



of the



THE DEFINITIVE ORAL HISTORY of the LOBSTER ROLL

IT WASN'T ALWAYS MAINE'S MARQUEE FOODSTUFF.

HOW DID A HUMBLE HOT DOG BUN CRAMMED WITH THE SIMPLEST OF INGREDIENTS MANAGE TO ATTAIN ROCKSTAR STATUS IN THE FOOD WORLD? WE TALKED TO THE SEAFOOD SLINGERS, CHEFS, GLOSSY FOOD-MAG WRITERS, AND ENTREPRENEURS WHO HELPED TURN THE UNASSUMING LOBSTER ROLL INTO A NATIONAL PHENOMENON.

BY **BRIAN KEVIN**
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **NINA GALLANT**
STYLED BY **MONICA MARIANO**



“The lobster roll,”

one travel writer recently gushed, “is as closely tied to Maine’s identity as the crab cake is to Baltimore or the cheesesteak to Philly.”

Seems like that’s always been true, right? After all, Maine’s beloved crustacean-on-a-bun inspires foodie pilgrimages, graces magazine covers, and prompts traffic jams in tourist season. But only a few decades back, the lobster roll was just another obscure seafood-shack menu item, no more renowned or emblematic of the Pine Tree State than, say, fried scallops or a bowl of steamers. Delicious? Of course! Nationally beloved? Hardly.

So what’s it take to become a new classic? We posed the question to dozens of chefs, seafood-stand owners, magazine editors, historians, and big-city entrepreneurs who witnessed (and helped fuel) the rise of one of our favorite morsels.

A hundred years ago, nobody had even heard of a lobster roll – not even in Maine. According to John F. Mariani’s revered *Encyclopedia of American Food and Drink*, the phrase first appeared in print in *The New York Times* in 1937, and Mariani name-checks possible progenitor

restaurants in Milford, Connecticut, and Long Island, New York (though our chats with lobster roll cognoscenti suggest there’s more to the story).

For most of the 20th century, a smattering of New England restaurateurs hawked the dish in relative obscurity. Then, at the tail end of the ’90s, a tiny restaurant in Manhattan, Pearl Oyster Bar, transformed the once-humble lobster roll into an object of culinary obsession – and a fleet of eager chefs, hyper-productive Maine fishermen, and savvy New York editors took over from there. By 2006, *Bon Appétit* had dubbed the lobster roll the dish of the year. It graced the cover of *Gourmet* in 2009. A 2010 *New York* magazine feature proclaimed its utter conquest of NYC, even as the lobster roll popped up on menus coast to coast, arguably usurping the classic shore dinner as Maine’s quintessential dish.

Today, perhaps a century after its debut, young chefs and entrepreneurs are pushing the lobster roll’s geographic and conceptual horizons. Put on your bib and enjoy the anything-but-simple story of a perfectly simple Maine treat.

For brevity and clarity, some portions of these quotes have been condensed.

I. “It’s Pretty Murky Back There.”

DEBBIE GAGNON (co-owner/manager of Red’s Eats in Wiscasset): There are so many stories. A million people will tell you a million different places where it originated.

REBECCA CHARLES (chef/owner at Pearl Oyster Bar in Greenwich Village, New York City): It’s not like Buffalo wings, which came from that one place – I know of like three restaurants that claim to have invented the lobster roll.

BEN CONNIFF (president of the national Luke’s Lobster chain): I’m pretty darned sure the first person was a lobsterman who had a bunch of leftover lobster and some bread. Whoever decided to put it on the menu first, I don’t think you’ll ever be able to definitively trace that.

MICHAEL STERN (co-author of the bestselling *Roadfood* guide-book): There is a pretty definitive origin story, actually. Oddly enough, the lobster roll was invented in Connecticut in 1929. What it was in those days – and what it remains to a large degree in Connecticut – is a hot lobster roll, which is hot lobster meat and butter in a bun. Whereas, to a lot of people in Connecticut, the kind of lobster roll you get as you travel more Down East is what they’d call a lobster salad roll, where it’s cool and with mayonnaise. Before Harry Perry started serving it in Milford, Connecticut, I don’t think there *were* lobster rolls.

SANDY OLIVER (New England food historian): Nobody ever invents anything. When it comes to food, practically everything we’re eating has evolved from something that existed in the

I’m pretty darned sure the first person was a lobsterman who had a bunch of leftover lobster and some bread.

past. The lobster salad sandwich has been around since the 19th century, especially the last quarter or so. Those early salad dressings weren’t always mayonnaise – they were often a vinegary, mustardy cream sauce. But lobster may have been tossed with that and maybe celery and served cold, and it was a major feature of weddings and other genteel gatherings.

SUSAN BAYLEY CLOUGH (co-owner of Bayley’s Lobster Pound at Pine Point in Scarborough): In 1915, my great-grandfather was digging clams and catching lobsters in this area. When you get some lobsters with a broken claw or that restaurants or wholesalers wouldn’t want, you have to figure out what to do with them. So my great-grandmother started cooking them in the kitchen of her house, on the same site we’re on now, and selling them right out her window. At some point, my great-grandfather asked for a sandwich, and she put together mayonnaise and lobster meat. She put it on white bread, though, and cut the crusts off, because he didn’t like crusts.

OLIVER: Probably the bright idea to stick it inside a bun was a commercial one. We start seeing what we know as a hot dog roll in the 1910s. In New England, we



Split-Top Bun



Side-Split Bun



Round Roll



Brioche Bun



Puff Pastry

Traditional

Outlandish!

Mayo



Butter



Lettuce



Celery



Chives



Wasabi/curry/chipotle



Avocado



Bacon





It surprised me later, when it became so popular in New York – and once it hit there, it just became a national craze.

have the famous split-top version – you can toast them, flatten them, open them up a bit, and dump your salad on top.

BAYLEY CLOUGH: In the years after they discovered the split-top hot dog roll, my great-grandmother switched over, because of the crust issue for my great-grandfather. It's not like there's a lot of advertising material from 101 years ago, so it's hard to say, but between 1915 and 1917, it would had to have been. I keep telling my husband it's a war I'm winning by attrition. I defy somebody to come to me and tell me, "We've been here for 103 years, and let me tell you about my family."

MARIANNE LACROIX (marketing director at the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative): It'd be hard to disprove anyone who claims to be the first – it's pretty murky back there.

II. "What's a Lobster Roll?"

NANCY HARMON JENKINS (Camden-based food writer): My father, who was born in Machias in 1910, told me he didn't remember seeing lobster rolls before WWII, that it was a post-war thing. I was surprised at that, because I thought it had always been around.

SCOTT DESIMON (Cumberland native, special projects and deputy editor of *Bon Appétit* from 2011 to 2015): Most of that lobster-shack culture didn't spring up until the '50s, when people started traveling. My mom says, growing up, lobster rolls weren't really a thing you ate if you lived here – she didn't start having them until the '70s.

GAGNON: My dad bought [Red's Eats] in 1977. It was defunct, and I remember so many merchants going, "Why do you want to buy Red's?" Dad and I used to sit at the window, playing cribbage and waiting for customers. Then, in the late '80s maybe, Dad went to another restaurant and had a lobster roll, and it was frozen meat – it's like eating wet cardboard; I think

it's a sin – and it had mayonnaise and celery and all this. He came back shaking his head and goes, "I'm going to make a lobster roll." After that, it was like a domino effect. People started talking about it and telling others, and people started coming.

BAYLEY CLOUGH: I started here when I was 12 years old, in 1978, but back then, and right up into the '90s, when people came in and saw "lobster rolls" on our sign, they didn't know what it was. You'd answer that question about 200 times a day. "What's a lobster roll?" About half thought it had something to do with an egg roll. It's funny because now, in the last 10 or 15 years, nobody asks that question anymore.

MICHAEL LANDGARTEN (owner of Bob's Clam Hut in Kittery): When I took over Bob's in 1986, on a summer day, we would do 60 or 70 [lobster rolls]. Now, some days I think we do 300. It's the biggest-selling single menu item.

STEVE KINGSTON (owner of The Clam Shack in Kennebunk): I remember selling 84 lobster rolls in a day was a record in my first year, 16 years ago. Our record now is 502. We feed way more people, but it just doesn't seem to be slowing down, and it seems like every restaurant in Maine has one now. Rebecca Charles gets a lot of credit for that – she was on the cutting edge of the casual oyster bar thing in New York City, before it became chic.

HARMON JENKINS: It was partly Rebecca Charles. It was partly Jasper White.

JASPER WHITE (chef/owner of Summer Shack in Boston, author of the cookbook *Lobster at Home*): I might have been the first chef to do a lobster roll on an upscale menu. In the '80s, I had a fine dining restaurant, Jasper's, and I introduced a lobster roll on our summer menu. I had to dress it up, which is kind of what I did with New England cooking back then. I did a saffron New England bun, homemade beet pickles, and homemade fancy potato chips.

It surprised me later when it became so popular in New York – and once it hit there, it just became a national craze.

III. "Oh, This Thing from Maine Is Now in New York."

CHARLES: I was in New York City cooking in the 1970s, and it was a drug-infested carnival ride. A few years of that and I was like, oh my god, I'm not going to make it to 30. So when mom bought a house in Kennebunk in 1979, I thought, why don't I just move up there? We had a long history of coming to Kennebunk – there are pictures of me at Kennebunk Beach at 11 months, lying on my stomach and smiling. I wound up working at the Whistling Oyster, and from there I went to the White Barn Inn and a little restaurant I opened called Café 74, which only lasted about a year.

I lived in Kennebunk until about '87, when I went back to the city. By 1996, I was sick of taking chef jobs for New York restaurant owners who didn't know anything about the restaurant business. I went to Napa to take a breather, and I read a guidebook on the plane about this place, Swan Oyster Depot in San Francisco. Right off the plane, I went, and they just had oysters and San Francisco-style seafood. Very simple, a bunch of guys working behind a counter, serving fish out the front window. I thought, oh my god, this is fantastic – we don't have anything like this in New York! I got back and started looking for a small space. I thought, they're doing San Francisco style – okay, I'll do New England style.

DESIMON: When I moved to New York in 1995, the only lobster roll I remember was kind of a fancy version at Grand Central Oyster Bar. Other than that, you couldn't find them. When Pearl Oyster Bar opened [in 1997], that was the first moment of, "Oh, this thing from Maine is now in New York."

LANDGARTEN: Rebecca Charles' whole schtick – it was more than schtick, it was the brilliant thing she did – was to elevate this fishermen's food, and she was brilliant enough not to overcomplicate things.

CHARLES: It was a very small space – it started out with 21 seats, bar and counter seating and one table that was bitterly fought over. I spent the longest time searching for buns and trying to get bakers to make them, then realized that the Pepperidge Farm bun I put my hot dog in is so much better than any of this, so I just went with that. And for me, it's a sandwich that has to have store-bought mayonnaise. When I serve a bouillabaisse, I'm making the mayonnaise, but when I serve a lobster roll, it's Hellmann's.

BARBARA FAIRCHILD (editor-in-chief of *Bon Appétit* from 2000 to 2011): For me, it's something that transports you to the place where you might have first had it in Maine – that's what I liked about Pearl, which is such a charming building on a charming street in charming Greenwich Village. You sit there and think, I almost *am* in Maine. All we're missing is the water outside.

CHARLES: It was about two weeks before I started to get attention, and reviewers singled out the lobster roll right away. I think the first person to write about us was Ed Levine [of *The New York Times*], and after he did, all hell broke loose. We had a magazine or a newspaper in once a week, and it snowballed.

IV. "And Then It Just Went Viral."

LANDGARTEN: This could be a myth at this point, but I'm pretty sure Rebecca Charles was on the cover of *Gourmet* or *Bon Appétit* or one of these with a lobster roll. After that, Martha Stewart jumped on, and everyone and their brother was making lobster rolls on television, and it's showing up in magazines. It became an icon of summertime.

KINGSTON: For us, the first real breakout one was *USA Today* in 2000. They did "50 Plates from 50 States" – they chose an iconic food and then a place. They chose a lobster roll, and they chose The Clam Shack.

GAGNON: Back in 1995, *CBS Sunday Morning*, with Tim Sample, that was the first national press that I remember. And

It's a sandwich that has to have store-bought mayonnaise. When I serve bouillabaisse, I'm making the mayo, but when I serve a lobster roll, it's Hellmann's.



then it just went viral – the Food Network, even Nippon Television in Japan.

KINGSTON: We were in a *Travel + Leisure* article in 2003 or 2004, and the interviewer said, “It’d be cool if you could get the makings of this thing and have them shipped to you.” Well I said, we could do that. Lo and behold, she put in a sidebar like, “Get the makings for your Maine lobster roll from The Clam Shack!” I didn’t even have a FedEx account. So subscribers get this magazine, the phone starts ringing, and I have a market manager saying, “Steve, I just got my third phone call for a lobster roll kit. What are these people talking about?” I went, “Oh shit! Are you kidding me? Take the order! Take the phone number!” Suddenly we were selling the Maine Lobster Roll Kit, and we just crushed it that first summer with orders, all from one article.

HARMON JENKINS: The key to the whole thing is New York because that’s where the magazine editors are, and you can’t get anything past them unless it’s in New York – then it becomes a big deal. Then everybody in the country wants it.

RUTH REICHL (editor of *Gourmet* from 1999 to 2009): I wish I could tell you about the conversations that went into choosing a lobster roll for the cover of the magazine [in July of 2009]. I would like to think I never had that much hubris that I would think, “Yeah, we’re going to make X dish famous.” Certainly, at *Gourmet*, we wouldn’t say of a particular dish, you know, “Tikka masala needs to be famous!”

FAIRCHILD: But so many people come to New York as a tourist destination that once a dish is sort of on the “must-have list,” people come from all over to eat it, then they go home and tell their friends. Hence the Cronut [a croissant-doughnut hybrid that New Yorkers have lined up for since 2013]. Once the word gets out, a dish spreads its tentacles all across the country: the pastrami sandwich at Carnegie Deli, the Cronut, the Pearl Oyster Bar lobster roll.

V. “Suddenly, They Were All Over the Place.”

REICHL: When Rebecca Charles opened up Pearl, nobody was eating lobster rolls. Then suddenly, they were all over the place. And certainly the fact that lobsters got cheap was a big factor in the growing popularity of it.

LACROIX: Historically, [Maine lobstermen] were catching 20–25 million pounds a year, and that started going up. In the early 2000s, you’re looking at maybe 60 million pounds coming in. There’s a lot of speculation as to why: the industry has been managing the resource since the 1800s, so there are a lot of sustainability measures in place. Cod were overfished and the cod fishery went down – those were considered a predator, so that’s a factor. Processing was also becoming more popular. Back in the ’90s, lobster was more of a white-tablecloth item,

The key to the whole thing is New York because that’s where the magazine editors are, and you can’t get anything past them unless it’s in New York – then it becomes a big deal.

and surf and turf – a piece of steak and a lobster tail – was big. And it was sort of like, “All right, now what are we going to do with all this claw and knuckle meat?”

DESIMON: I’m guessing [New York restaurants] use quite a bit of picked lobster meat, because almost no one in a New York kitchen – other than, say, Pearl – is steaming the lobsters and picking the meat themselves.

CHARLES: That’s what’s wrong with most lobster rolls. We get all of the lobster into that tiny restaurant to the tune of 1,500 pounds a week, and we steam it all in-house, throw it into ice-water baths. We break it down, we pick it, we cut it. We have a very specific methodology.

It was only a couple of months before other restaurateurs were coming with cameras and pads, trying to determine what was in the Pearl lobster roll. I’ve learned the hard way that people can copy you right down to the exact way you do everything, and there’s not a lot you can do about it.

FROM THE NEW YORK TIMES: “Do not invite Rebecca Charles and Mary Redding to the same clambake. They opened the snug but sparkling Pearl Oyster Bar together in Greenwich Village in 1997, but bitterly dissolved their partnership, with Ms. Charles retaining sole ownership of Pearl. Ms. Redding then opened her own



place, Mary's Fish Camp, a few blocks away, offering virtually the same menu of New England-inspired seafood." ("A Rivalry Fought Out In Dueling Lobster Rolls," by Eric Asimov; May 23, 2001)

"The owner and chef of a Greenwich Village seafood restaurant has settled the lawsuit she brought against her former sous-chef after he opened a restaurant that she said was a 'total plagiarism' of her own. The chef, Rebecca Charles of Pearl Oyster Bar, had accused her former assistant, Edward McFarland, of copying 'each and every element' of her restaurant." ("Chef's Lawsuit Against a Former Assistant Is Settled Out of Court," by Pete Wells; April 19, 2008)

BEN SARGENT (aka "Dr. Klaw" of Brooklyn's short-lived Underground Lobster Pound, former restaurateur, host of the Cooking Channel's *Hook, Line & Dinner* from 2011 to 2013): What started to happen was that people were just riffing off of Rebecca Charles. And I was like, no! Go on a trip to Maine, because even *hers* is her own version! It was chef-y chefs who'd never left New

York City. They were over-garnishing, and they were putting so much lobster in the roll that they no longer understood the concept, because the point is the ratio of buttery toasted bun to succulent lobster.

So I woke up one day [in early 2010] and was like, I'm going to make a lobster roll in my Brooklyn apartment and show these guys what a lobster roll is all about. It was all run by text message, all word-of-mouth. I'd operate from dark until about 1 in the morning. I had to operate under the name "Dr. Klaw" because I needed an alias. And it worked, for a while, which was crazy. I was having people down to my teeny tiny apartment and selling 250 lobster rolls a night [with Maine-sourced lobster].

I got kind of a slap on the wrist from the fire department – they said I had enough propane in my apartment to blow up a city block – and eventually, the health department sent a notice to me and to my landlord: "Benjamin F.W. Sargent, dba 'The Lobster Pusher Man,' operating as 'Dr. Klaw.'" They threatened me with jail time.

MICHAEL CIMARUSTI (chef/owner at Providence, Connie and Ted's, and Cape Seafood & Provisions in Los Angeles): Maybe there were places in LA that did lobster rolls every once in a while, but only five or six years ago did you start seeing them here more often. At Connie and Ted's [opened in 2013], we'll get anywhere between 700 and 900 pounds of whole lobster throughout the week, specifically for the lobster roll. It can account for as much as 20 percent of the entrée sales in any given day.

SABIN LOMAC (Scarborough native, co-founder and co-owner of the national, Los Angeles-based Cousins Maine Lobster chain of food trucks): When we first started doing this [in 2012], we weren't sure that people in LA even knew what a lobster roll was.

JIM TSELIKIS (Cape Elizabeth native, co-founder and co-owner of Cousins Maine Lobster): We thought about doing Italian sandwiches, but we kept coming back to lobster, because that's our identity and our tradition. It was going

COMING SUMMER 2017

DownEast

LOBSTER ROLL
CELEBRATION

A FESTIVAL LIKE NO OTHER

BE ON OUR VIP LIST TO GET ALL THE DETAILS FIRST!

downeast.com/lobsterroll



The Retirement of a Lifetime

Apartment and cottage living at Piper Shores offers residents fully updated and affordable homes, with all the benefits of Maine's first and only nonprofit lifecare retirement community. Located along the Southern Maine coastline, our active, engaged community combines worry-free independent living with priority access to higher levels of on-site healthcare—all for a predictable monthly fee.

Call today for a complimentary luncheon tour.

Discover the promise of lifecare.

(207) 883-8700 • Toll Free (888) 333-8711
15 Piper Road • Scarborough, ME 04074
www.pipershores.org



Piper Shores



to be a passion project, maybe break even. Then we had lines 50 people deep on day one, and [ABC's reality TV show] *Shark Tank* reached out to us the night before we'd even served a roll. ["Shark" Barbara Corcoran, of the show's investor panel, bought 15% of the company for \$55,000.]

LOMAC: We were astounded by how many people were driving 30, 40, 50 miles for a lobster roll. We had a guy drive from Phoenix one time. We just opened in San Antonio [the company's 13th city and 19th truck], and there were people there, especially wayward New Englanders, who were genuinely grateful.

LUKE HOLDEN (Cape Elizabeth native, founder and CEO of the national Luke's Lobster chain): My father had the very first lobster-processing license in the state of Maine, 30-plus years ago, so that was the business I grew up in, whether it was on the docks or the processing facility. I wanted to be on the water, so I got a job as a sternman, right in Kettle Cove in Cape Elizabeth. I learned how to fish there.

We opened in 2009, building on the lobster roll's momentum in NYC. The question was, why are all these incredible chefs screwing this thing up so badly? We cut out the middleman and brought the product to urban environments in a fast-casual fare that didn't exist. We're at 26 locations now. We're comfortable growing five to eight shacks a year in the next five to seven years, which puts us hopefully somewhere around 75 shacks domestically, across the U.S.

LACROIX: These guys [Luke's and Cousins] are doing an amazing job. Both of them are also selling a story, which I think people really like right now, to know where their food is coming from and the story behind it.

JANE STERN (co-author of *Roadfood*): Can I be a contrarian? We've spent the better part of four decades preaching that the glory of American food done correctly is not



PORTLAND'S ONLY ALL-SUITE WATERFRONT HOTEL

Located in downtown Portland, just steps from the shops, restaurants, galleries, and attractions of the city's historic Old Port.

Residence Inn®
Marriott
Portland, Maine
Downtown/Waterfront

145 Fore Street, Portland, Maine 04101
To reserve your room, call 207-761-1660 or 1-800-MARRIOTT
Or visit our web site at marriott.com/pwmdt


dream kitchen
 studio


Wood-Mode
 FINE CUSTOM CABINETS

DREAM KITCHEN STUDIO
 5 Payne Avenue • Rockland, ME 04841 • 800.639.7205 • dreamkitchenstudio.com

just food on a plate but the ambience and gestalt. How anyone can replicate sitting on the end of a pier in Maine – with the gray Atlantic waters splashing against the wooden pillars and the salty air and the Down East accents – to eating it out of a truck in Des Moines is ridiculous to me.

VI. “Now Everybody Has to Differentiate Their Lobster Roll with What They Do That’s Special.”

BAYLEY CLOUGH: Going back to the 1970s, when people came in for lobster rolls and brought friends from out of state, they would talk about it like this special thing they couldn’t get anywhere else. “I couldn’t wait to get back to Maine to get a lobster roll!” We don’t have that anymore because you can get a lobster roll anywhere in the country – they have them at McDonald’s, for goodness sake. So now everybody has to differentiate their lobster roll with what they do that’s special.

KARL SUTTON (co-owner of Bite Into Maine food truck at Fort Williams in Cape Elizabeth): We were genuinely surprised [before opening in 2011] that everyone just used the Maine style, with some mayo, and there didn’t seem to be a lot of variation. We were like, what are we missing? So we did some tastings and experiments with different flavor combinations that we thought paired well with the lobster, and that became the impetus and inspiration to open a food truck [which now serves curry-, chipotle-, and wasabi-style rolls, alongside the classics].

ISLAND TEAK
 COMPANY

Celebrating 17 Years in Business





CERTIFIED PLANTATION-GROWN WOOD

AAA-quality, TEAK garden furniture with a lifetime (no-hassle) guarantee. BEST QUALITY — BEST PRICE! Hundreds of benches, tables, and chairs in stock, ready for quick delivery. Don’t miss our NEW 4000 s.f. Warehouse Annex featuring Live Edge Slab Tables and countertops, Recycled Teak wood furniture, home decor, wood carvings and those Crazy Teak Root Benches!

681 Bath Rd. (US Route 1), Wiscasset • 207-882-7225
 And 38 Sea Street, Boothbay Harbor • 207-633-9899
 Open April 15–October 15, Daily, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
www.islandteakcompany.blogspot.com

HELLO, SUMMER

SUMMER SWELTER



BAXTER[®]
Brewing Co.

CRAFT-BREWED



IN MAINE

SARAH SUTTON (co-owner of Bite Into Maine): We definitely sell more traditional ones, but in the beginning, we were on the news, and then all of a sudden, we started getting these really old Mainers who were like, “I want a curry lobster roll!” because the TV reporter said they were good.

BAXTER KEY (co-founder/co-owner of The Highroller Lobster Co. food cart in Portland): We serve a lot of first-timers, people on vacation doing the beer circuit here, and they’re like, “I’ve never had a lobster roll. How should I do it?” I’ll say, I like it with bacon and jalapeño mayo. And they’re always stoked about it.

ANDY GERRY (co-founder/co-owner of The Highroller): We knew at first people would be skeptical because we were messing with a classic.

KEY: There are definitely people with their opinions. We’ll post a picture with, like, avocado and lime mayo, and people are like, “What are you doing?! You can’t even taste the lobster!” in the comments section.

FAIRCHILD: It’s one of those things like a well-made burger or club sandwich, those kinds of iconic dishes that never go out of style but also can adapt to modern eating. I daresay somewhere in this country, there’s probably a lobster roll that has some kind of Asian seasoning or maybe some kind of South American or Latin seasoning. And it doesn’t suffer. It’s enhanced by reinterpretation, and I think that’s why it endures.

JANE STERN: I think lobster rolls are totally minimalist cuisine. I remember watching Gordon Ramsay on TV about a year ago, showing how to make a lobster roll. It was a complete nightmare, because he had all this weird seasoning in it – thyme and I don’t know what else. He wanted to make it interesting and chef-ish, but the best lobster roll depends only on the perfection

Ever Dreamed of Owning an Affordable Three-Season Getaway in Maine?



**Owning a Vacation Home in Maine Just Got Easier.
Park Model Homes Are the Perfect Getaway.**

Old Orchard Beach, Maine

Seacoast RV Resort is an affordable coastal village in Old Orchard Beach, Maine, giving you access to beaches, pool, hot tub, recreational hall, trolley to the beach, and more.

**Open May 1 through October 31
NO transit RVs in and out, NO Rentals,
NO visitors fees — ever!**

STARTING AT \$69,500

**Fully furnished, including 3-season
sunroom, deck, and central AC**



Financing Available

Annual fee includes city water, city sewer, 90 channels of cable TV, trash removal, use of clubhouse, heated pool, two large hot tubs, etc.

Seacoast RV Resort

For more information, call Bev at 207-332-4282 or 800-718-5884

www.seacoastresort.com

of the lobster, how recently it was caught, how good it is – then butter and a roll.

CIMARUSTI: It's got to just be an exercise in purity.

CHARLES: When you elevate something, for me, you have to be careful not to take it somewhere else: somebody puts seaweed in it, someone else puts tarragon in it. You just – you can't do that. You have to keep it pure. Most people's biggest complaint about my lobster roll is that it's got too much mayonnaise. Well, I love mayonnaise, and I don't trust people who don't.

KINGSTON: I actually like those places that do some funky stuff. Questions about our round rolls used to really bother me – fortunately for us, the reputation of the product outgrew the skepticism.

WHITE: It's so hard to be a young chef now, because you just have to come up with nonsense to get noticed. I did one change: some of the old classic lobster rolls have celery, but instead I do a small amount of chives in the mayonnaise and cucumbers, which give it that little bit of crunch and texture.

DESIMON: All you need is butter, a split-top hot dog bun, a lobster, and mayonnaise. And if you want a little bit of celery or something, go for it. You shouldn't. But whatever, you can.

SARGENT: If you put lettuce anywhere near my f*cking lobster roll, I'll just give it back.

LOMAC: If you're serving a roll on a baguette or brioche – I think at some point throughout my journeys in LA I've seen them on a puff pastry – it might look beautiful, but for me, it just doesn't have that tradition behind it.

OLIVER: Foods on the gimmicky side, they're not going to last. Like a Cronut? Oh, please. There's all kinds of garbage like that out there, and it dies its own natural death,



The way life should be.

Private Cottages and Apartments for
Independent Living in beautiful
Boothbay Harbor, Maine



BOOTHBAY HARBOR

Call Bob Drury
at (207) 633-0920

www.standrewsvillage.com



DAMARISCOTTA
Call Karen Westbaver
at (207) 563-5523
www.schoonercove.com

St. Andrews Village and Schooner Cove are part of the LincolnHealth Senior Services Continuum, which includes Independent Living, Assisted Living, Memory Care, Skilled Rehabilitation, Long Term Care, Home Care, and Hospice.

and we should be grateful. The more a dish relates to the larger culture, if it's descended from a long family line of something, the more it's going to endure.

KINGSTON: People thought lobster mac and cheese was going to be the next chowder, but while you certainly see it on menus, it's not classic, because it's still not as pure. A lobster roll lets you taste the pureness of real lobster without going too crazy.

WHITE: Lobster mashed potatoes? Come on. Macaroni and cheese with lobster? It might be the best way you can eat macaroni and cheese, but it's got to be one of the worst ways you can eat lobster. To me, it's all about flavor, texture, aroma. Look at the great classic dishes, like bouillabaisse – it reached perfection 100 years ago. There's really not much to do with it. In the end, the dishes that last are the ones that have incredible flavor – which is probably why the hamburger has lasted through all kinds of bastardizations and fast-food garbage.

LANDGARTEN: You can't argue with the downright deliciousness of the lobster roll. Whether or not you get it hot with butter, you still have the hot butter caramelization on the roll, so the butter flavor is there. You get the fresh meat, you get the pop with the outer skin giving way to the inside, a burst of salty yummy flavor. It's just tremendous.

REICHL: It's our dish. Atlantic lobsters are an iconic American food, and it makes sense we would democratize this thing that in almost all the rest of the world is a luxury food by putting it on a hot dog bun with a lot of mayonnaise – that we would bring it down to ballpark level. The lobster roll makes more sense to me as an icon of American food than a hamburger. I mean "hamburger" isn't even an American word. We didn't invent it. Lobster rolls are really ours. 🍷

Brian Kevin is Down East's managing editor. Follow him on Twitter at @BrianMT.