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Once a humble bottom feeder fit only for the plates of prisoners and slaves, the Maine lobster is now hailed as haute cuisine. Today lobster is swimmingly approved by acclaimed chefs nationwide who spin it—like straw into gold—to ever-increasing culinary heights. A few of them share their favorite crustacean creations with Portland Monthly.

Emeril Lagasse

BAM!

Emeril Lagasse won a full scholarship to study music at the New England Conservatory of Music but turned it down to pursue a life in the culinary arts. “My mother was the inspiration,” he says. “It all started in her kitchen.”
For Emeril...

Before New Orleans there was Portland.

“I had a home in Old Orchard Beach... I would always stop at this place—I think it was called the Lobster Pot—for lobster rolls.” —Emeril

20-year-old executive chef Emeril Lagasse, center, with his staff at Sheraton Inn’s Seasons restaurant in South Portland, 1980.
I grew up cooking with her. I tried the music thing for a while, but in the end I wanted to cook.” That’s not to say he doesn’t feel the beat every now and then. “If there’s a set of drums at an event, it is likely that you will catch me playing before the night is over.”

From 1980 to 1982, Lagasse worked as the executive chef at the Sheraton in South Portland, where Doubletree is today. “Portland is a wonderful city with the ocean right there and great seafood,” he says. “I made a friend, Rod Mitchell [of Browne Trading Company], over 30 years ago, and I still buy Day Boat Scallops and Peekytoe crab from him.”

Asked if he ever thought about opening a restaurant in Maine, Emeril admits it’s crossed his mind. “I really loved being there,” he says. “There weren’t many restaurants back then, but there were fish shacks and lobster shacks. I had a home in Old Orchard Beach, and on the way to South Portland I would always stop at this place–I think it was called the Lobster Pot–for lobster rolls.” But Commander’s Palace in New Orleans drew him away in 1982, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Of the recipe he’s sharing with us–one of his go-tos–Emeril says it combines two of his favorite things: lobster and pasta. “It’s simple enough to let the taste of the sweet lobster shine through and yet sophisticated enough to serve as part of an elegant meal. When I opened Emeril’s in New Orleans (left), lobster wasn’t often seen on local menus. This was a way for me to introduce it to locals who already had a love for pasta with creamy seafood sauces. The touch of saffron adds complexity to the simple combination of flavors.”
Mark Gaier and Clark Frasier have popularized a sweet twist on the expected with their **Lobster Shortcake**.

### THE POWER OF TWO

Nominated five times for the James Beard Foundation’s Best Chef(s) of the Northeast award, the team of Clark Frasier and Mark Gaier got their start working for celebrity chef Jeremiah Tower. It was the mid-’80s and the two were working at Stars, Tower’s legendary restaurant in San Francisco. “J.T. was old-school—very difficult and rigorous,” says Frasier. “If he didn’t like what was prepared, he would throw it on the ground. He demanded—and got—the best.”

As if working under Tower wasn’t challenging enough, after two inspiring years at Stars, Frasier and Gaier decided they wanted to open a place of their own. “We were so young. No one would take a chance on us in California,” Frasier says. “It was so moving,” says Frasier. “It was like having the approval of your father or mother. When we worked at Stars we were kids. The world came to J.T. Every food writer and all the famous folks. Cooking with him as peers was very gratifying—everything came full circle. There was this feeling of real substance, which is an elusive fish these days.” But the real star of the event was none other than the Maine lob-nowned Pebble Beach Food & Wine weekend in California. The “premiere epicurean lifestyle event on the West Coast” made for a perfect reunion. “It was so moving,” says Frasier. “It was like having the approval of your father or mother. When we worked at Stars we were kids. The world came to J.T. Every food writer and all the famous folks. Cooking with him as peers was very gratifying—everything came full circle. There was this feeling of real substance, which is an elusive fish these days.” But the real star of the event was none other than the Maine lob-

### Lobster Shortcake with Rum Vanilla Sauce

**Yield:** 6 Servings

**Shortcake:**
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 12 tablespoons (1 1/2 sticks) very cold butter, cubed
- 3/4 to 1 cup buttermilk
- 1/4 cup heavy cream

**Lime Vanilla Rum Sauce:**
- 1/2 cup lime juice
- 1/2 cup rice wine vinegar
- 1/4 cup dark rum
- 1 serrano chile, seeded and finely chopped
- 1/2 vanilla bean, split lengthwise
- 1/4 cup finely chopped shallots
- 1 tablespoon finely sliced fresh ginger

**Curried Shallots:**
- 8 shallots, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh ginger
- 1 serrano chile, seeded and finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon turmeric
- 1 tablespoon Madras curry powder
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup rice wine vinegar

**Lobster:**
- 3 (1 ¼-pound) lobsters, boiled and meat removed
- 1/2 pound (1 stick) butter

**For the Lobster:**
- Split each lobster tail in half. Melt the butter over medium heat.
- Add the lobster and heat gently until the lobster is warmed through, 3 to 4 minutes.

**To assemble the dish:**
- Spoon half of the sauce evenly onto six warm plates. Split each shortcake and place the bottom half on each plate. Top each shortcake with one-half of a tail, a claw, and knuckle meat. Topped with the remaining sauce and then with the top of the shortcake. Divide the curried shallots among the plates.

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The 2017 documentary *Jeremiah Tower: The Last Magnificent* tells the story of “one of the most controversial and influential figures in the history of American gastronomy” and features interviews with Mario Batali, Anthony Bourdain, Ruth Reichl, and Martha Stewart. Available on Netflix, Amazon, and iTunes.

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The power of two
Queen of the Coast

Primo chef/owner Melissa Kelly, the first two-time winner (1999, 2013) of the James Beard Foundation’s Best Chef: Northeast Award, came to the culinary table from an auspicious family background in Long Island, New York. “My mom was a stay-at-home mom who cooked a lot from food raised in her garden, because that was affordable,” she says. Another early role model was her Italian grandmother. “I loved to cook in her kitchen, and still prefer Mediterranean influences.” Her grandfather, Primo, was a butcher.

Granted a scholarship for studies at the Culinary Institute of America, Kelly graduated first in her class, and from there her experiences and accolades kept coming. “Working with Larry Forgione at American Place and Alice Waters at Chez Panisse really got me started on the path that was actually instilled by my grandmother: the best food is simple, seasonal, fresh, and uses only quality ingredients.”

What started in Rockland 19 years ago as “a small greenhouse, a few hens, and a couple of pigs” has become a four-acre organic farm providing 80 percent of what is eaten at the restaurant.

Melissa Kelly channels reality from McLoon’s Lobster Shack, a lobster pound run by a young couple. “[The owner’s] dad is a lobsterman. It’s in Spruce Head, ten minutes from the restaurant, and it’s BYOB.” Kelly’s Primo innovation is “Lobster Celeriac.”

Maine Lobster & Celeriac

Yield: 6 servings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ingredient</th>
<th>Quantity</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 whole Maine lobsters</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon olive oil</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 tablespoon anatto seeds</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 medium onion, chopped</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 carrot, chopped</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 stalk of celery, chopped</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 cloves garlic, crushed</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 tablespoons tomato puree</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 cup brandy</td>
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<tr>
<td>½ cup sweet vermouth</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 bay leaf</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 sprig of thyme</td>
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<tr>
<td>¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 cups lobster stock (can sub fish stock)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 cups heavy cream</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 large knob celeriac, peeled and halved</td>
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<tr>
<td>(1 half diced in large chunks, 1 half sliced paper thin then julienne)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salt and pepper to taste</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vegetable or canola oil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 tablespoons parsley and tarragon, chopped</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**In a large sauce pot**

1. Boil water and cook lobsters for 7 minutes. Remove and plunge into an ice bath. Pull lobster meat from shell reserving both the shells and the meat. Large dice meat and refrigerate until later.
2. Heat a large sauce pot over high heat.
3. Add lobster shells and annatto seeds and sear.
4. Add onions, celery and carrot and cook until onion is translucent.
5. Add garlic and cook 3 minutes.
6. Add tomato puree cook 4-5 minutes but do not brown, deglaze with brandy and vermouth. Be careful as this may ignite.
7. Reduce the alcohol until almost dry, add spices and herbs, add stock. Add diced celeriac. Bring up to a boil, reduce by half. Make sure the celeriac is tender at this point.
8. Add heavy cream and bring it back up to a boil.
9. Turn down to a simmer and cook 15-20 minutes longer.
10. Remove from heat and strain through a mesh strainer, pushing out all of the juices. Taste, adjust seasonings and check texture.
11. If you’d like the sauce a little thicker you can put it back on the fire and thicken with a cornstarch slurry. (2 tablespoons cornstarch, 3 tablespoons cold water, mixed together and whisked in)
12. Heat vegetable oil to 375°.
13. Fry the julienne celeriac a handful at a time (it should be golden brown and crisp). Drain fried julienne on paper towels and sprinkle with salt.
14. When ready to serve heat sauce, add meat.
15. Garnish center of the plate with fried celeriac and chopped herb mixture.
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served at Primo. The rest is sourced from local farmers sharing those same values.

Kelly also cooks and gardens at two other Primo locations. One is in Tucson, Arizona, and the other in Orlando, Florida, where she revels in the opportunity to grow and use different ingredients “like citrus, papayas, figs, and artichokes.”

For her own lobster-eating experience, Kelly loves going to McLoon’s Lobster Shack, a lobster pound run by a young couple. “[The owner’s] dad is a lobsterman. It’s in Spruce Head, ten minutes from the restaurant, and it’s BYOB.” Emeril would certainly join Kelly on this outing.

**IN FROM THE WINDY CITY**

Each summer, Chef Ryan McCaskey, the owner of Acadia, a Michelin Guide two-starred restaurant in the Windy City, returns to Deer Isle, his childhood playground where the cooking bug first bit. “When I was about eight years old, my family started summering in Maine at Goose Cove Lodge,” he says. “I would poke my
head in the kitchen and study the chefs. Then one day, there I was, shelling peas.”

Following culinary studies in Chicago, McCaskey took a job cooking at Goose Cove, where he was spoiled with the freshest local ingredients. “We picked our own lettuce and herbs from our garden, got our chickens down the road, and went to the dock for fresh seafood.” Carrying this over to his own restaurant, McCaskey is insistent on getting his ingredients from Maine. “I get my lettuce from Maine’s Yellow Birch Farm in Deer Isle, and onions and potatoes from Four Seasons Farm in Harbor-side.” Unsurprisingly, McCaskey says he “can’t find blueberries anywhere better than Maine’s.”

But what lobster is he serving those Bear if the Michelin Guide gave stars in Maine, we might have had McCaskey here. He came close to buying Hugo’s from his longtime friend and James Beard Award-winner Rob Evans. But he knew if he took his talent to Chicago, he’d be in line for those coveted stars. Right he was.

Lobster Bisque

Yield: 3 quarts
1800 grams lobster bodies, thorax only, gills removed
975 grams whole peeled tomato
788 grams carrots
375 grams onion
275 grams celery
100 grams garlic
175 grams leeks
110 grams tomato paste
250 grams cognac
28 grams chervil
3 grams bay leaves

Roast lobster, bay leaves, and garlic in a hot pan for 15 minutes. Add vegetables and continue to roast another 15 minutes. Deglaze with cognac and cook 5 minutes. Add tomato paste and chervil. Transfer to stock pot and add water just to cover. Cook for 2 to 2.5 hours. Chop or pulverize the solids and shells. Bring just to a boil. Strain. Reduce stock by half and add the same weight of the stock in heavy cream. Reduce by half again. Finish with whole butter and salt.
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Red Delicious (continued from page 95)
fans? “I only buy Stonington, Maine, lobster.” McCaskey tried Brittany Blue lobsters for awhile, but says they are expensive and hard to get. For a restaurant that goes through nearly 140 lobsters a week, they need those reliable Mainers.

While it’s clear this Chicagooan can crack claws with the rest of us, he prides himself on his bisque. “The lobster stock is made meticulously, using only certain parts of the crustacean,” says McCaskey. “Each step is strategic. We have mastered this at Acadia. It is a challenge teaching our chefs the technique. There’s a lot of push and pull.

Acadia’s Stonington Lobster Roll, $18.
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**RISING STAR**

“All I do is cook and study,” says 23-year-old Nathaniel Adam, executive sous chef at Boothbay Harbor Country Club and Harvest on the Harbor’s 2017 Lobster Chef of the Year. Self-taught, Adam has been cooking since he was a kid. “My mom was a single mom who worked all the time, so my older brother Eric and I cooked for the family.”

Adam’s brother went on to study at the College of Culinary Arts at Johnson & Wales University, and helped teach Adam the kitchen basics. “Only so much cooking is teachable. A huge portion of it is natural talent,” says Adam, who demonstrates plenty of that, winning Judge’s Choice at the sixth annual Claw Down Maine Lobster Bite Competition last year. For that recipe, he was trying to come up with the simplest way of using lobster “without masking the flavor.” He opted for “basic ingredients and
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Lobster in Its Habitat

Yield: About 1 quart
Sweet Corn Emulsion: 560 grams fresh sweet corn; 200 grams small diced yellow onion; 4 grams shaved garlic; 700 grams heavy cream; 10 grams salt; *166 grams thyme brown butter (last step)
Candied Thyme Brown Butter: 1 pound whole unsalted butter, 20 grams fresh thyme sprigs
Tarragon stock: 2 grams spent vanilla beans; 4 grams lemon zest; 10 grams minced garlic; 30 grams shallot; 70 grams fresh tarragon; 800 grams water; 15 grams white vinegar; 10 grams salt; 15 grams sugar; 2 tablespoons dry oregano
Vanilla Tarragon Sea Foam: 350 grams tarragon stock; 7 grams soy lethicin
Sea Salt Coral Tuile: 10 grams flour; 80 grams water; 30 grams vegetable oil; 3 grams salt
Butter Poached Lobster Claws: 6 lobster claws; 4 tablespoons whole butter; Pinch of salt; 1 tablespoon minced parsley

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COURTESY PHOTO
Place butter in a small pot and heat on low until melted. Place claws in pot and gently stir around to warm the lobster. Once lobster is warmed, season with salt and parsley.

Assembly: Serve as a large dish or in small spoons as an appetizer. Place corn sauce at the bottom of the spoon, top with the warm lobster, tobiko, a piece of tuile, a touch of sea foam and fresh herbs. Enjoy.

(Continued on page 255)
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a classic preparation to keep it elegant."

When he isn’t buried in kitchen utensils or books for class, Adam loves to fish and hike in Maine with his fiancée. During Boothbay Harbor Country Club’s off-season, he runs Savor the Flavor, a private-chef service in Florida.

His go-to meal? “I’m a comfort-food kind of a guy. Give me a plate of ribs paired with some collard greens and cornbread—nothing beats it!”

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