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Maine Fra Diavolo

TODD ENGLISH's secret ingredient is *our* salt air. Question is, will his next restaurant be in Portland, Camden, or Islesboro?

INTERVIEW BY COLIN W. SARGENT

Since you've collaborated with Eva Longoria on Beso, with locations in Las Vegas and Los Angeles, what Maine celebrity would you consider working with in this neck of the woods? Let's see. I'd partner with John Travolta.

He could even fly the celebrity diners in himself!

We'd call our rustic Mediterranean restaurant Saturday Night Fever. Or Vinnie Barbarino's.

Our guess was Martha Stewart, who lives in Edsel Ford's former mansion Skylands in Northeast Harbor. She loves you on the Internet. She's mentioned your 'bedroom eyes.' I've never been to her place in Maine, but I've heard it's amazing.

Well, how about the Forest City for your new restaurant? Think *Wicked Wild Olives*.

Yeah, in a Portland restaurant, I'd stay with the wood burning, and I'd want it to be on the ocean because I find water is so appealing



Ça va steak frites

**My dream Maine bistro?
I'd partner with John
Travolta. We'd call our
rustic Mediterranean
place Saturday Night
Fever. Or Vinnie
Barbarino's.**

and beautiful. I love the inlets. When you're in Rockport or Rockland, the beautiful coves. Something right *on top of* the view. It's like the fun Greek restaurants that are open in the summer. You get the beautiful fresh seafood, wood fires. You eat on the sand, on the beach.

How about locating a Figs here? Since your Figs restaurants specialize in Neapolitan pizza, wouldn't it be perfect to locate one in Naples, Maine, a beautiful resort town with a causeway, sea planes, a scenic paddle wheel ferry—all on the southern tip of Long Lake? Steamy summer crowds. Where is that? I'd like to go see that!

And then there's Camden, where your mother's lived for over 30 years. It's very dear to you, isn't it? I love Portland, but I've been coming in to Camden for 40 years. Longer than that. I love what's going on up there, with what [chef] Brian [Hill of Francine Bistro] is doing, all the chefs up there. It's a good little restaurant scene.

There was a restaurant called John Wanamaker on an old seagoing tug-boat. They used to dock in Camden, and you'd eat *right on the boat*.

Dining as theater.

Maybe that woke something up in me... Dinner as an event and dining as entertainment. Yes!

Lobster with nutmeg vinaigrette and chestnut purée





SEX ON THE BEACH...
Lobster's a very **rich shellfish**,
and then with the **cream**, it's
super decadent. It's having
your **cake** and **eating** it **too**.
The **truffles** marry the **corn** and
lobster together.

Once there was an old seagoing tugboat, the ***John Wanamaker***, that used to **dock** in **Camden**, and you'd **eat right on the boat**.... I was 16, and it **woke something up in me: cuisine as an event.**



Your mother's kitchen at Seamew in Camden puts you right in front of the sailboats in the harbor. Dramatic visuals, hungry ocean. Dish by dish, what's your idea of a perfect summer supper at her place up here?

Soft shell lobsters. Call it a cliché, but to me it's the thing I think of most. We get the lobsters from the local guys, spread out newspapers on the table, put the big pile of lobsters in the center of the table, and make homemade potato chips, fresh tomatoes and zucchini, and blueberry bread. My mother started baking blueberry bread I don't know how many years ago. It's kind of like 'coffee-cake-meets-poundcake.' Did I mention steamers with chorizo sausage?

Take us into your mom's kitchen. What do we see?

It's rustic, with an island in the middle. The floors are kind of crooked! It's just very simple, humble, not fancy in any way. It's open to the dining room and living room.

When you're not visiting with your mom, what excursions do you make up here?

We usually do a hike up Mt. Battie—an outing in the afternoon. It's a great exercise to burn off my mother's cooking. We'll go to the little outdoor chapel in Camden. Sometimes we'll head over to Islesboro. For years we had a little boat we'd tool around in, like a mini lobster boat.

Sometimes we play golf at a little course

From left: English enjoys lobster bakes on the coast of Maine; John Wanamaker was made into a floating restaurant run by the Dunfey family, first in Camden and later in Portsmouth, NH, until 2002.



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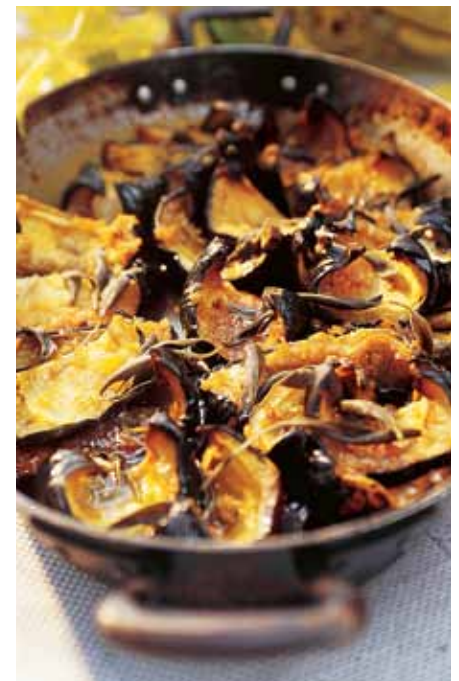
RAIN OR SHINE WE DELIVER AND YOU DINE

ME CONFIDENTIAL

in Rockport, or the one at the Samoset, which is very nice. Sometimes we take hikes to Lincolnville Beach. A lot of hanging out, really.

You're so connected to so many places, that this Maine connection of yours is a comparative secret. Where do you see your Maine experiences and connection to family being expressed in your cuisine?

So often, great food comes from great stories. The memory of sitting out on the deck or cooking on the beach. I remember cooking on the beach with my uncle from Calabria on the coast, just hanging out, doing food inspired by Maine and Maine ingredi-



ents, where four generations of our family came together to enjoy a single meal.

My kids have been coming to Maine since they were young—they have very fun memories, walking up and down the beach collecting sea glass, shells, the things you do on the coast.

Your signature Italian dishes often sparkle with Maine ingredients. Why do you think that's such a magic combination just now?

A lot of Mediterranean cuisine is based on seafood, just like in Maine. I don't know if the worlds are that far apart. A potato is a potato, you know. Fish is fish. Once you understand that, you can substitute without much issue. It's all about how they might use a certain type of fish. Mediterranean and

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Italian cooking and Maine cooking are about simple things. What's good.

Your olive-oil braised lobster with lemongrass corn has a Far East-flavor twist with the coconut, as well as a fiery kick.



Where were you when you came up with that one?

I've gone to Thailand a lot, done a lot of shows there. Lemongrass is one of the great flavors of Southeast Asia. Corn is very versatile. It brings out the perfume of the lemongrass and combines it with its own sweetness.



What's a flavor you'd never dare to combine with lobster? Maybe chocolate? I'm kidding. I don't know. In fact, I'd do a lobster mole. I think it would be good.

Maine's getting raves for its peekytoe crabs now. In fact, we supply Chesapeake Bay restaurants with crabmeat when

COURTESY COASTAL LIVING (2)

where portland eats

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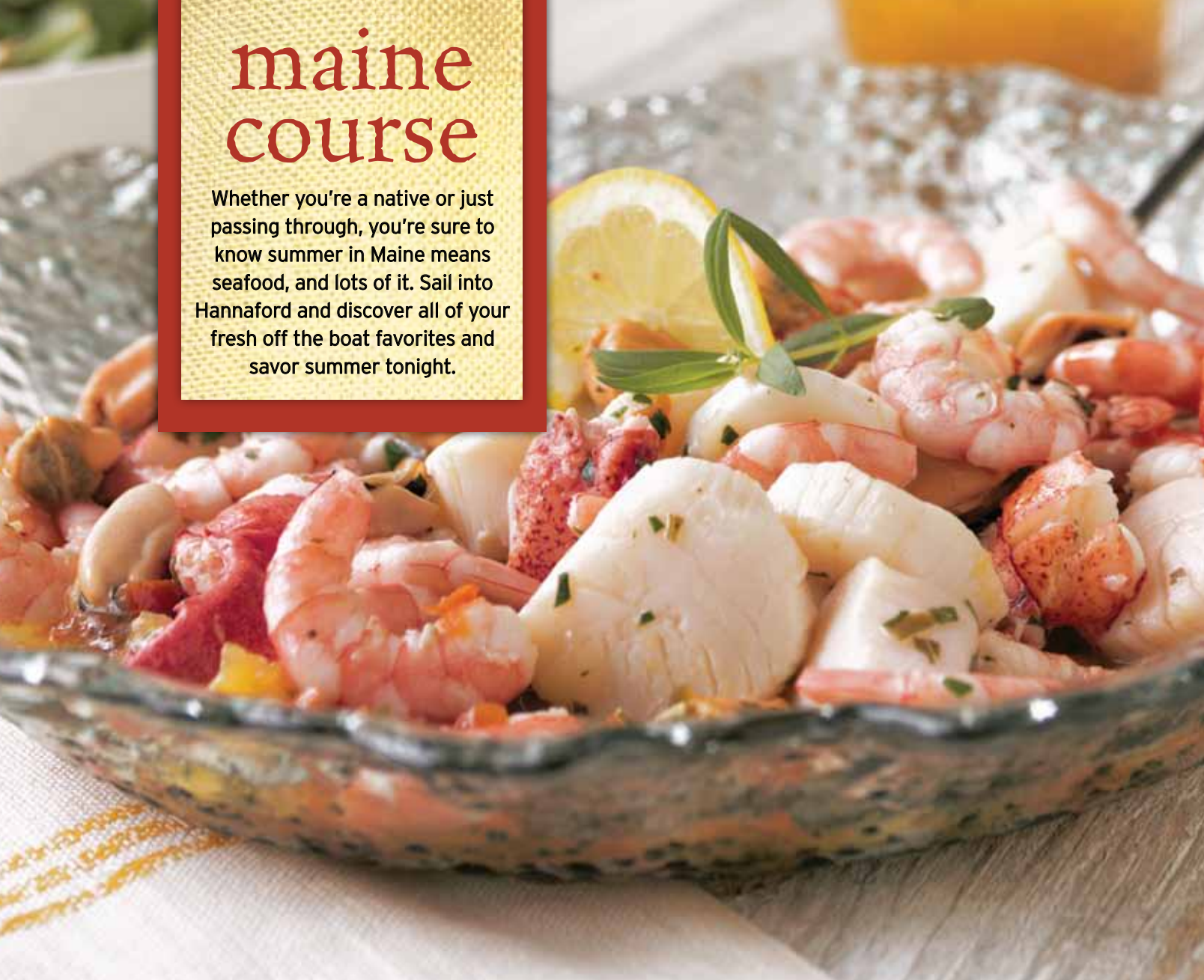
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maine course

Whether you're a native or just passing through, you're sure to know summer in Maine means seafood, and lots of it. Sail into Hannaford and discover all of your fresh off the boat favorites and savor summer tonight.



Summer Seafood Salad

2 cups water
1 carrot, peeled and diced
1/2 celery rib, cut into 1/2 inch pieces
1 garlic clove, crushed
1/2 small lemon, sliced
1/2 lb. medium shrimp, peeled, deveined
1/2 lb. sea scallops, halved
1 lb. mussels, scrubbed
1 container (6 oz.) cooked lobster meat
2 Tbsp. chopped fresh parsley
1 bag Taste of Inspirations Spring Mix
1/2 cup Taste of Inspirations
Raspberry Nectar Vinaigrette

STEP 1 Combine first 5 ingredients in medium saucepan. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium; add shrimp, cover and cook 3 minutes. With slotted spoon, transfer shrimp to large bowl. Return liquid to boil; add scallops, cook 2 minutes, transfer with slotted spoon to bowl. Add mussels to liquid and cook covered over high heat 2 minutes or until mussels open. Transfer to a plate to cool slightly. Remove mussels from shell, add to bowl with other fish. Toss with dressing, add lobster meat and parsley. Cover and refrigerate 1 hour.

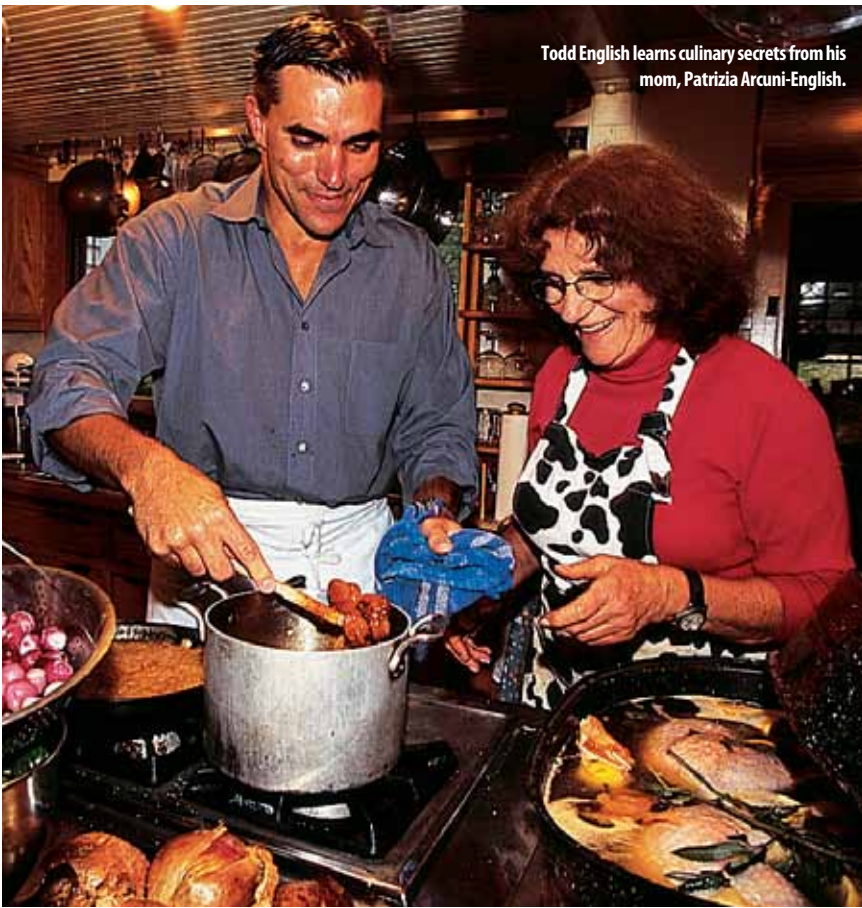
STEP 2 Arrange Spring Mix evenly on 6 serving plates. Spoon seafood mixture over greens.



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Todd English learns culinary secrets from his mom, Patrizia Arcuni-English.



their blue crabs go dormant in the winter months. Do you have a dish that includes peekytoe crab?

Yeah. I've used it in many different variations. I think peekytoe crab is best cold, or we use it as a garnish. I do a dish called "Spaghetti Crabonara."

Lobster vs. crab, a 15-round title fight. Whose corner are you in?

I'm a huge fan of crabmeat, I must say. I love that fresh-picked crab, it's amazing. I also like it better than I like lobster. I mean to me, crab is so sweet and delicate, and lobster has



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a heartier, more rubbery sensation.

The Chinese are going crazy for Maine lobster right now, emerging as a huge client. But they call Maine lobster “Boston lobster” because they see Boston’s Logan Airport shipping labels. It’s as though the market is creating a *new species* that has nothing to do with biology, the “Boston lobster.” What do you think Maine should do to protect its brand?

It’s really just marketing. Maine needs to let the world know their lobster is the best anywhere, that it’s not just coming out of Canadian waters, it’s from Maine waters.

Tell us about your lobster popovers as an hors d’œuvre.

I like popovers in *many* things. They’re great delivery vehicles: roast beef, lobster salad, almond butter, great Maine cheddar cheese. I’ve always done popovers with crab and also braised short ribs as a nod to Yorkshire pudding.

(Continued on page 183)



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Maine Fra Diavolo (continued from page 79)

Tell us why seaweed is so essential to a Maine clam bake.

First of all, it provides the steam, so you have to have that. It's essentially a clam *steam*, not a clam bake. Wet seaweed holds moisture in all of its little pockets. The design of the wet seaweed allows it to steam.

Soft shell lobsters. Call it a **cliché**, but to me it's the thing I **think** of most. We get the **lobsters** from the **local** guys, **spread** out **newspapers** on the **table**, put the big **pile** of lobsters in the **center** of the table, and make **homemade** potato **chips**, fresh **tomatoes** and **zucchini**, and **blueberry** bread.

Do lobsters taste better in a clam bake because their taste mingles with the clams'—like an infused cocktail?

Yes, the sea flavor combines with it.

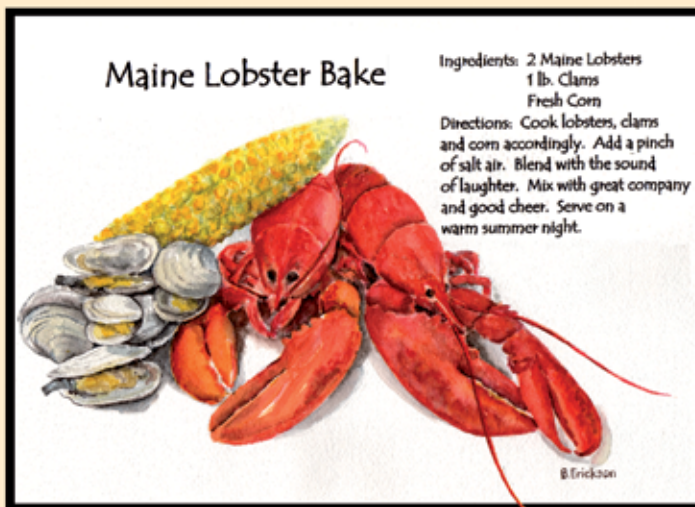
What's the best wine to pair with a classic lobster dinner?

I'll always go to a crisp French white chardonnay. Or, for the Naples connection, try Lacryma Christi white. It's got some local white grapes in it. I like Lacryma Christi—it's good.

Great Memories Always Start in the Kitchen

Recipe Paintings by Artist Brenda Erickson

Watercolor Paintings of Your Recipe, Prints, Posters and Brenda's book *Kitchen Memories, Recipe Paintings with A Taste of Art*



Maine Lobster Bake

Ingredients: 2 Maine Lobsters
1 lb. Clams
Fresh Corn

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What's the most overlooked ingredient you associate with Maine, and how do you like to serve it?

One of Maine's best ingredients is the sea urchin. I use it for everything—risottos, pastas, spaghetini luchi de mare. I finish sauces with them, I toss them in salads, I make a tuna tartare with uni from Maine. Sea urchins are not loved as much as they should be. In *America*. The Japanese obviously take their share of sea urchins out of Maine.

Tell us about some restaurants here you admire.

Fore Street in Portland—Sam [Hayward's] restaurant—is great. [There's] Brian's restau-



rant—Francine Bistro in Camden—there's Shepherd's Pie in Rockport, Melissa Kelly's Primo in Rockland, Arrows [in Ogunquit].

How about the delicious decadence of combining lobster meat with heavy cream, viz. your New England creamed corn and charred lobster chowder with summer truffles? Is there a diet version?

Lobster and cream! Lobster's a very rich shellfish, and then with the cream, it's super decadent. It's having your cake and eating it too. The truffles marry the corn and lobster together. Just take the heads of the lobster, steep them in cream, and you have a beautiful soup.

One of my favorite soups in the world

is lobster bisque. One of my favorite *sauces* in the world is sauce Américaine: the to-malley, the head of the lobster, the flavor. With cream.

Now, we know you were asked to design a gorgeous lobster dish with an Idaho potato, and we've lived that down, but when we look at the photograph (page 190), we see you've chosen a lobster that isn't from Maine in that dish, too—one with a coarser texture. When *shouldn't* you use a Maine lobster in a lobster dish?

I would say never.

The warm-water lobsters and the crayfish are good. Certainly, fresh out of the Caribbean or South African waters, they



Ça va poulet rôti-soire



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can be delicious, right over a nice wood grill. But I would say in most cases, anything that's *beyond grilling* for the warm-weather lobsters, I'd say don't do anything beyond that. It's hard to blend them into something that works other than a ceviche preparation. I find Maine lobsters to be a lot more diverse in their use for many more applications.

When I went to Venice and squinted at the menu at a restaurant on the Grand Canal, the proprietor shook me by the shoulders, turned me to the glass food display case, and said, "Don't read the menu, look at the fish!" How important does serendipity—that sense of luck, love, and the catch of the day—figure into your philosophy of great cooking?

We try always to have flexibility in our menus to get only what's fresh, and I think it depends on the type of restaurant. In Italy where they serve 30 covers and use four fish of one type on a given night—that's different from what our restaurants have to do to arrive at exactly the same place.

Do you agree that Maine is truly experiencing a renaissance in cuisine, given your more traveled perspective?

I'd say so. Certainly Maine has, over the last ten years, opened its eyes with the really great chefs up here. Rod Mitchell exploited some of the great seafood of Maine. It's



Warm lobster summer rolls with brown butter morel sauce



On September 30th, the Todd English Restaurant will cruise into Maine aboard the *Queen Mary 2*, as the ocean liner makes port in Bar Harbor en route to Southampton, England.

bringing out the best in everything, from maple syrup to...Browne Trading discovered *angulas*, the little baby eels they serve in Spain, which are very sought after.

I go to Savannah, Georgia, Charleston, South Carolina; you go to all these places, and everybody seems to be discovering what's local, what's theirs. Maine is right up

there with a lot of the rest of the country. I love that. Getting what's local, what you can't get as fresh anywhere else.

Just as people aren't necessarily aware of your Maine influences, many gastronomes don't know that Emeril used to be a chef at the Sheraton Tara in South Portland. Then there's the Acadian/Cajun connection that links Maine



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to Cajun cuisine. To what extent is Maine a proving ground for culinary development?

I didn't know that about Emeril. I know he has a Massachusetts background, but I didn't know he worked in Maine. There's a lot of great chefs in Maine. Certainly, because our country's waking up to local, organic, sustainable ingredients, Maine is a great place to win international acclaim as a chef.

In your opinion, what's the perfect cocktail/lobster pairing right now?

If you're just going to do a boiled lobster, I love a great bourbon drink.

A Southern drink! I do declare!

Bourbon's got that toasty, caramelly flavor that really adds to your anticipation of a perfect bite of lobster—you take a sip of bourbon, and it works really well.

How about swordfish?

I'd stick to vodka.

Salmon?

I should say gin.

When will we see you on the Maine coast this summer?

I'm usually up in August, for sure. ■

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Charlestown, Massachusetts

Boston, Massachusetts

LaGuardia Airport, Queens, New York

Figs at 29 Fair

Nantucket, Massachusetts

Figs Macy's

Palm Beach Gardens Mall, Palm Beach Gardens, Florida

Isabelle's Curly Cakes

Boston, Massachusetts

KingFish Hall

Boston, Massachusetts

Olives

Charlestown, Massachusetts

Olives Las Vegas

Las Vegas, Nevada

Plaza Food Hall

New York, New York

Summer House

Nantucket, Massachusetts

Todd English's Bonfire,

John F. Kennedy Airport, at Terminal 2, Queens, NY

Logan Airport, East Boston, Massachusetts

Todd English's bluezoo

Walt Disney World Dolphin Resort, Lake Buena Vista, Florida

Todd English P.U.B.

Las Vegas, Nevada

Todd English's Tuscany

Mohegan Sun Casino, Uncasville, Connecticut

Todd English Restaurant

Aboard the Queen Mary 2

Aboard the Queen Victoria

Wild Olives by Todd English

Boca Raton, Florida

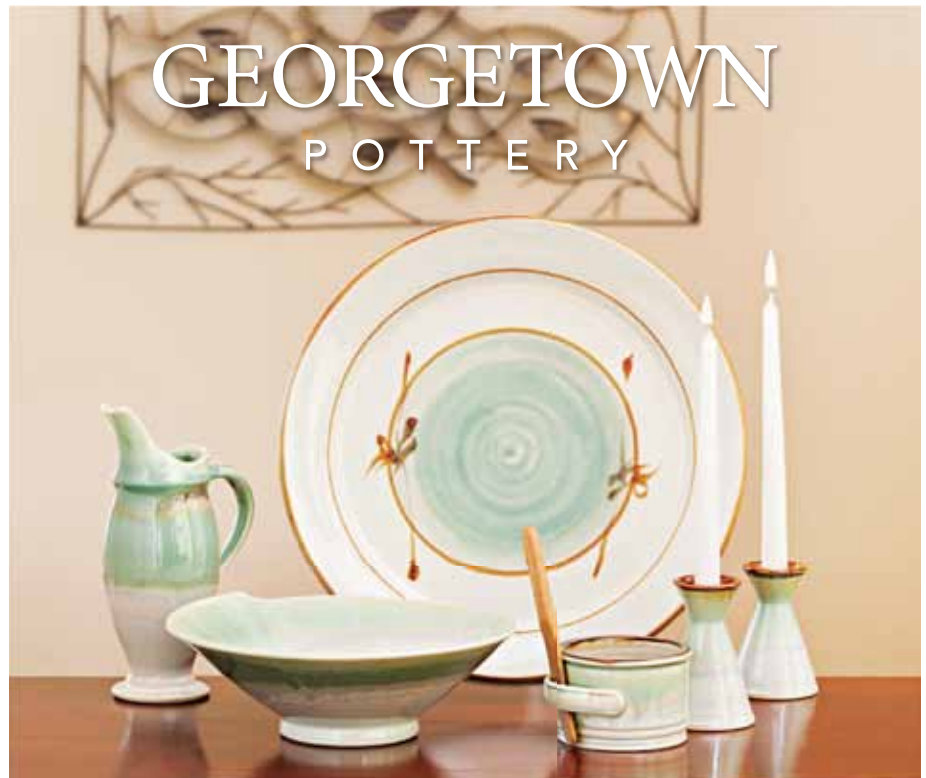


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