

# NOTABLE EDIBLES

## TASTY READS

A few months ago, Alison Becker Hurt was brainstorming what sort of theme diner could help invigorate the relatively slow winter at her Bridgehampton restaurant, **Alison's**. "I had thought about doing some kind of book club," she said, knowing that many of her friends' clubs often reserve big tables for dinner. She e-mailed John Brancati, owner of **East End Books** in East Hampton, who had been incubating similar thoughts, and the two launched the Authors Roundtable Dinner Series at Alison's.

So far, diners have been treated to between-course readings from James and Kay Salter's *Life is Meals* (a smorgasbord of recipes and food experiences), Jennifer Egan's *The Keep* (a creepy story about a childhood prank gone wrong), and Christopher Cerf and Paige Peterson's *Blackie, The Horse Who Stood Still* (a story about an underestimated horse). The meals cost roughly \$55 and include the price of an autographed book. The author rotates seats at the communal tables so he or she can field questions.

The first three meals have all been filled to capacity, and Hurt plans to continue them through this winter and even midweek next summer. "The dinner table is a place for conversation," said Brancotti. "It's a natural way to break the ice when you're meeting with

strangers." In fact, the diner's been particularly popular with singles. "It's not like going to a bar to be picked up," said Hurt. "It's an intelligent night out." (For information: 537-7100, [alison-restaurant.com](http://alison-restaurant.com).)



## COOKING WITH GREASE

**Osprey's Dominion Winery** in Peconic is doing it. So are the **Peconic Star** charter boat out of Greenport and a fair number of North Fork potato farms. Not to mention a customer of the **Rottisserie**



**Smokehouse** in Southold who empties the restaurant's fryers to fuel his diesel Mercedes. "We'd love to see a bus fleet or Riverhead Building Supply or the ferry companies using it," said John Romanelli, owner of **Burt's Reliable**, a heating-oil delivery company in Southold, that recently started carrying biodiesel made of 100 percent American-grown soybean oil, and runs its own fleet of trucks on the stuff. "It's more natural than natural gas."

With lower emissions, lower risk of toxic oil spills and lower dependence on foreign oil suppliers, the national shift towards running our cars and heating our homes from homegrown veggie oil is taking root on the Island.

The Suffolk County government plans to use biodiesel for 25 percent of its fleet's fuel, according to County Executive Steve Levy, who has pushed for financial incentives for homeowners and businesses. And New York State began offering a 5-cents-per-gallon tax credit to homeowners who use bioheat. Bohemia-based **North American BioFuels Company** recently became the Northeast's first biodiesel plant to convert tens of millions of gallons of waste grease from Suffolk County food businesses into fuel.

Given the interest, there might even be more local sources. The **North Fork Potato Chips** company in Mattituck recently received a New York Department of Agriculture grant to explore, among other things, the possibility of converting its used sunflower oil into biodiesel to run its irrigation pumps, tractors and furnaces, and perhaps sell to neighbors.



### COZY CUPPA JOE

On a recent, chilly morning, a hurried customer came into **EastEnders Coffee House** on East Main Street in Riverhead and ordered a regular coffee with cream to go. As he paid, he surveyed the scene of quiet music, hushed conversation, and newspaper crinkling, and he told the barista and owner Diane Reeve, that he, in fact, wanted to stay. “In the summer time everyone has so much going on, that they are grabbing and going,” said Reeve, who hosts live music nightly from Thursday through Saturday. “In the winter, our volume goes down, but people sit longer.”

This is a common refrain from the East End’s coffee shops which provide a nice warm glow—not to mention one chemical antidote for seasonal mood disorders—as the days get shorter. Fewer customers, but longer stays, more evening business, more elaborate orders, more desserts. “I don’t think there’s anything specifically biological about coffee and the cold,” said Erik Suydam, a barista at Sag Harbor’s winter watering hole, **Java Nation**, who admitted an inverse correlation between orders for ice coffee and hot chocolate. “It’s just a better place to hang out and linger.” On a more practical level, although Java Nation still fires up its massive roaster daily, beckoning anyone within olfactory radius, the shop’s January sales are 30 percent of those in August.

### BEER FOR WINTER CHEER

While coffee shops don’t turn to caffeine-fortified beans in the cooler months, part of the appeal of visiting your local brewery in winter is the more substantial beers. “They get stronger and heartier and fuller-tasting,” said Mark Burford, brewmaster and owner at **Blue Point Brewery** in Patchogue. Consider the silky, thick Oatmeal Stout or the Winter Ale, an amber ale made with a touch of chocolate malt to help chase away the chill. Burford’s customers literally come in from the cold, as the outdoor section of the tasting room, open Thursday through Saturday, closes. The greater density of people partly explains the warm, fuzzy feeling. Another winter favorite, Old Howling Bastard, a malty, caramely barleywine named after an infamous local character, delivers a cavity-warming 10 percent alcohol content, nearly twice that of the average beer. “When people are hibernating, they seem to be happy with that,” said Burford. (Regulars enjoy Old Howling Bastard in a snifter or wineglass—and in moderation.)

At the **Publick House Brewery** in Southampton, this seasonal variation plays out in darker and spicier offerings. There’s the French Country Christmas Ale (a deceptively strong amber that one fan called “a fantastic party on the tongue”), the slightly sweet and almondy Nut Brown ale, the smooth, chocolaty Imperial

Porter, and the Old Willy Winter Warmer, a classic British dark beer with a great bitter bite and higher than normal alcohol content. Both of these Island breweries counter the falloff of tourist flows with festivals and charitable events. Blue Point holds its annual Cask Ale Festival on January 27—in that apparently lonesome period between the N.F.L. playoffs and the superbowl. Attendees can try cask ales—impressively tasty, traditional ales that have little carbonation and are served closer to room temperature—from around the Northeast and even drink out of the world’s largest cask. In February, the Publick House hosts the 10th Annual Love Life Lingerie Fashion Show to benefit the South Fork Breast Health Coalition, as well as additional musical, sports, and theme dining offerings to keep the community, and customer base, interested.

“Our building really lends itself to the off-season,” said Don Sullivan, owner of the Publick House. Originally an inn and speakeasy, the wooden house has two fireplaces and a collection of small, intimate rooms. “It’s a great place to see your neighbor, the person you bump into in the post office sort of thing.”

