Cuban pork sandwich, oysters with ginger lemongrass mignonette, and salt cod fritters with piquillo pepper relish. 83 Exchange St., 772-7774.

▶ At **EL RAYO**, both the **TAQUERIA** and more upscale **CANTINA** next door have Restaurant Week specials, and the Taqueria has a special lunch as well. "It's a chance for the kitchens to try out new dishes," says general manager Noreen Kotts, such as the cornmeal and coconut fish cake with spicy aioli and the turkey mole that debuted on the brand-new Cantina's first Restaurant Week menu last

(Continued on page 68)



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LOCAL FLAVOR



Temptation at Eve's at the Garden: Boneless lamb loin dressed with tomato blood orange chutney luxuriates on a bed of herbed bulgur risotto.

One Thousand and One Bites (continued from page 45) year. 85 and 101 York St., 780-8226.

▶ **BAR LOLA** rolls out a 5-course Restaurant Week tasting menu for \$42. "Since our regular menu is set up so that dinner can be more than three courses, for Restaurant Week we like to give new people a chance to see what we usually do [with the extra courses]," says Stella Hernandez, who owns the comfortable and chic hot spot on Munjoy Hill with her chef husband Guy. Bar Lola's ever-changing menu is known and loved for its new spins on familiar ingredients. Guy

Hernandez can take ingredients as humble as sardines, chickpeas, chicken livers, or hand-cut pappardelle and dress them up and turn them into red-carpet starlets. Stella finds March perfect for Restaurant Week: "It's the doldrums before spring, and new people definitely come out." Any drink specials? "We always offer wine pairings. And this year we're in the cocktail competition at the end of Restaurant Week on March 10—that'll be fun." 100 Congress St., 775-5652.

▶ **Jeff Buerhaus**, chef/owner of Portland's **WALTER'S**, loves the way Restaurant Week

can "bring in crowds who otherwise wouldn't be here in the off-season." His special menu? "Maybe Maine shrimp, since they're in season. Or a trio—trios of anything do well. We've done a lobster trio—a bisque, fritter, and a grilled half-tail—and it was a real hit." 2 Portland Square, 871-9258.

▶ "We love Restaurant Week," says Harding Lee Smith of his three restaurants in Portland, the **FRONT ROOM**, **GRILL ROOM**, and **CORNER ROOM**, all of which join in the fun. "The Corner Room's [Italian] menu works especially well for the three-course format. The appetizer choices are easy—antipasti or cheeses, and then a choice of pasta—the fettuccine bolognese was the big hit last year. And *sorbetto* or *gelato* for dessert—all for \$20." Sounds like temptation impossible to resist. Corner Room, 110 Exchange St., 879-4747; Front Room, 73 Congress St., 773-3366; Grill Room, 84 Exchange St., 774-2333.

▶ **Cape Elizabeth** is Restaurant-Week friendly. "We have a nice clientele here locally, and we like to give them a very

FROM LEFT: EVE'S/PORTLAND HARBOR HOTEL



Portland's Newest Wedding Showcase

Sunday, March 3, 2013

Italian Heritage Center
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12 noon to 4 pm - Free Admission!

The Italian Heritage Center is pleased to announce its inaugural Wedding Showcase. Located on outer Congress Street with ample free parking, the IHC is the perfect setting for a pre-spring event for couples planning a Fall 2013 or Winter 2014 wedding.

Exhibitors include: 3 Sisters Cookies, Double-Take Photography, Annemarie's Italian Cookies, Dean's Sweets, Edible Delights, European Bakery, Affinity Limousine, Musicman DJ Services, Focus Photography, Music by DJ Roger Grenier, and many more.

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good value," says chef Mitchell Kaldrovich at SEA GLASS RESTAURANT at the Inn by the Sea. "For a first course, there's a choice of oysters from Pine Point, a nice salad, or a vegan-but- creamy soup. I make my own gnocchi or pasta as a main-course choice, along with a chicken dish and meatloaf. Comfort for the season. One of our specialty desserts is a gluten-free carrot cake—it's very, very good." 40 Bowery Beach Rd., Cape Elizabeth, 799-3134.

Just up the road, the GOOD TABLE pretties up the plates and offers "higher-end and beloved" dishes for this busy week, says owner Lisa Kostopoulos. Past hits that have become keepers include grilled jumbo scallops with toasted hazelnut Spanish sherry cream served on mashed Yukon gold potatoes, and a Greek meze platter with spanakopita, dolmathes and the works. "For dessert, we've done house-made Eskimo pies with our own vanilla ice cream and caramel sauce." No one can make you hungry like Kostopoulos can—if you've been to the Good Table, you know

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LOCAL FLAVOR

her boundless joy about everything from fresh hot cinnamon buns just pulled from the oven to “braised, Asian-glazed short ribs served on pan-fried ginger and scallion rice cakes” to specialty cocktails: “I’ve got one that has bourbon with bacon—doesn’t that sound *great?*” 527 Ocean House Rd., 799-4663.

▶ THE ROYAL RIVER GRILLHOUSE also loves feeling the love, according to manager Christy Wezowicz. “We *always* have mus-

MORE TO EXPLORE: MAINE ACROSS

- 1912 Cafe, Freeport
- 40 Paper, Camden
- Academe Brasserie, Kennebunk
- Azure Cafe, Freeport
- Back Bay Grill, Portland
- Bar Lola, Portland
- Bonobo Wood Fire Pizza, Portland
- The Broad Arrow Tavern, Freeport
- Buck’s Naked BBQ, Portland
- Cappy’s Chowder House, Camden
- Carmen at the Danforth, Portland
- Corner Room, Portland
- David’s & David’s Opus Ten, Portland
- David’s 388, South Portland
- DaVinci’s Eatery, Lewiston
- DiMillo’s, Portland
- The Dry Dock, Portland
- El Rayo—Taqueria & Cantina, Portland
- Eve’s at the Garden, Portland
- Farmer’s Table, Portland
- Federal Jack’s, Kennebunkport
- Fish Bones American Grill, Lewiston
- Five Fifty-Five & Point 5 Lounge, Portland
- Francine Bistro, Camden
- Freeport Seafood Company
- Fromviandoux, Camden
- Front Room Restaurant & Bar, Portland
- Fuel, Lewiston
- The Good Table, Cape Elizabeth
- Great American Grill, Auburn
- Great Lost Bear, Portland
- Grill Room and Bar, Portland
- Hartstone Inn, Camden

sels as one of the appetizer choices, and it's always *our* mussels with Madeira and butter sauce. Anyone who knows it wants it. There's a beet Napoleon that does well, too, and then steak, seafood, and vegetarian choices for the main course. We usually pick things from our regular menu and tweak them a bit. Wait till you see what our pastry chef is dreaming up." Also dreamy: the view from every window at this pretty spot. Lower Falls Landing, Yarmouth, 846-1226.

RESTAURANT WEEK THE STATE

Hot Suppal, Portland
 Hug's Italian Restaurant, Falmouth
 Le Garage, Wiscasset
 Local 188, Portland
 The Lucerne Inn, Dedham
 Mac's Grill, Auburn
 Natalie's Restaurant, Camden
 Nautilus Seafood & Grill, Belfast
 Old Port Sea Grill, Portland
 One Dock at the Kennebunkport Inn
 Pepperclub/Good Egg Cafe, Portland
 Petite Jacqueline, Portland
 Ribollita, Portland
 RiRa Irish Pub, Portland
 Royal River Grillhouse, Yarmouth
 The Salt Exchange, Portland
 Saltwater Grill, South Portland
 Sea Dog Brewing Company—
 South Portland/Topsham/Bangor
 Sea Glass Restaurant, Cape Elizabeth
 Shepherd's Pie, Rockport
 Shipyard Brew Pub, Eliot
 Slate's, Hallowell
 Solo Bistro, Bath
 Sonny's, Portland
 Tavern at Brunswick Station
 The Thirsty Mule, Oakland
 Thornton's Bar and Grille, South Portland
 Twenty Milk Street, Portland
 Vignola Cinque Terre, Portland
 Walter's, Portland
 White Cap Grille, Portland
 Zapoteca Restaurante Y Tequileria, Portland



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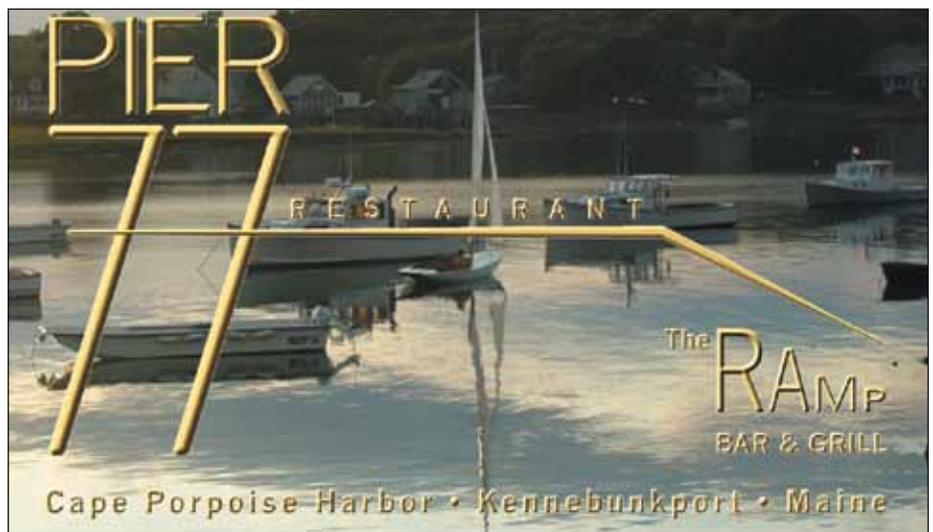


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LOCAL FLAVOR

▶ **ACADEME**, in Kennebunk, has also matriculated for year number four. "We love the philosophy behind MRW, encouraging people to get out and try new places. Offering seasonal items makes sense from a quality and price perspective, and we've also offered special pricing on cocktails or wine" to jazz things up," says Shanna O'Hea, co-chef with husband Brian at this bistro in the Kennebunk Inn. 45 Main St., Kennebunk, 985-3351.

▶ At **FISHBONES AMERICAN GRILL**, which opened seven years ago in Lewiston, chef/owner Paul Landry shoots for excitement on a plate. "We'll have lobster rangoons or mussels margarita in the appetizer choices." Main courses include a "steak served with Maine shrimp risotto and a garlic sauce, panko-crusted haddock with native fingerlings, and pork medallions in a schnitzel style, with breading made from crumbs of toasted grains from Baxter Brewing—we've toasted these grains before and they're a unique, nutty, crispy, unusually flavorful thing." And here's a sinful dessert you won't find elsewhere: "Maine apple fritter with maple

Signature Events

THE BREAKFAST COOK-OFF

March 1, 7-9 a.m.

This wildly popular kick-off event has drawn throngs to Sea Dog Brewing for the past 3 years. The Good Table Restaurant's Creme Brulée French Toast has dominated first place all three years. \$20, Sea Dog Brewing Co., 125 Western Ave., South Portland, seadogbrewing.com

"SIGNATURE EVENT" BARTENDER & PASTRY CHEF COMPETITION

March 10, 4:30-7:30 p.m.

Restaurant Week's finale somehow makes the collision of cocktails and fancy desserts at a single event make perfect sense. Fancy hors d'oeuvres are paired with the drinks. \$40, Prime Mercedes-Benz, 137 U.S. Route 1, Scarborough, primemotorcars.com



Simple pleasures seduce: prosciutto and arugula pizza and a glass of rosso at the Corner Room.

applewood bacon ice cream that we make here specially for restaurant week." Landry's enthusiasm for MRW is catchy. "It's a nice introduction to Fishbones. There's something about that Lewiston/Gray line—people think we're far away, but we're not. We keep gaining new people from the Portland area." This is truly a bone to pick. 60 Lincoln St. in No. 6 Bates Mill, 333-3663.

▶▶ Chef Justin Oliver's **FUEL**, in Lewiston's Lyceum Hall on Lisbon Street, is a Restaurant Week star. The menu's full of country French bistro hits like *escargots*, *cassoulet*, *coq au vin* and *filet mignon*, but he also offers an off-the-cuff "feed me" menu to interested whole tables upon request. "They tell me what they like," Oliver laughs, "and what they *don't* like, and I make them something for dinner. We can do this any night." As in, "Try me. I dare you." 49 Lisbon St., Lewiston, 333-3835. (See our review of Fuel, page 67.)

Which somehow captures the spirit of Restaurant Week: surprise, camaraderie, and originality, with a dash of devil-may-care experimentation. If there are rush tickets to theater, why shouldn't there be rush tickets to cuisine? Join the madding crowd, because this is the week that is. ■

▶▶ For the most up-to-date list of participating restaurants, visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2013/02/restaurant-week-2013.

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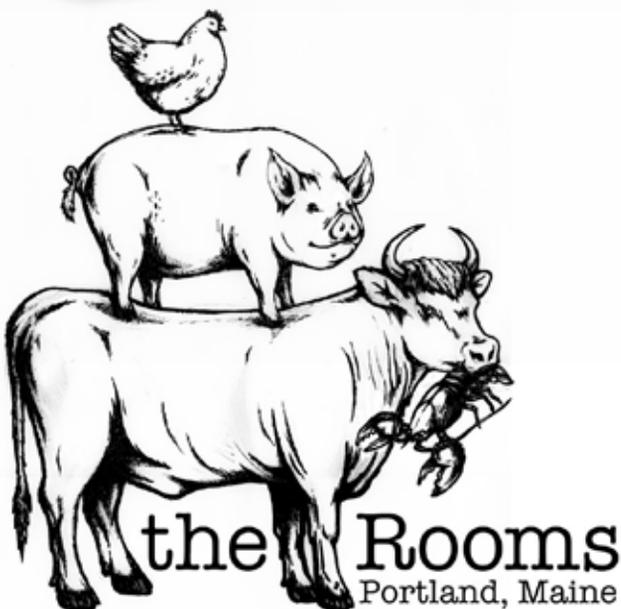
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