

Decor Maine

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Devin Finigan and her restaurant, Aragosta, have transformed Goose Cove into a culinary destination. Photo by Nicole Wolf.



Splendor at the EDGE of the WORLD

IN ACADIA AND ON MOUNT DESERT ISLAND, EXTREME NATURE AND EXTRAORDINARY CULTURE DON'T JUST COEXIST—THEY FLOURISH

Written by Alexandra Hall

It's impossible to believe there's any human civilization nearby. At least that's what I'm thinking, sitting seaward on one of the gargantuan boulders piled up around Barred Island—all imperfectly fit against one another, as if arranged by some drunken giant playing mock-Tetris.

Surrounded on three sides by Penobscot Bay's endless waves and feeling as though you're sitting at the edge of the world, your brain rejects the concept that humans could somehow make even the tiniest dent in something so vast and primitive.

And yet, over the centuries, it's the area's nature itself that drew not only civilization but also some of its best inventions: the Wabanaki's cultivation of corn and

beans—a precursor to farming. Inspiring art depicting shores and forests. Interior design that embraces the exterior. And culinary masterpieces that sing with ingredients just plucked from the wilds.

All across Acadia and Mount Desert Island, nature and culture exist in almost unbelievably close proximity, and this issue's Drive story delves into some highlights.

Let's begin a short hike away from the exact rocks I'm sitting on: a magical place called Goose Cove, home to **Aragosta**, easily one of the most artful restaurants in all the Northeast. Chef/owner Devin Finigan is the Renaissance woman behind it all: the light-drenched dining room dotted with wildflower bouquets; the exquisite dishes that bow to surrounding forests and ocean; her ingenious, free-



For some lucky Mainers, Acadia is a spectacular backyard. Here, a view of Sand Beach from Great Head Trail. Photo by Michael D. Wilson.



TOP: Balance Rock Inn is just outside Bar Harbor, yet it feels entirely secluded. Photo by Francisco Companio. **LEFT:** Place settings at Rusticator are designed and customized to each customer. Photo by Sean Litchfield. **ABOVE:** A suite with a view at The Harborside Hotel. **(OPPOSITE) BOTTOM, LEFT:** Designer Laura Keeler Pierce, who co-owns the shop Rusticator with husband Vassar Pierce. **TOP, RIGHT:** Dishes at Aragosta highlight ingredients from just outside its door. Photo by Lauryn Hottinger. **MIDDLE:** The brand-new Salt Cottages hover at the edge of Bar Harbor. **BOTTOM, RIGHT:** Abel's Lobster blends a natural setting with a modern interior. Photo by Meg Leddy.

photo by Sean Litchfield



At Aragosta, Chef Devin Finigan's thoughtful creations spotlight even the smallest details. **OPPOSITE:** Textural interplay at Rusticator, the design of which focuses on how people go about their lives every day. Photo by Sean Litchfield.

photo by Laurn Hottinger



standing greenhouses/private dining rooms, perched above the expanse of Penobscot Bay. She's also just added a bar on the beach—yet another reason to book one of the property's darling shabby chic cabins and stay a few nights.

When you're ready to tear yourself away, it's a 10-minute drive to **Deer Isle Artists Association**, a nonprofit of 100 members, now in its 49th year. "We represent all calibers of artists, from those with national reputations to local emerging ones," says David McBeth, the association's board president. Exhibits change every two weeks through the summer, and most works take cues from the surrounding environment. "A lot are of ocean, trees, and boats," says McBeth. "That's what we live and see here, so these artists are representing the world around them."

About 45 minutes up Route 172 in Ellsworth, Maine's rugged beauty is one of Susan Nordman's inspirations when stocking clothes by local designers for her women's shop, **Bliss**. "I encourage quiet enjoyment here," she says, noting her stock of flowing tunics and pants by Angelrox, hand-knit sweaters with low carbon footprints, and meticulously stitched Italian linen. "I know all of the makers I stock personally," she says. "Their things are made with joy and reflect where and how we live."

That's equally true 20 minutes south, at **The Gallery at Somes Sound**. Pull into the driveway, and you're facing the mountains of Acadia National Park. "We sometimes see eagles, seals, or ospreys before we even get out of the car," says director and owner Tyra Hanson. And inside, the sculpture Tyra curates—from arctic birds by artist Katie Bell to bronze foxes and fawns by Sarah Seabury Ward—nods to that nature. "Our artists and furniture makers have national standing," says Tyra, "whereas the paintings we present are by artists who have a definite tie to Mount Desert Island."

Another 10 minutes south, Abel's Lobster splits the difference between elevated and down to earth. "We're very come-as-you-are," says operator/partner Mandy Fontaine, who's from a generational MDI family. "It's classic backyard-at-grandma's, with a modern twist." Chef Matt Leddy's superlative lobster roll is extra crispy and buttery, overflowing with big chunks of meat; and while the lawn is set with picnic tables and a wood-fired cooker, the indoor space is bright and contemporary—with new high-top seating, so everyone sits high enough to get a view of sparkling Somes Sound.

Moments further south lands you in Southwest Harbor, in **The Claremont Hotel's** revitalized turn-of-the-20th-century grandeur—complete with a cossetting spa, a storied croquet pitch, and a croquet club to match. Hovering above it all is the simple elegance of Little Fern restaurant (don't miss the black cod with sweet pea and ginger coulis), looking across the emerald lawn—a spot-on match to the pink-and-green pool decor—tumbling down to the dock toward Northeast Harbor.



Photo by Erin Little

The sprawling lawn at The Claremont Hotel rolls gracefully down to the dock, looking out to Northeast Harbor.



Find your way to that village by swooping back through Somesville, then down to **Island Artisans NE**. Owned by eight local artisans and curators, the gallery spotlights distinguished Maine contemporary artists working in traditional media, creating pieces that are far more heirloom than souvenir. For example? "We have works by incredible basketmakers who are adding to the timelines of their traditions," says co-owner Linda Perrin. Likewise, the hand-woven wraps and bags, fluid and modern handblown glass, and abstract sculptures of sea life.

Steps away, more discoveries abound at **Main Street Mercantile**, hand-picked by owner Erika Wibby Mitchell, who runs the brightly lit, inviting store with her husband and daughter. "I switch up the inventory throughout the season," she says. But it's always a mix of great books, personal care items, next-level clothes for men, kids, and women (keep an eye out for new airy dresses by Nina-leuca), and all manner of other things that elevate everyday life.

A similar sense of elevation continues slightly southward in Seal Harbor, at **Rusticator**. "This village is tiny, quiet, and intimate," says Vassar Pierce, who co-owns the interior design shop with wife Laura Keeler Pierce. "People here walk slowly and take the time to come in and

talk. So we really get into the design details of their lives." Those conversations go beyond big furnishings to everything from hand-turned plates by Christopher Spitzmiller and flatware to Rusticator's own collection of furniture and accents inspired by Mount Desert Island's iconic summer cottages.

A half-hour's drive north sits Bar Harbor, the buzzy gateway to Acadia National Park. Start out by gathering some foundational perspective with a visit to the **Abbe Museum**, Maine's only Smithsonian affiliate, to learn more about the Wabanaki land you're standing on. And then settle in at family-owned **Balance Rock Inn**. "We're secluded even though we're downtown," says co-owner Claire Miles. Her husband, Aaron, sees to the award-winning menu at Veranda, the boutique property's graceful restaurant that sources from local farmers and foragers. The theme of natural luxury continues in your chambers, redesigned last winter to evoke the area's history, and, says Claire, "the woods and ocean around you."

Design-savvy families can do no better than the recently renovated **Harborside Hotel**, sandwiched between downtown and the bay. Book a family suite, and you'll find yourself in a pretty room (sharp blue and white details with subtle boating motifs)—on one side are bunk beds

for the kids (they get their own TVs and games); on the other, a larger bed for parents. So you needn't shell out for two rooms, but you also don't suffer from an overload of togetherness.

Or maybe you want to be near the action, but not in it. If so, move further up the coast by 10 minutes to **The Chart Room** in Hulls Cove. Local restaurateur Michael Boland has just bought the classic lobster pound. "We're carrying the torch but also reinvigorating it," he says—most notably with new pier seating, which means downing those oysters and that Blueberry Mojito directly on the water.

Keep that vibe going by falling asleep to the sound of waves, next door at the **Salt Cottages**. The newly renovated, breezy, freestanding units date to the '40s and are decked with seagrass rugs and fabrics as simple, chic, and summery as it comes. And sitting outside the cabins, letting the breeze and expansive view of Frenchman Bay wash over you, things feel reminiscent of Barred Island. It may not have that same extreme sense of remoteness, but somewhere between that and the buzz of Bar Harbor is the perfect happy medium between nature and culture. ■

ABOVE, RIGHT: Acadia National Park is filled with natural wonders like the Schoodic Peninsula. Photo by Michael D. Wilson.