
BACK OF THE HOUSE GREENPORT FOR DINNER

*With a focus on the region, dining in this town
gives home cooking new meaning.*

BY MEG GLOVER



GREENPORT—The village of Greenport, settled in 1682, enjoys a gastronomic history that includes whaling, squidding, rumrunning, and a nascent wine country in its backyard. The cosmopolitan harbor has always attracted discriminating diners. “Today’s increased restaurant activity is just another chapter in a very interesting town,” said John Ross, former chef and owner of Ross’ North Fork in Southold, which in the 1970s became one of the first restaurants to focus on the food and wine of the North Fork.

Ross is referring to the flurry of new faces on Front Street (and just beyond). They haven’t displaced the old guard of locals haunts like The Chowder Pot Pub and The Townsend Manor Inn or nostalgia-laden landmarks like Claudio’s and the Soundview Inn and Restaurant. But Ross, who is now the head chef at the Olde Vine Golf Club in Riverhead and who recently published *The Food and Wine of the North Fork: Historical Anecdotes and Recipes*, said that new and old can’t really be compared. Some restaurants have persisted for years simply because they’re convenient and affordable. They create a welcoming atmosphere and “personality that has ‘North Fork’ painted all over it.” In contrast, Ross said, the “new cluster of chef-oriented upscale dinner houses,” has a different emphasis. “They are small enough to cook to order and use the freshest and most creative ingredients. It’s a bright spot on Greenport’s landscape.”

Below is a sampling of this new cluster, which defines the latest stage in Greenport’s culinary evolution. These shops arguably focus less on being quaint and cozy and more on the provenance and quality of the food, which makes some locals drool and gives others ammunition for charges of gentrification. Be your own judge. It’s an incomplete list. (One never knows when Aldo, the patron saint of Greenport restaurant row, will reopen his elusive kitchen.) But clearly the Greenport restaurant scene hasn’t looked so good in years.

SCRIMSHAW

All those years chef-owner Rosa de Carvalho Ross (Lo San) lived and studied cuisine in Europe, Asia and South America informs everything that is wonderful at Scrimshaw.

There she is, a petite, convivial hostess greeting us and her other guests into her unique, open and airy dining room: a renovated historic wharf building right over the water in Greenport Harbor. We scanned the menu during *le bleu*, the blue hour, and felt engulfed in a watercolor of sea blues and greys, with misty vistas of Shelter Island. The muted grey and black dining room enhanced the painterly effect.

Scrimshaw is known for its seafood, duck, and lamb, and the ingredients are locally sourced when possible: warm Greenport Bay oysters with creamed leaks and pastis glaze; Satur Farms bitter field greens with

orange ginger vinaigrette; grilled fillet of salmon confit, roasted baby beets, butternut veloute with a lobster ravioli. The Asian infusion was piquant, subtle and dazzling. The lobster, salmon and beet dish became a still life of oranges, reds and pinks. Siding salmon with beets was a bold gesture that won me over. My partner settled on duck: crispy spring roll of duck confit followed by Crescent Farm Long Island duck breast. The Asian-inspired sauces of tomato chutney for one and soy braise for the other were deeply lush. The wine menu offered several

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perfect pairings from their extensive local and international list (60 selections). We chose gewürztraminer from one of the six local whites, or could have made our selection from the 19 “other new world” or “old world” whites, rosés and champagnes.

For stunning Peking duck, which Ross delights in preparing with Long Island duck, call two

days ahead. When the weather warms up, Scrimshaw expands to about 20 dining tables outdoors on the wharf, and adds a special bar menu and local jazz bands for late-nighters. (102 Main Street, 477-8882. Open year round. Tuesday–Sunday from 6 p.m., and Saturday & Sunday noon–4 p.m.)

FRISKY OYSTER

Every time I enter the handsome storefront bar of The Frisky Oyster there is a jangle of energy, and this Friday evening was no different. Our friends had arrived earlier and were settled into a comfy chocolate banquette in the more classic dining area aglow with candlelight. Striking red fabric panels of pomegranate blossoms added to the elegant ambiance.

The Frisky Oyster gets its name from “a wild moment” says owner Dennis McDermott who, along with co-owner Hank Tomashevski, both of Manhattan, launched this endeavor five years ago and, in doing so, started the now celebrated “restaurant row” of Greenport. It suits the place, as the menu and wine list are both quite frisky—local mixed with foreign, always changing, a dash of the unusual and unexpected.

We looked over the menu with a bottle of Couly-Dutheil, a chenin blanc from the Loire Valley, which was fragrant, delicate and straightforward. The appetizer chef is from Mexico and delivers inventive combinations, such the lobster quesadilla appetizer, a toasted corn tortilla stuffed with warm lobster and cheese, complemented with guacamole. It’s a kind of fusion of New England and Mexico, almost a Mexican calzone. We all loved it. Tasty and unusual. We were finding other creative delights: tiny gnocchi with corn, mushrooms and sage butter (classic Italian with Mexican); a composition of Dungeness crab timbale layered with scallions and other fresh ingredients; a seared tuna spring roll with a hot-and-sour sauce.

The entrées were also fun. Puffy polka-dot soft shell crabs piled high over pineapple and tomato fried rice. It was pretty party food: the crab batter tasted a bit like popcorn. A melt-in-your-mouth grilled swordfish with mandarine orange beurre blanc and mini corn gnocchi—each taste starting French and ending up American Indian—was dazzling. The spring lamb loin chops were cooked to perfection.

An unusual assortment of rosés from the expanded wine list were

tempting to try. (The restaurant is also offering an impressive selection of rosés, including a flight of variety specific blushes from Channing Daughters Winery in Bridgehampton.) We ordered a Greek rosé to complement the entrées. Our lamb diner had a Sicilian red by the glass: Borgo Nuovo, Nero D’Avola. A medley of interesting wines from around the world, the best buys looked to be the Long Island selections. At the end, the excellent and professional staff recommended “the best key lime pie” and we were glad for that. It couldn’t get any better.

Yes, they’re frisky, they take chances here, and the classics are equally fine. We all agreed: to be frisky pays off deliciously. (27 Front Street, 477-4265. Open daily, 5-10 p.m., Friday & Saturday until 11 p.m.)

THE FIFTH SEASON

First-time diners at The Fifth Season are treated to an amuse-bouche of philosophy. “We are part of the Slow Food movement,” our meticulous server began, “which means we think the origin of the food is as equally important as the taste.” At a time when the phrase “seasonal and local” has become as overused as “billions served,” The Fifth Season means it.

So, perfectly sautéed spinach and roasted baby spring vegetables



Above: The open kitchen shows that The Fifth Season has nothing to hide. **Previous:** Greenport’s Front Street, home to restaurant row.

showed up on several dishes. A pesto of mint (always in season on the East End) showed up on the barley panzanella, East Coast sautéed cod, pork involtini, and penne with grana Padano. The oven-roasted Long Island lobster—something you never see in restaurants, let alone East End seafood shops—was delivered in a broth of leeks, chilies, lemon juice, red wine, butter, salt and pepper, and its own fluids that turned it silken next to the Yukon gold potato hash.

“We like what Slow Food stands for,” said chef Erik Orłowski, who developed his simple Mediterranean-tinged cooking style in the chef de cuisine position at Manhattan’s renowned City Crab and opened this restaurant with his wife Jennifer two years ago. “A lot of restaurants use all frozen products. We use all fresh ingredients. Fresh sauces. Fresh sorbets. Fresh chicken stock. Everything is cooked from scratch. Nothing’s bought.” The casual, open-kitchen format serves the same purpose, he

said. "We have nothing to hide."

The exclusively Long Island wine list sits next to what is perhaps the country's only exclusively New York microbrew list—Blue Point, Ommegang, Southampton Publick House, Brooklyn Brewery.

Trying eight out of the ten menu items, our group of four was never disappointed. "Delicate but with a lot behind it," was how one of us summed up the style. In a regal display, our dessert course of three American farmstead cheeses came with three knives for each diner—a nice touch that simultaneously respected the diners' palates and the integrity of the cheeses. (45 Front Street, 477-8500. Tuesday-Thursday 5-10 p.m., Friday-Saturday 5-11 p.m., Sunday 5-9 p.m. Closed Mondays.)

ANTARES CAFÉ

A brilliant red star, Antares attracts us to one of the great constellations of the night sky, Scorpio. So too, this gem of a restaurant, Antares Café, attracts a loyal following with its consistently exciting food, warm atmosphere, fine service, and good value.

Out of the way in Brewer's Yacht Yard at Sterling Harbor, we've dined there several times since they opened in 1999. A dozen tables,

wood floors, high ceilings and 19th century art posters on Venetian-red walls define the inside. Outside, the grand canopied deck is a lovely place to dine on a summer night.

The seasonal menu has influences of France, Italy and Morocco: Long Island duck confit, smoked salmon and shrimp risotto, braised rabbit ragout. Chef-owner Matt Murphy comes by his international flare honestly, having worked in restaurants in New York (Russian Tea Room, Rainbow Room, La Colombe D'Or) and in Paris and Tuscany. If you peek into the tiny kitchen, you will see only Matt, perhaps one other, creating away.

Braised octopus in red wine, grilled vegetable and gorgonzola terrine, and sliced Moroccan beef, were some of the inventive appetizers. We decided on the warm local oysters and sautéed cod cakes, then looked over the wine list and selected Pierre Sparr, Alsatian pinot gris, lush with hints of peach and quince.

The soft puffy cod cakes arrived on a bed of green mizuna. The plate was dotted yellow and orange—creamy aioli and lemon musto oil. Both smartly enhanced the dish, adding tang and depth. You could also dip the cod cakes into a puddle of parsley pesto, rich in garlic. The half dozen oysters with Pernot butter were sitting in their shells. The

NEW SEASON, NEW RESTAURANT

What's new and noteworthy in the world of East End restaurants can be as fickle as the local weather, but here's a recent sampling.

Back in March, for Lent, John Donnelly, chef and owner of **Oasis Waterfront Restaurant and Bar** in Noyac, garnered some respect for the East End beyond the L.I.E., when he prepared a seafood meal, paired with wine from **Channing Daughters Winery** in Bridgehampton, at the James Beard House in New York City.

Tom Schaudel of UpIsland cheffing fame (and formerly of the **Spring Close House** in East Hampton and **Downtown Grill** in Montauk) will be multitasking with two new East End ventures, one north and one south. In Jamesport, the newly restored **Jedediah Hawkins House and Inn** will open on 22 acres of working farmland. In Westhampton, Schaudel will open an outpost of his **PassionFish** in the old **Starr Boggs** location on Dune Road.

And a few new forms of cuisine will hit the East End this season. **Aqua East** on South Edison Drive in Montauk will greet its second year with a new crudo bar: a dedicated crudo chef who will serve up raw local seafood to eight guests and prepare all the raw dishes for the main dining room. The **Pridwin Restaurant & Lounge** on Shore Road in Shelter Island, featuring American-style cuisine with fresh fish caught by the owners, and vegetables from nearby farms, will start Wednesday evening outdoor cookouts, followed by live music and dancing. **Lori Restaurant & Wine Bar** will open at 75 Main Street in Southampton at the former **James on Main** spot. The "New American" menu will be prepared by Long Island cuisine specialist Michael Meehan, most recently culinary director at **Peconic Bay Winery** in Cutchogue. And on Montauk Highway in Amagansett, 27 **Lobster and Surf Shack**, the brainchild of Manhattan "Bar Czar" Alex Gordon (known for Bamboo Bernie's, Bourbon St., and Zoo Bar), will open with "crazy drink concoctions and ultimate seafood deals (1¼ pound lobsters for \$9.95)." And someone will take yet another crack at the perennial problem of no good Chinese food on the East End with **Wei Fun**, planned for the old O'Malley's space (next to **Turtle Crossing**) on Montauk Highway in East Hampton.

While **Leif Hope's Restaurant at the Old Steam Laundry** takes root at the "old" Laundry restaurant location on Race Lane in East

Hampton, the "old" **Laundry** moves around a few corners to the former **Farmhouse** property on Pantigo Road (Montauk Highway). Despite the new location, which offers more seats and an events space, the Laundry's owners and chef Andrew Engle are resolute in keeping the menu the same. "Any Laundry customer will recognize and be comforted by the menu immediately, from the ribs to the Iacono Farms chicken," said Engle. "You'll see the same commitment on our menu to using local farms and bounty from the sea." Both the old Laundry and the new restaurant at the Old Laundry are open seven nights a week.

Sag Harbor's culinary turnover continues as **Jeff & Eddy's** on Main Street gives way to **Mumbo Gumbo**, "a festive Cajun BBQ joint with a special emphasis on families and kids" run by the owners of **JL East** in East Hampton, **JLX Bistro** down the street, and **Madame Tong's** in Southampton. Locals yearning for more yearround dining options who aren't sated by the large barrel of peanuts at the entrance, weekly "Harry the Clown" magic shows, and new flat screen TV's, can drown their sorrows in a few Hurricanes. Across Main Street, Hamptons chain **The Golden Pear Café**, fresh from releasing *The Golden Pear Café Cookbook*, will open its latest location on the site formerly known as **The Harbor Deli**. And, up the road, the new owners of **Linda's Gingerbread Bakery** on the Sag Harbor-Bridgehampton Turnpike hope to open, by the end of the summer, **Bayburger**, which would be similar in spirit to the popular **Whaler Burger** that served burgers, fries, shakes and ice cream there in the 1970s and 1980s.

Fresno and **JL East** in East Hampton, and **Alison** in Bridgehampton, all have new chefs. At Fresno, Gretchen Menser, formerly of **Nick & Toni's**, **Rowdy Hall** and the **1770 House** in East Hampton, hopes to liven up the cuisine with a European sensibility that keeps flavors exciting and clean, and works with as much local product as possible. New dishes include sautéed black sea bass with fennel, beets, blood orange and quinoa, a Fresno cataplana with shrimp, mussels, littlenecks and fluke in a spicy tomato broth, a cumin-scented loin of lamb with preserved lemon, black olives, harissa and cous cous, and a grilled hanger steak with pommes frites and sauce verte. JL East gains Peter Dunlop, formerly of the kitchen at **Café des Artistes** in New York City and the **American Hotel** in Sag Harbor. And Robert Gurvich, former executive chef at the old **Alison** by the **Beach**, comes home to lead the kitchen at **Alison** in Bridgehampton.

oyster I tasted had an exciting splash of Pernot, a complement to the oysters.

The braised lamb shank and grilled hanger steak called for a red, so back to the list. With 33 wines, only four were Long Island. There were eight California, seven French, and others from Italy, Argentina, and Australia. We were, admittedly, disappointed in the slim local selection, but settled for a wine from Spain and one from Italy.

The Apulia red, Salice, was robust and complemented the tender Moroccan lamb, braised with plump carrots, raisins, prunes, tomato and lentils. The hanger steak was perfect, a deep resonant essence, the best part of the steer, swimming in a thick mushroom sauce. Local asparagus—just fresh that day, the first of the season—was piled on top, its sweetness, and soft crunch was delicious unsauced. This dish paired nicely with the simple charm of the Tempranillo.

Take note, Antares offers a six-course tasting menu, which we asked the staff about. It's best to let them know you want to order this adventure when you are making reservations. Ask about the Early-Bird Special and the half-price weeknight offers. (2530 Manhasset Avenue, 477-8839. Open daily for dinner.)

LA CUVÉE WINE BAR AND FRENCH BISTRO

If you hunger for high energy and light contemporary fare, La Cuvée bistro bar in The Greenporter Hotel & Spa is the ticket.

A pretty blonde wood and zinc bar, floor-to-ceiling windows, soft chartreuse green walls, white tablecloths, and orchids in bloom create a mod-bistro look. The early dinner crowd looked to be young dating couples, parents with teenagers, and guests of the hotel. A

lively bar scene materialized as we were leaving.

La Cuvée lives up to its name, featuring 60 wines by the glass and Continental menu listings such as steak au poivre, tuna tartar, muscels "Indochine," "les Crabcakes," linguini fruit de mer, a bistro burger, pesto pasta, and salad nicoise with grilled tuna steak.

We couldn't resist sampling from the myriad of wine choices on La Cuvée's list, a perennial favorite of *Wine Spectator*. Deborah Rivera, executive chef and owner, changes the list every three months to include many new finds from around the world including Israel, South Africa, Romania, Lebanon, Argentina, Australia, and Portugal. In the 20 selections from local wineries, absent are many of the region's best—the stated goal being to "break out of the merlot and chardonnay mold."

So, we traveled. A Loire Valley muscadet, for years a darling of Paris bistros, which we had hoped would crisply complement the tuna tartar appetizer, was a little bit too soft, missing the seaside tang of the varietal. The tuna was excellent—a little timbale tower with finely chopped cukes sitting in a dark plum sauce. Nearly seared with lime, it was more like ceviche.

A luxurious Tortoise from the Rhone complemented the succulent ribeye steak. (There was a local connection as the vineyard is owned by a Mattituck couple.) We sampled two sangioveses. One was from Argentina, and one from its native Tuscany. Yes, we liked the robust Tuscan best and it was perfect with our delightful dessert selection of cheeses: Manchego, Parmesean and Roquefort. (326 Front Street, 477-0066. In season, lunch and dinner Thursday–Sunday.) □

the frisky oyster

27 FRONT STREET GREENPORT, 631-477-4265, WWW.THEFRISKYOYSTER.COM

SERVING DINNER STARTING AT 5PM