
BACK OF THE HOUSE

MONTAUK EATS

Catch and keep.

BY GERALDINE PLUENNEKE



MONTAUK—Montauk is in its soul still a fishing village. Saltwater defines its dining. Peel back the veneer of megahouses and newly-arrived, high-powered real estate operatives, and beneath is a community that lives and eats from the sea. When workmen across town disappear en masse, you know the “blues” are running; that you’ll find pickups crowded together on the ocean beach at the spot where gulls circle over schools of fish.

What sets Montauk apart from other northeast ocean resorts is its thriving commercial fishing industry. Peopled with hard-working, hard-drinking men, these are the breed that filled opening scenes of the book and film *The Perfect Storm*. “The movie? Yeah. That *is* Montauk,” these fishermen and the chefs who serve their catch tell you.

When the jammed bar at Salivar’s on the docks closes at 4 a.m., fisherman spill into its adjoining restaurant for simple food, especially “The Bonnie”—two fried eggs, two pancakes, choice of ham, sausage, bacon,

Dinner at Harvest comes in big sizes and you’ll want to take it home. **Above:** A tilefish special fresh off the boat.

\$6.25. By 6 a.m. the restaurant empties. Several hours later, it refills with locals. From a covered outdoor patio rimmed with flowers, breakfasters watch the movement at the docks a few feet away. The scene hums with a contagious sense of life.

Respect for the taste of the freshest fish is central to most of Montauk’s more than 50 eating spots. Most succeed; not all. When asked at a jam-packed eatery if the fluke in the fluke taco was local, the waitress replied, “The fluke? That’s a *fish!*”

At the best places you find hard-edged respect for freshness. Says Tony Berkhofer, chef at West Lake Clam and Chowder House, “If we have a nor’easter, we try to stay open afterwards, but we may not really be in business for a few days. There’s no fresh fish.” At Dave’s Grill, next door to Salivar’s, its fish for the day arrives gleaming with seawater in a wheel-

barrow, trundled to it each morning along the wooden dock outside. Then Tsuyoshi Horita (Dave's day prep chef and former executive chef at Manhattan's Russian Tearoom who believed he had retired when he moved to Montauk) inspects each fish, rejecting some. To experienced palates, Dave's Grill is the best restaurant in Montauk; to some critics, the top seafood restaurant on Long Island.

DAVE'S GRILL

Pete's Viking Grill was a fishermen's haunt, opening only at 10 p.m. to serve breakfast throughout the night, when David Marcley and his wife, jazz-singer Julie Sheldon, bought it in May 1988. The couple delayed breakfast until dawn, added lunch and as their skill and staff increased, soon were serving only dinner.

Their East Coast version of red and white cioppino, now \$35.95, hit their menu 14 years ago and the word was out. Both cioppinos are outstanding, as are sweet, moist potato-crusting flounder, the fish of the day—perhaps striped bass or halibut, sushi—especially “tuna tempura,” tuna tartare, seven-vegetable spring rolls, linguine with clam sauce. The wine list and desserts are excellent. So is Julie's coffee, a stunner with Kahlua, Baileys and cream. “Given the hour, do you want decaf?” asks Tammy the bartender.

Like almost all Montauk establishments, Dave's serves some meat and steak. In the mid-90s its pork chops were a knock-out; today, they're even better. “We briefly tried taking them off the menu and had a customer uprising,” recalls Sheldon. Recently Marcley switched to “porter-

house” pork chops from Niman Ranch, from pigs that Niman reports, “run, roam and root,” giving a product that Marcley finds far juicier, deeper-flavored than lean industrial pork.

Dave's (468 West Lake Drive, 669-9190) is open daily (except Wednesday) from 5:30 p.m. through September, Thursday–Saturday to October 21, and reopens mid-May. Same day reservations are essential except for seven bar stools. Either queue early outside the restaurant, which accepts reservations from 4:30 p.m., or call and keep hitting redial during the fleeting window before tables fill. davesgrill.com.

THE DOCK

Decorated with odd-ball signs and stuffed game donated to owner George Watson by “irate wives” of hunters, this rustic 33-year-old restaurant-bar a few doors from Dave's is beloved by Montaukers. The fish of the day, always local—swordfish, tuna, flounder, fluke—is consistently good. “We're at the source,” grins Watson, nodding at the boats a hundred feet away.

The kitchen goes through “bushels of mussels,” dispatches heaping plates of tender oysters in a crispy coating, clams on the half shell, good linguine with white clam sauce. It's a place to drop in for full meals or snacks like “Fishwiches,” burgers, nachos. “But the tuna melt and the fries,” sighs one East Hamptoner. In Watson's version of this mundane canned tuna standard, a thin layer of sharp, aged cheddar is melted on a grilled English muffin, topped with tuna steak—choose seared-only to well-done—and a slice of local tomato.

On cold autumn nights The Dock (West Lake Drive, 668-9778) is comfortably warmed by a coal stove. It closes around mid-November and re-opens April 1. Cash only, no reservations. thedockmontauk.com.

SALIVAR'S

Almost everyone in Montauk smiles as they remember breakfast at Salivar's with someone special—be it grandchild or lover. The atmosphere of the place and sense of sea. The head of the 4,500-pound white shark caught by Frank Mundus in 1964, which inspired the movie “Jaws,” hangs in the bar. Eggs with crisp, excellent home-fries, pancakes and the smoked salmon platter are favorites.

Salivar's Restaurant (470 West Lake Drive, 668-2555), still owned by Peter and Tina Chimpoukchis who opened it in 1957, serves food 24/7. Bar hours, 11 a.m.–4 a.m. Cash only, no reservations. Restaurant closes mid-November to mid-May.

THE HARVEST, EAST BY NORTHEAST

The bustling Harvest, “favorite” restaurant of so many East Enders, serves enormous portions, a communal form of supersizing, on its quieter landscaped outside patio that feels like dining in Napa Valley with Northeast sunsets added. A wonderful herbed, seafood bruschetta arrives on oval platters heaped with clams, mussels, shrimp, and scallops over slices of grilled, garlic-scented bread. Several weeks ago, two bruschetta (\$38 each), one individual grilled pizza, and two salads served six hearty eaters, with leftovers. Chef John Weston says family-style servings, with some dishes actually designed for later reheating, give customers the sense of great value. Recently, the Harvest served a record 600 meals in the restaurant and outside patio in one busy night.

Whole red snapper, flash-fried and finished in the oven with an Asian sauce is terrific. Always consider the local special—perhaps black sea bass, porgy. “I personally take tilefish off the boat of a friend, the biggest

RECIPE

DAVE'S WHITE CIOPPINO

by David Marcley, Dave's Grill, Montauk

1 1-lb. lobster, split down center by fish market	8 or 10 branches fresh thyme
2 doz. mussels, scrubbed, debearded	scant $\frac{1}{16}$ t. cayenne pepper
$\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 c. calamari rings, fresh if available	$\frac{1}{2}$ c. garlic cloves (boiled 3 times, pureed in 1 t. butter)
1 c. tuna or any white fish in chunks like cod, blackfish, striped bass	2 t. garlic puree (from preparation above)
2 or 4 extra-large shrimp	$1\frac{1}{2}$ c. dry white wine (pinot grigio or sauvignon blanc)
	1 c. heavy cream
	2 t. unsalted butter optional

In preparation, boil peeled garlic 3 times, then puree with one t. of butter.

To large pan add olive oil, minced garlic, red pepper flakes and thyme and cook over medium heat until garlic sizzles. Add clams, lobster, and wine. Cover. Raise heat to high. Cook approximately 2 minutes. (Clams should open and lobster should be three-quarters cooked.) Leave claw in pan, but set lobster body and tail aside. Add cream, mussels, calamari and fish chunks to pan. Stir with wooden spoon. Cover and simmer for 2 minutes or until mussels open. Remove lid. Return lobster body and tail to pan. Add shrimp and garlic puree and cover. Simmer 1 or 2 minutes. Remove seafood and divide in two bowls. Raise heat under broth and cook 2 or 3 minutes without lid to reduce. Pour over seafood. Serves 2.

tile fisherman here,” says co-owner John Erb. At East by Northeast, sister restaurant of the Harvest along with Harvest-on-Hudson in Hastings, NY, portions are shrinking by design into small plates and shareable large plates. Particularly good are the Asian pear salad, Peking duck tacos and pan-roasted halibut with bok choy. Reservations are essential at the Harvest (11 South Emery Street, 668-5574); advised at East By Northeast (51 Edgemere Street, 668-2872). Both open daily from 5 p.m. in summer; Thursday–Sunday in winter. harvest2000.com.

RECIPE

PAN SEARED TILEFISH WITH BLACK SUMMER TRUFFLES CREAMED LEEKS IN A CORN AND JALEPENO BROTH

by John Weston, Harvest, Montauk

For the creamed leeks:	3 ¾ ears, corn on the cob
6 leeks	¼ bottle white wine
8 oz. Spanish onion	1 c. heavy cream
½ bunch scallions	½ black truffle
4 garlic cloves	

In a large pan sauté the Spanish onions, scallions, and garlic to translucent stage. Add cut leeks, stir, and cover with parchment paper. Turn to low heat. In separate sauce pan combine white wine, heavy cream, and black truffles. Cook down to nape. When leeks are soft, about 20-25 minutes, combine cream reduction. Add cut corn. Add salt and pepper.

For the corn and jalapeño broth:	4 garlic cloves
2 stalk celery, diced	1 jalapeño pepper, diced
½ onion, diced	1 pt. vegetable stock
1½ oz. carrots, diced	1 corn on the cob, left from leek

In a large sauce pan sauté the celery, onions, carrots, jalapeños, and garlic. Add vegetable stock. Add corn cobs. Bring to boil, then simmer for two hours. Buzz sauce with buerre mixer and strain.

For the tilefish:	fresh picked thyme
20 lb. tilefish fillet	olive oil
salt and pepper	

Cut fish into 14 ounce portions and season with salt, pepper, and fresh thyme. Heat sauté pan with oil. When hot place fish in pan. Cook for about 90 seconds to 2 minutes in pan. Finish in oven at 500 degrees for 4 minutes or until fully cooked through. Garnish with freshly shaved Italian black summer truffles.

THE MONTAUK BAKE SHOPPE

Some summer weekend mornings a line of 40 or more of the holiday-spirited waits outside the Montauk Bake Shoppe for egg sandwiches, omelets wrapped in tortillas, jellied croissants and cream cheese-fruit filled “cruffins.” Says one Manhattan sweet-tooth, “The Danishes are better than anyplace out here, better than many in Manhattan. Fruit tarts are heaven.” For lunch the shop has a range of paninis. Pies, cookies, muffins and dozens of refrigerated mousses and elaborate individual desserts are displayed below the order counter.

Good flavor is no accident. The first year Alan and Celeste Steil opened their bakery in the mid-90s, they flew in two bakers from Holland to work the summer season. Breads have excelled since, great for sandwich-

es and toasting. Then Alan went on a key lime pie binge. “I bought every damn key lime pie in Key West,” some 40, he guesses. The meringue-topped pie Alan settled on is delicious.

Full hours are 6 a.m.-6 p.m. Closed after special-order Thanksgiving turkey dinners until St. Patrick’s Day weekend. Cash only. (Montauk Plaza, 668-2439.)

JONI’S

Nearby, Joni’s draws beach and surf crowds and organic-lovers for breakfast and lunch. Bowls of fruit sit on a harvest table. Surfboards accent the walls. There are fresh-squeezed juices, breakfast wraps including bacon and tofu, pressed sandwiches on semolina bread, and a half-dozen picnic tables outside.

Among popular lunch choices, organic when available, are Mexican eggrolls, fresh tuna, veggie burgers, fish tacos and an excellent gingered Thai tofu-sprout combination.

Joni Huey was general manager of a chain of six Blanche’s Organic Cafés in Manhattan when her husband moved to Montauk. Six years ago Joni’s opened at Nine South Edison Street and then twins, now 2½-years-old, followed.

Open seven days a week at 8 a.m. (7:30 a.m. on weekends) through September, then Thursday-Sundays. Closed January-April. Confirm hours at 668-3663.

DURYEA’S LOBSTER DECK

It’s possible that Duryea’s overlooking Fort Pond Bay serves the best lobster roll and best New England clam chowder on the East Coast. The lobster roll or salad is tossed in perfectly balanced dill mayonnaise, often matched with dilled potato salad. The chowder is a rich, silky cream awash in clams where others substitute excess potatoes. The view from the concrete deck with its umbrella tables rivals the food, especially at sunset. Both cry out for a lovely wine or good beer. Bring your own.

While you wait for a table, sometimes an hour, you can anticipate the steamers, or whole lobsters, the Caribbean crab cakes or fishburger to come, or order your food to go. Duryea’s on Tuthill Road, a major seafood supplier since 1928, opens daily, around noon until about 9 p.m. The deck is open, weather permitting—at least to Columbus Day, and reopens May or earlier. No reservations, cash only. This year, throughout the winter, you can place same-day phone orders for cooked lobsters, salad and chowder at 668-2410. Never assume anything in Montauk, at Duryea’s or anywhere else. Always phone to confirm.

WEST LAKE CLAM AND CHOWDER HOUSE

If you’re lunching outside under umbrellas on the restaurant’s patio, you may spot either owner Rob Devlon or chef Tony Berkhofer chopping up bigeye tuna or other sizeable fish. The simple restaurant is surrounded on three sides by marinas.

Sushi fans should consider the Super Dave Roll of tuna, salmon, yellow tail, avocado, spicy sauce and barbecued eel. An Asian touch continues in excellent panko-fried sea scallops, marinated baby octopus over seaweed, miso-glazed bigeye. On lucky days, you may find a whole crispy sea bass on the specials. There are clams and oysters on the half-shell, a salad of fried, fresh (never frozen) calamari, and, at lunch only, a roll heaped with an amazing mound of excellent lobster salad accompanied by thick-sliced fried potatoes. Open 5:30 a.m.-11 p.m. until October, then Thursday-Sunday through November. Reopens late April. No reservations. (382 West Lake Drive, 668-6252.) □