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Restaurant Week “feels like a special occasion,” says Michelle Corry at 555, where steak might pair with farro, local carrots, and vadouvan spices.

Delicious Risks

Chefs let their imaginations run wild as Maine Restaurant Week stretches to two weeks—March 1 to 14.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

“**W**eekends are absolutely when you see more customers coming out,” says Shanna O’Hea of Academe Restaurant in the Kennebunk Inn, where she’s co-owner and co-chef with her husband Brian. “So the two-week Maine Restaurant Week [MRW] this year is great—because we can package attractions together. The town of Kennebunk has built an ice rink next door; why not a dine, skate, and stay package?”

Inspirations like this are labors of love on the eve of Restaurant Week. “Brian and I open a bottle of wine, sit in front of our fireplace, and menu-plan together.” Such brainstorming yields tasty little masterpieces like “Brian’s lobster, corn, and

cheese empanadas” paired with “chipotle braised beef stew over smoked celeriac puree” as a surf-and-turf-entree.

“We’ve been flirting with a Chicken Waldorf ravioli, with a Gorgonzola cream sauce, raisin jam, toasted walnuts, and fresh petite grapes and pickled celery. After our trip to Greece, we returned with an idea for Lobster Gyros on homemade pita, with tomato, shallots, avocado *tzatziki*, and spiced fried potatoes.”

Which is not to say they neglect their greatest hits, like their award-winning Maine Lobster Pot Pie. “We offer it as a mini during Restaurant Week, so you can try our signature dish but also try new items we’re excited about.”

Such as something daringly sophisti-



The O’Heas of Academe at the Kennebunk Inn.

HUNGRY EYE

cated Brian is playing with: 'savory cotton candy' informed by Worcestershire sauce, paired with a smoked strip steak.

"Dining out should be fun—revisit your childhood memories" but more thoughtfully, "with adult tastebuds."

BY POPULAR DEMAND

"We'll be sure to include are our beloved shaved Brussels sprouts salad [with] dried cranberries, toasted pecans, bacon, and shaved manchego cheese with a champagne mustard vinaigrette," says Lisa Kostopoulos, who's owned **The Good Table** in Cape Elizabeth with her father Tony since 1986. Deeper and darker, there's "our chef Ryan Weeks's Pork Schnitzel and Spaetzle—he makes the best—a pounded thin pork chop with a grain mustard and mushroom sauce topped with a roasted apple, bacon, and arugula salad and served with grain-mustard spaetzle. For dessert, we could never leave out the Eskimo Pie—house-made brownie crusts and vanilla ice cream with caramel dipping sauce.

Scottish salmon crowned with a pumpkin seed crust sits on a throne of butternut squash dressed with maple creme at the Good Table in Cape Elizabeth; and fried Maine smelts are served with sauce gribiche (inset).



Hot Suppa's casual charm is aimed to put the café on "your short list of favorite places," says co-owner Alec Sabina, above.

“You know what? Restaurant Week is a lot of work,” where the Good Table has excelled for years. “And we love it.”

What about the legendary “Incredible Breakfast” competition, which the Good Table dominated for years with their *crème brûlée* Belgian waffles until Eve’s at the Garden unseated them last year with a pork-belly waffle?

“We’ll be there,” says Kostopoulos.

UPTOWN DOWN-HOME

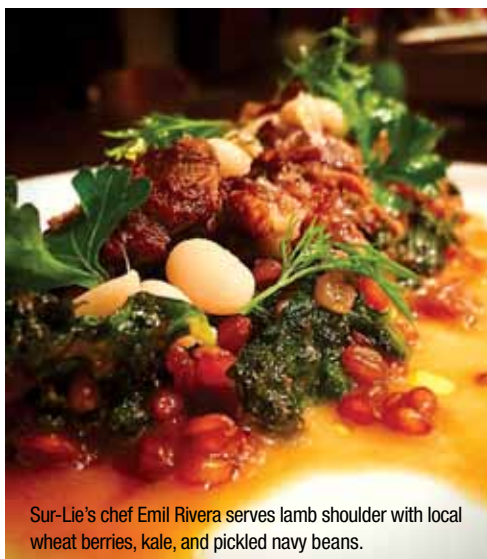
“Last year, bacon-wrapped meatloaf went over big,” says Alec Sabina, co-owner with his brother Moses at Hot Suppa. “And a pork chop with grits.” So why not dare to change? “This year, we’re working on butter-poached wolf fish on lentils with a fennel salad. And a cherry and chestnut stuffed quail.”

“It’s a great opportunity to welcome new guests and possibly make it onto their short list of favorite places. In the past we’ve chosen the \$25 price point. Most of our [regular menu] entrees are \$13 to \$21, so we try to stay true to the Hot Suppa dining experience...encouraging the value of our RW menu.”

While he loved the “urgency” of the one-week format, there’ll still be \$1 oysters at Happy Hour during the two-week stretch, Alec says. “While they last.”

CHOICES, CHOICES...

“It’s been very successful for us, in what is normally a quiet time of year,” says Michelle Corry, co-owner with chef/husband Steve of restaurant 555 and adjacent Point Five Lounge on Congress Street and the bistro



Sur-Lie’s chef Emil Rivera serves lamb shoulder with local wheat berries, kale, and pickled navy beans.

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HUNGRY EYE

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- 3 Crow Restaurant & Bar, Rockland
- 40 Paper, Camden
- Academe Brasserie, Kennebunk
- Azure Cafe, Freeport
- Back Bay Grill, Portland
- Bayside Bowl, Portland
- Bonobo Wood Fire Pizza, Portland
- The Broad Arrow Tavern, Freeport
- The Brunswick Hotel and Tavern, Brunswick
- Bucks Naked BBQ & Steakhouse, Portland
- Bueno Loco, Falmouth
- Cappys Chowder House & Harbor View, Camden
- Casa Novello, Westbrook
- Congress Squared Restaurant, Portland
- Cumberland Club, Portland
- David's, Portland
- David's 388, South Portland
- David's Opus Ten, Portland
- DaVinci's Eatery, Lewiston
- DiMillo's On the Water, Portland
- Dockside Grill, Falmouth
- Eve's at the Garden, Portland
- Federal Jacks, Kennebunkport
- Fish Bones American Grill, Lewiston
- Five Fifty-Five, Portland
- Forks in the Air Mountain Bistro, Rangeley
- Fuel Restaurant, Lewiston
- The Garden Grille & Bar, Auburn
- The Good Table Restaurant, Cape Elizabeth
- Hartstone Inn, Camden
- Hot Suppa, Portland
- Hugs Italian Restaurant, Falmouth
- Le Garage, Wiscasset
- Local 188, Portland
- Lolita, Portland
- Mac's Grill, Auburn
- Marche Kitchen & Wine Bar, Lewiston
- Natalie's at Camden Harbour Inn, Camden
- Petite Jacqueline, Portland
- Point 5 Lounge, Portland
- Portland Pie Co., Portland
- Portland Pie Co., Scarborough
- Portland Pie Co., Westbrook
- Ribollita, Portland
- Royal River Grillhouse, Yarmouth
- Saltwater Grille, South Portland
- Salvage BBQ, Portland
- Sea Dog Brewing Company, Topsham
- Sea Dog Brewing Company, Bangor
- Sea Dog Brewing Company, South Portland
- Sea Glass Restaurant, Cape Elizabeth
- Shipyards Brew Pub, Eliot
- Sonny's, Portland
- Sur Lie, Portland
- TIOA, Portland
- Tuscan Brick Oven Bistro, Freeport
- Twenty Milk Street, Portland
- Vignola Cinque Terre, Portland
- Vinland, Portland
- Walter's, Portland
- White Cap Grille, Portland

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Petite Jacqueline on State Street. “The *prix-fixe* format is appealing to people because it feels like a deal—a special occasion. Customers get really excited.

“We have separate Restaurant Week menus for both the lounge and the restaurant, and we use these to offer our signature items in a less expensive format.”

In fact, 555 has *prix-fixe* menus at \$35, \$45, and \$55. The three-course bar menu is no less tempting. You might start with house-made *pâté* or their delicate grilled caesar salad with white anchovies, follow it with *gnocchi* with duck confit or mussels and fries, and finish with a dessert assortment of “*petit-five*” sweet treats.

“We have customers who come one night for the bar menu and the next for the dining room.” They’ve found that showcasing bar favorites like steak and fries in the three-course format refreshes their charm and even “wins over some new regulars,” says Michelle.

FIRST TIME’S A CHARM

When you’re new in town, like sleek **Sur Lie** on Free Street, *all* your dishes are creative and new. “The sweet pea hummus, the Chicken Biscuit, and the Brussels sprouts with lardons and marcona almonds are shoe-ins,” says chef Emil Rivera, who learned and earned his restaurant kitchen chops in Puerto Rico and Naples, Florida. “We try to keep it seasonally relevant.” ■

RYAN BROWNELL



Sur-Lie’s seasonal small plates dazzle: Honey-soy glazed cauliflower, above, and Brussels sprouts made savory with with marcona almonds and lardons..



Photography: Justine Johnson

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