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THE HAMPTONS

by Matthew Wexler

There's a reason why everyone from Wall Street millionaires to newly minted Ivy League grads in their seersuckers and Lands' End totes will brave the Long Island Expressway's inevitable gridlock to get to the Hamptons. A not-so-quick connection spills harried New Yorkers (and those who love them) into the Montauk Highway, which reveals a handful of pastoral towns that dot New York State's most eastern region. Gaze out the window along the bustling streets and you might spot the likes of Calvin Klein, Jennifer Lopez, or David Geffen. And if you have \$200,000 lying around, Sean Puffy Combs' waterfront estate could be yours as a summer rental.

All of this glitterati (including Martha Stewart and Hamptons icon Ina Garten) demand a certain level of culinary prowess, even if they're just going to stick to a liquid diet of rosé wine from nearby **Wölffer Estate Vineyard** (139 Sagg Road, Sagaponack, Tel: 631-537-5106. www.wolffer.com). As far back as the late 1960s, Truman Capote was a regular at **Bobby Van's Steakhouse** (2393 Montauk Hwy., Tel: 631-537-0590. www.bobbyvans.com/bridgehampton) where he was rumored to await the restaurant's daily opening to get his frequent drink on (usually a screwdriver). But over the decades, the Hamptons restaurant scene has flourished to epic proportion as Manhattanites have come to expect a level of cuisine that matches the multi-million-dollar price tag.

The following restaurants eliminate the guesswork from the flash-in-the-pan openings and closings that are common among seasonal destinations. Be sure to make a reservation to avoid long waits during those picture-perfect summer nights. On the other hand, you never know what celebs may appear for an amuse bouche selfie.

TUTTO IL GIORNO

Originally from Lake Como, Italy, **Tutto Il Giorno's** Executive Chef and Managing Partner Maurizio Marfoggia brings the flavors of Italy to Southampton. "I'm from the north so a lot of the dishes are from the north, but one of our partners is from south, so I'd call



Almond Restaurant

our cuisine 'Neapolitan with a modern twist,'" says the chef. "It's an evolution in Italian cuisine: less heavy, less ingredients, and concentrating on the quality."

San Francisco stakes claim for the dish, referencing the many Italian immigrants who arrived in the Bay Area during the late 19th century from Genoa. But prior to that, "ciuppin" (a rustic fish stew with trimmings, white wine, and vegetables) could commonly be found in coastal towns along the Ligurian Sea. Marfoggia's version draws from some of the best seafood to be found on the East End.

"We buy fish every day, so the recipe varies depending on what is fresh," says Marfoggia. This often includes shrimp, mussels, clams, calamari, and a white fish such as branzino or striped bass. The rich broth, spiked with extra-virgin olive oil, tomato sauce, and garlic, is finished with a slather of saffron aoli and crusty rustic bread from nearby Blue Duck Bakery.

Other standout dishes include risotto with asparagus tips, marinated lemon, and

a hefty portion of grated Pecorino Romano; and chicken "under a brick" served with baby artichokes, new potatoes, and preserved lemon. The chef suggests Prosecco as the beverage of choice. "It's usually identified as an aperitif but this is a great combination," says Marfoggia. Made from the glera grape, look for a dry prosecco from Italy's Veneto region. 56 *Nugent St., Southampton, Tel: 631-377-3611. www.tuttoilgiorno.com*

ALMOND RESTAURANT

For French fare that draws ingredients from local farmers, head to **Almond Restaurant**, which has been a dining staple in Bridgehampton since its opening in 2001. Co-owners Jason Weiner and Eric Lemonide have made their mark with innovative bistro dishes served in a casual setting (along with outside dining and sidewalk tables for obligatory people-watching.) The historic space features 100-year-old tin ceilings, signature zebra wallpaper, and bathrooms that pay homage to

favorite cookbook authors including Julia Child and Craig Claiborne. But it's the menu that wows, particularly in its commitment to lesser-known cuts of meat like hanger steak.

"At the restaurant, we specialize in the fantastic things that for whatever reason are under-utilized, misunderstood, or under-appreciated," says Chef Weiner. "Hanger steak [is] a bit toothy and gamey, but that's why it makes for such interesting and complex meal. And the flat iron: here's a cut that it is quite literally rescued from the shoulder of the animal. It's the part that usually gets ground into hamburger, because it's thought to be too tough to be used for anything else. If butchered correctly, it has the leanness and tenderness of a filet mignon but with a heck of a lot more flavor."

For those who aren't carnivores, Almond delivers an array of inspired vegetarian dishes such as roasted asparagus with soy truffle vin, Parmesan frico and Aleppo powder; and other snackables like citrus-marinated olives, crushed potatoes with roasted garlic, and an ever-changing "Meatless Monday" plats du jour of risotto. *One Ocean Rd., Bridgehampton, Tel: 631-536-5665. www.almondrestaurant.com*

SEN

He was a legend in the dohyō before he was a legend in Sag Harbor. Former sumo wrestler Kazutomo Matsuoka had a catering company in Manhattan and eventually moved his family to the East End and opened **Sen**, a popular Japanese eatery and sushi bar. "I think we were probably eating gourmet sushi instead of baby food," says Jesse Matsuoka, who along with his brother Tora, now oversee the legendary dining spot.

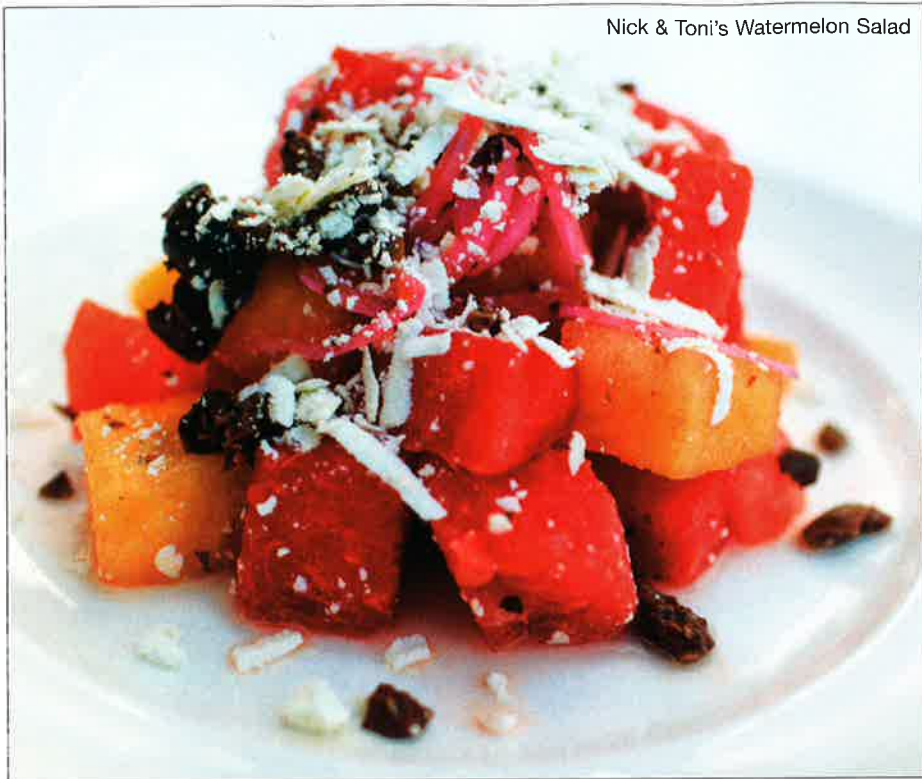
The restaurant's signature dish, the Garuda roll, is named after a bird-man deity found in Japanese culture and exemplifies the restaurant's commitment to top-notch ingredients. This includes Tamanishiki small grain rice grown by family-owned Montra Farms in California, premium-grade tuna (Sen can go through upwards of 250 pounds per weekend during high season), and the underdog of the sushi roll: Shirako ten-grade yaki nori seaweed, which is harvested with the same attention to detail as one might expect from a grand cru row of vines. The deep-fried roll (referred by the staff as the "crack roll" due to its addictive appeal to customers) is dusted with cake flour, quickly dipped in tempura batter then dipped in hot oil for a mere 15 seconds—crisping the exterior but protecting the cool interior of tuna



Long Island Iced Tea



Sen Dragon Roll



Nick & Toni's Watermelon Salad

and spicy mayonnaise.

More recently, Sen added ramen to its menu and offers several varieties for those seeking a soothing bowl of broth on a cool summer night. Varieties include chili chicken ramen with a miso broth base, double pork ramen with pork belly submerged in a robust pork broth, and a vegetarian option with earthy mushroom notes and a garnish of memma (fermented bamboo shoots). Sen also offers an extensive selection of sake and sochu including Blue Current, a handcrafted American sake from Maine. 23 Main St., Sag Harbor, Tel: 631-725-1774. www.senrestaurant.com

NICK & TONI'S

Executive Chef Joseph Realmuto helms **Nick & Toni's**, an East Hampton mainstay that has been serving up classic fare with a farm-to-table spirit far before it was trendy. "We're local, seasonal Italian," says Realmuto, "in the sense that we're using a lot of ingredients that are indigenous to us that might not be in Italy." This includes a bounty of produce, fresh herbs, and honey from the restaurant's one-acre organic garden.

This slow-food philosophy is evident in one of the restaurant's signature dishes, housemade cavatelli with jumbo lump crab, fresh peas, and garden mint. The pasta comprises three simple ingredients: Calabro ricotta, eggs, and all-purpose flour. A hand-cranked cavatelli machine produces the thin

dumplings, which are then prepared to order. A few additional simple ingredients including Maryland jumbo-lump crabmeat, shelled green peas from the restaurant's garden or nearby Balsam Farms, and palate-popping mint. A gurgle of olive oil along with garlic, shallots, and a splash of starchy pasta water create a light and bright Italian dish that's ideal for a summer sunset.

The restaurant's wood-burning oven also turns out noteworthy items including signature pizzas like the picante, topped with cherry peppers, spicy sausage, tomato, and fresh mozzarella, as well as locally caught fish such as day boat fluke with baby vegetables, Calabrian chili and saba, an Italian syrup similar to an aged balsamic vinegar. 136 N. Main St., East Hampton, Tel: 631-324-3550. www.nickandtonis.com

HARBOR BISTO

Chef and Partner Damien O'Donnell serves up "waterfront comfort food" at **Harbor Bistro**, where he aims to deliver cuisine that can hold its own to the picturesque views. One of the restaurant's recent mainstays, which has gained popularity beyond its island (and we're not talking Long Island) origin, is poke (pronounced poh-keh). The chef was first exposed to the dish working for chef Roy Yamaguchi, where he learned the nuances of Asian cuisine. "Salty, sweet, savory—there's a lot of excitement involved

in Asian cooking," says O'Donnell.

Center-cut yellowfin tuna is used instead of the traditional trim, diced to a quarter-inch and tossed with toasted macadamia nuts, onion, and tomato. A touch of luxurious truffle oil and fresh ginger juice elevates the dish to Hamptons status, served on a bed of haji-ki black seaweed salad dressed with rice vinegar, soy, and pickled lotus root.

"As a chef you never hit a moratorium of knowledge, there's always more to learn," says O'Donnell. "The menu has a lot of Asian influence, but I show my appreciation for all types of cuisine. Our guests are worldly and I want to give them some of those experiences that they may have had in their travels." 313 Three Mile Harbor-Hog Creek Rd., East Hampton, Tel: 631-324-7300. www.harborbistro.net

668 THE GIGSHACK

For a final Hamptons hurrah, drive to the end of the road before you hit the Atlantic, and you'll find yourself in Montauk. Casual joints like **668 The Gigshack** define this less-stuffy East End enclave but make no mistake, the "global surf cuisine" delivers thoughtful dishes that embrace the best that the sea has to offer.

Tracey and Lewis Gardell opened the venue after relocating post-9/11 with their sons, Arden, Skylar, and Gray (yes, they're as sexy as their names would suggest). The Shack, as locals affectionately know it, usually has live music to be enjoyed along with Chef Gray's menu. Highlights include the sea scallop salad, which Gray created by "playing around at home." Local scallops from nearby Gosman's Fish Market are seared golden in a hot sauté pan and served with a warm vinaigrette composed of soy sauce and rice wine vinegar, which is then emulsified with a bit of cold butter and served atop baby arugula, avocado, cherry tomatoes, and locally sourced red radish sprouts.

Some might balk at the Shack's riff on the lobster roll, which forgoes the classic hot dog bun in lieu of a croissant and comes with a heaping pile of homemade potato chips. Or the grilled local oysters topped with Parmigiana Gouda. No matter, this chef cooks to the beat of his own drum. And nobody will question Arden's signature margarita, which combines Herradura Silver tequila, fresh squeezed lime juice, orange juice, Cointreau, and just a touch of agave syrup and splash of soda. If there's such a thing as a taste of summer, this is it. 782 Main St., Montauk, Tel: 631-668-2727. www.668thegigshack.com