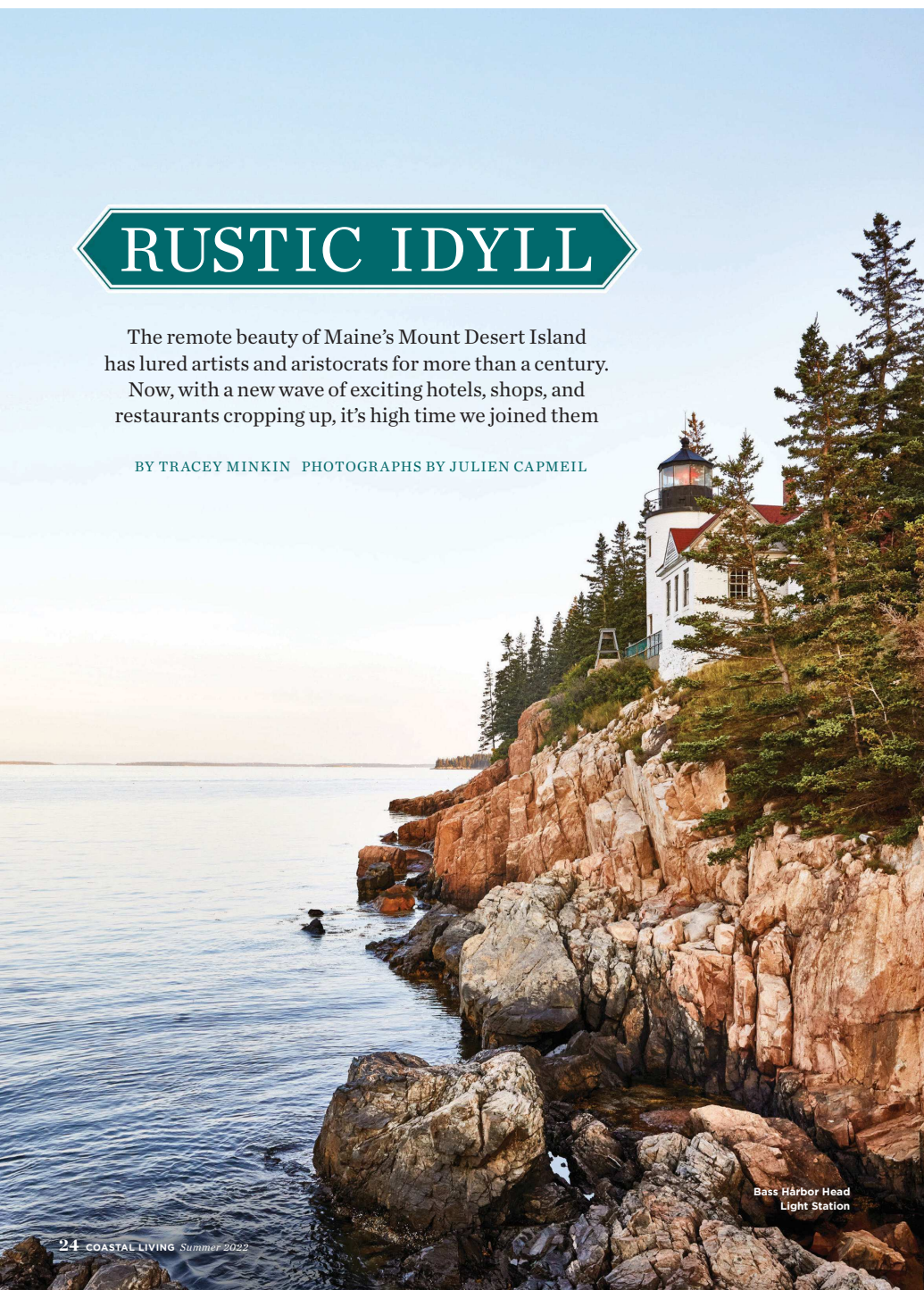


RUSTIC IDYLL

The remote beauty of Maine's Mount Desert Island has lured artists and aristocrats for more than a century. Now, with a new wave of exciting hotels, shops, and restaurants cropping up, it's high time we joined them

BY TRACEY MINKIN PHOTOGRAPHS BY JULIEN CAPMEIL



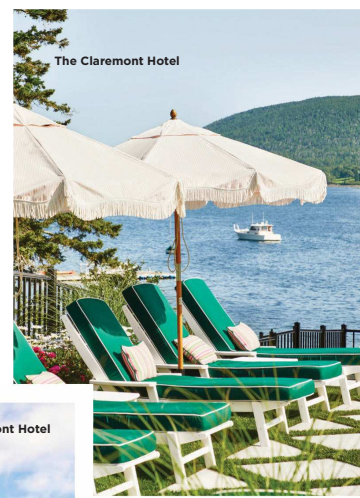
Bass Harbor Head Light Station



Batson River Fish Camp



Iconic treat in Northeast Harbor



The Claremont Hotel



Little Fern at The Claremont



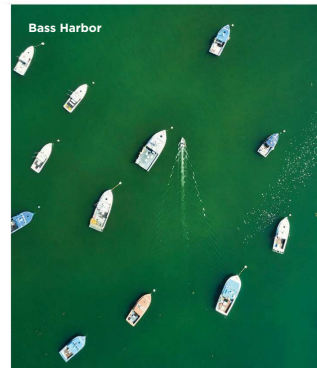
The Claremont Hotel



The Claremont owner Tim Harrington



IslandBound Treats



Bass Harbor



Sabina A. Wood Art & Antiques

RUSTICATORS.

I've learned this word today, and it's a revelation. Like discovering the code to a cipher, finding the right key for an old lock, or murmuring one of those Harry Potter spells that makes everything click magically into place, I feel like I understand the world surrounding me a bit better on this sunny, early summer day in Maine.

The world is that of Mount Desert Island, the famed Down East destination that's home to one of America's most beloved national parks and its gateway town of Bar Harbor, as well as a history of immense wealth tucked among its wilds. I've come to MDI, as folks shorthand it, to explore an exciting burst of historic revitalization, two high-style campgrounds fit for a Rockefeller, and a new generation of designers, chefs, and curators keeping company with the old guard. For several days I have been trying to tease apart the founding principles of the good life, MDI-style. What DNA informs escapism here in the upper-right corner of America?

I swirl the heavy cubes icing my gin and examine the vista from the graceful veranda of The Claremont Hotel, where I've settled into a wicker chair painted a fresh, deep green (and settled in for several plush nights in its newly renovated digs). Below me, a wide lawn sweeps around a rectangle of swimming pool in a grand unfurl to the cobalt blue of fjord-like Somes Sound. At water's edge, a colony of sailboats, Hinckley motor yachts, and The Claremont's *The Lady Claire* tour boat bob near a narrow pier and lobster buoy—festooned boat-house-turned-bar. I hear the clack of a croquet mallet striking a ball, and then a holler of exultation at the shot. Beyond the water rises a painterly backdrop of ridgelines capped at the horizon by the sloping granite mountaintops of Acadia National Park. From the refined to the wild, I think, and back again.

No wonder they called them rusticators.

RUSTICATORS DIDN'T DISCOVER THIS ISLAND, bristled with conifers and backbone with broad swaths of granite, dangling from the coastline into the cold, clear Atlantic like a fat lobster claw. It was long home to the Passamaquoddy

and Penobscot tribes, later colonized by the French and then the English, made American by the Revolution, and then quietly inhabited for a century by farmers and fishermen, lumbermen and shipbuilders. But when Hudson River School artists Thomas Cole and Frederic Church made their ways to the distant, wild idyll in the 1850s and returned with canvases of Mount Desert's sweeps of stone, its romantic coves and wild seas, their exhibitions in Boston, Philadelphia, and New York created a sensation.

Victorians rushed aboard steamers and rail cars to discover Mount Desert for themselves but found the quiet spot not yet ready for prime time, tourism-wise. A smattering of small hotels barely covered the influx, so most vacationers took rooms with local farmers and fishermen. And here's the thing: Those adventuresome early tourists loved that rusticated life. They returned the next summer, and the summer after that, building friendships with their local hosts and seeding a culture of leisurely roughing it. They were termed rusticators—they clambered and picnicked on the rocky bluffs, fished and swam, climbed mountains, and enjoyed a simple, fresh existence that was a balm for their lives back home in the crowded, industrializing cities to the south.

But there were only so many huts and cottages to go around—by 1880, 30 hotels had popped up in the area. (The Claremont opened in 1884.) What artists and adventurers discover is generally gobbled up by the wealthy. And thus, the next wave to break upon Mount Desert Island was the newly minted American aristocracy of the late 19th century: scions like Frederick and George Vanderbilt, industrialists like Joseph Pulitzer and William Proctor, socialites like author Mary Cadwalader Jones and mining heiress Evalyn Walsh McLean. There were Rockefellers, Morgans, DuPonts, Bouviers, and Astors. Like their ilk who similarly decamped to Newport, Rhode Island, these Gilded Age glitterati built massive mansions along Frenchman Bay near the village of Bar Harbor as their summer “cottages.” Amid the splendor, textile heir and preservationist George Dorr began a strident campaign to purchase and



Poolside cabanas at The Claremont Hotel



Mount Desert Island's world of boats



Slack Tide Shop



Daily catch at Thurston's Lobster Pound



Acadia National Park



Harry's Bar at The Claremont Hotel



Good Design Here owner Diana Brochendorff

preserve much of the eastern side's landscape, ultimately leading to the creation of the national park in 1919 that would get its final name, Acadia, in 1929. And a sylvan Acadia it all was—an idealized playground of open lands, carriage roads, and even an official Millionaire Row in Bar Harbor. And then, in 1947, it all burned down.

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT A MONTHLONG wildfire would terrorize this water-surrounded place, but that's what happened. After a dry summer, a cranberry bog fire was reported smoldering underground on October 17, and that's where it stayed for three days. But strong winds arrived on the 21st, whipping the flames into a conflagration that engulfed the eastern half of the island within days. While miraculously sparing Bar Harbor's densely packed town center, flames consumed nearly all of Millionaire's Row and swept through Acadia National Park, forming a fire ball over the sea before ultimately being declared fully extinguished on November 14. Most of the millionaires, by then beleaguered by the creation of the income tax several decades prior and the lingering vestiges of the Great Depression, never rebuilt and never returned. Nature, on the other hand, did—replacing spruce and fir with sun-loving birch and aspen. The result is today's Mount Desert Island. On the western claw untouched by the fire, I find this grand historic hotel, quiet working towns like Southwest Harbor, lobster shacks, preserved coastlines, and bucolic small communities and fishing harbors. On the eastern claw, there's the regrown flora and famed granites of Acadia National Park; there's Bar Harbor, which brims with day-trippers and parkgoers all season long; and two enclaves with rich—and richer still—summer folks maintaining the pleasures of upscale rustication.

It all becomes clear, as so many things do, from the water. "You see Northeast Harbor, there?" Jad Dow asks, as he maneuvers the cruiser *Liberty* along the eastern half of the island's

ocean-facing shoreline. "That's where the millionaires live." From the water, Northeast Harbor shows off like the gorgeous New England coastal enclave it is: glimmers of a village and marina, gracious shingle-style homes, lawns, and banks of rhododendron and hydrangea. "You see Seal Harbor, there?" Dow says. I peer farther east. It's green upon green, the occasional thrust of houses that are large, but as quiet as grandeur can manage—like a stage whisper. "That," he says, "is where the millionaires live."

He should know. Dow works at Hinckley Yachts, Southwest Harbor's redoubtable boatyard founded in 1928 by Henry R. Hinckley to service local lobster boats and the yachts of summer folk. Hinckley built his first boat in 1933, a "fisherman" with a sweeping bow and innate grace that still informs the company's famed line of cruising and sailing craft. A locus of maritime design and local employment, and a keyhole through which islanders peer into the lives of their richest neighbors, the company is a Maine—and MDI—institution. Dow's day job is overseeing local Hinckleys, so he's up close and personal with the million- and billionaires, from Rockefellerers to Martha Stewart to *Law & Order* impresario Dick Wolf. An affably communicative captain, Dow shares that Wolf keeps three boats here—*Illegal*, *Primetime II*, and *Miss Demeanor*. "He's a great guy," he adds. "Everyone up here tends to be."

Home to Hinckley and The Claremont, Southwest Harbor turns out to be a tidy marvel of a town, gently updating while still maintaining its sense of a place where working folks live, shop, and gather. You can feel the breeze of change on Main Street, where new shops like Bramble & Stone lean knowingly

into Maine icons like lobsters and pine trees for sweaters, hats, and other takeaways that are a million style miles from the old-school souvenir shops in Bar Harbor. Nearby, chef/owners Dave Allen and Zach Firestein at Hearth & Harbor have performed their upgrade along culinary lines, putting wood-fired pizzas and local seafood at the center of their full-wall chalkboard menu. A few blocks away, Mary Musson's whole family is hard at work in IslandBound Treats' tiny-house bakeshop—rolling dough, filling, baking, and selling pies to a steady stream of folks pulling up in cars and sauntering by on the sidewalk. "We have to take one with us!" a patron gushes, rushing to get her hands on one of Musson's last Triple Berry Pies of the day with, of course, Maine blueberries. Her husband waits for her with the motor running. She lingers, looking up and down Main Street. "We're on our way home now," she adds, wistfully.

IT'S EASY TO APPRECIATE THE ARDOR OF THE departing visitor who wrings every bit of taste, of divine rustication, from this island. I feel this way after a few days and therefore vow to hit at least one lobster shack a day. And while there is nothing in the other 49 states that touches the experience of fresh-caught Maine lobster served up at a shack or pound anywhere on the coast, there's an exciting new generation taking hold of the time-honored industry up here. Down Route 102 from Southwest Harbor lies the ideal example: Thurston's Lobster Pound in tiny Bernard, where I'm standing in line awaiting the noon opening so I can snag a seat overlooking Thurston's docks, lobster pots stacked high, and the quiet marine hum of boats heading in and out of this protected

little harbor. Christina Lapointe has not only helped keep the restaurant—in her family for five generations since great-grandfather Fred Thurston started the business in 1946—vibrantly humming, but also opened a new boutique, Slack Tide Shop, in a shingled house at the turn in the road to Thurston's. Like Bramble & Stone in Southwest Harbor, the curator here nods to tradition while updating the hunt-and-gather ethos with darling lobster-bedecked children's wear, locally crafted soaps, and artisan sea salts. The pleasures in Bernard, now, are doubled thanks to Lapointe—from a bright-orange-red quarter-pound lobster on Thurston's sunny dock to a spell of peak souvenir shopping. It's the perfect MDI afternoon.

So is a slow stroll amid the even tinier downtown of Northeast Harbor. Here is where savvy rusticators source antiques and vintage finds, respectively, at Sabina A. Wood Art & Antiques and Diana Brochendorff's Good Design Here. At the former, the famed namesake dealer is busy readying to take off for a show in Philadelphia but waves me enthusiastically into the shop where English and American pieces comeingle and speak to the deep decorative history of the island and the timeless taste of its summerfolk. Down the block, Brochendorff minds her shop from a vintage midcentury sofa. Perched amid her 20th-century curation of furniture, decorative pieces, and artwork, she chats with browsers and seems a bit of work of art herself.

In Seal Harbor, interior designer Laura Keeler Pierce represents the fresh new face of design on the island. The owner of Boston-based Keeler & Company, Pierce began work in 2020 on the massive renovation of The Claremont under hotelier Tim Harrington's new ownership; she spied an additional opportunity in some bricks and mortar on the other side of the sound. Now, on her town's Main Street, Pierce's Rusticator shop offers take-home expressions of the maximalist design magic she's conjured at The Claremont. From upholstered pieces to linens, lamps, tableware, and, perhaps especially, backgammon



Bramble & Stone



Laura Keeler Pierce and her husband, Vassar, at Rusticator



Hearth & Harbor



Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden



Under Canvas Acadia



Hiking help at Acadia National Park



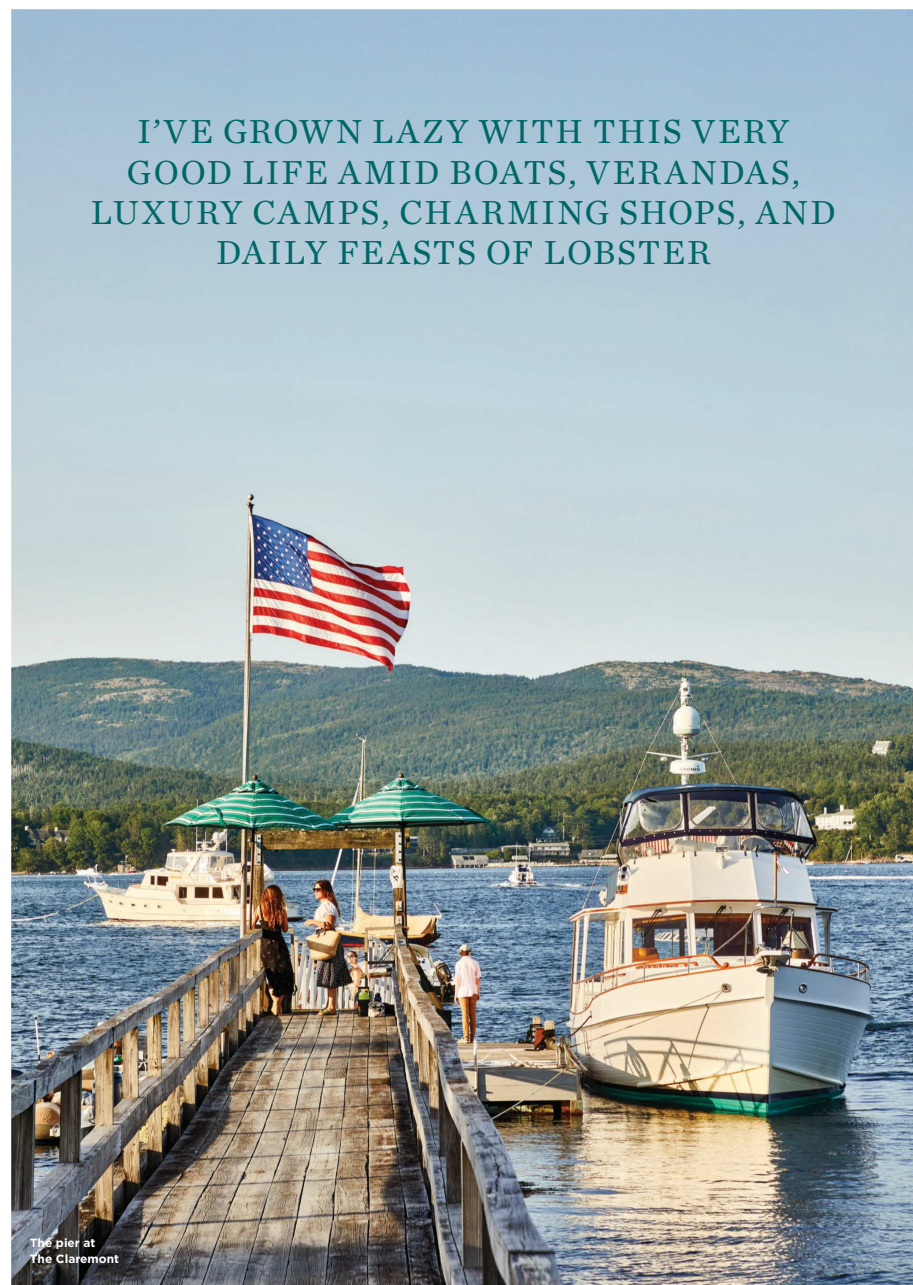
The Lodge bar at Terramor Outdoor Resort



Linens at Rusticator



Sweet fare at every turn



The pier at The Claremont

I'VE GROWN LAZY WITH THIS VERY GOOD LIFE AMID BOATS, VERANDAS, LUXURY CAMPS, CHARMING SHOPS, AND DAILY FEASTS OF LOBSTER



Jordan Pond

boards, browsing Rusticator is like dropping into an idealized Down East summer vacation.

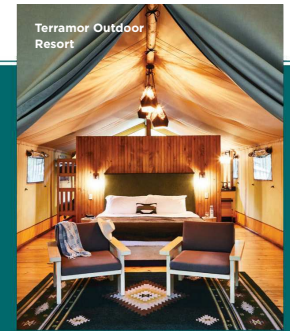
Everywhere, it seems, there are women of taste on this island. Perhaps it's the legacy of those rustivating women and their Gilded Age followers—I think of the famed landscape designer Beatrix Farrand, who conjured the carriage roads and exquisite gardens for Abby Aldrich and John D. Rockefeller's estate in Seal Harbor. The roads are now enfolded into Acadia National Park, while the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden is a preserved treasure that marries English garden design with Chinese, Japanese, and Korean influences and is considered one of the finest gardens in America. From refined to wild, and back again.

IN FITTING TRIBUTE TO RUSTICATION, I SPEND my final days camping in MDI style, meaning my tents are commodious safari-style havens of luxury, my bed is off the ground and clad in fine sheets, my shower is inside my tent and warm, and not far away stands a fellow under another spectacular tent, ready to pour me a glass of excellent wine, offer me freshly grilled scallops over pasta, and tuck some marshmallows and chocolate into my hand for after-dinner s'mores around the fire with my fellow "campers."

This is outdoor adventure now that Under Canvas arrived in town in 2021, nestling a new colony of its luxurious camping tents—some with transparent roof panels to watch the stars, others with nearby teepees for kids to bed down in imaginative delight—at the head of Union River Bay with a Thomas Cole-worthy view over to Acadia. Off the grid intentionally with a collection of battery-charged lanterns to read and shower by, and the rustling quiet of its waterside meadow, it's spellbinding to be so luxuriously rustic.

I keep "camping" on MDI: In Bar Harbor outside of town, Terramor Outdoor Resort has newly revitalized a former KOA campground into a luxuriously nostalgic retreat among the fir trees. Here, European tents spread their wings over fully outfitted suites with heavy Pendleton blankets and modern whippers like electric tea kettles, plugs to charge phones, and Wi-Fi.

But MDI has worked its rustic magic, and the Internet seems like the least worthy companion when Acadia National Park lies so close at hand. I spend my final days poking dreamily around. I slip down to Little Hunters Beach, a tight cove of small, rounded stones that jostle and sing as waves push in and out from shore. I follow narrow Ship Harbor Trail into dense stands of spruce, giving way to gentle tongues of granite along the water. Here, like their Victorian forebears, families picnic and gaze out to sea. I trace the curves of Jordan Pond, watching a merganser glide across its glasslike surface. I even ponder joining the park's pre-dawn hike to the top of Cadillac Mountain—its highest point—to watch the sun rise, as famously offered, before anyone else on the continental United States. But I've grown lazy with this very good life amid boats, verandas, luxury camps, charming shops, and daily feasts of lobster. "I'll come back," I say to a young couple, sharing the campfire with me under the inky black sky, who plan to rise at 4 a.m. to make the expedition. And perhaps that promise to return to the wild, the delicious, the revived world of Mount Desert Island is what makes me feel like I'm turning rusticator. I'll be back next summer.



RUSTICATION NATION

GET HERE

Hancock County-Bar Harbor Airport is the closest airport to Mount Desert Island. **Portland International Jetport** is about a three-hour drive.

STAY HERE

For pure rusticator style, there's no finer place than **The Claremont Hotel**, spectacularly redone, in Southwest Harbor. Choose from vibrant guest rooms in the main building, cottages, and summer homes on the stunning waterfront property overlooking Somes Sound and Cadillac Mountain. New in 2022: a houseboat, which offers the ultimate floating overnight. Rates start at \$310; thclaremont.com. In Bar Harbor, The Claremont owner Tim Harrington will open the delightful **Salt Cottages** in July—a reimagined vintage motor lodge and cottage resort on Hulls Cove. Rates start at \$325; saltcottagesbarharbor.com. For off-the-grid luxuries on the water, **Under Canvas Acadia** is a dreamy enclave of canvas safari-style tents with private baths, a restaurant and bar, and communal campfires. Rates for deluxe tents start at \$459; undercanvas.com. Near Acadia National Park, **Terramor Outdoor Resort** is an upscale redo of a classic KOA campground with commodious new tents and a bright, buzzy Lodge for food, drink, and

borrowing telescopes for stargazing. Rates for two-person tents start at \$329; terramoroutdoorresort.com.

EAT HERE

For lobster, hit the venerable **Thurston's Lobster Pound** in Bernard, **Perry's Lobster Shack** in Surry, and **The Nor'easter Pound & Market** in Northeast Harbor. At The Claremont, catch a waterside drink at **Batson River Fish Camp**, a superb cocktail at **Harry's Bar**, and farm-and-sea-fresh meals at **Little Fern**. In Southwest Harbor, head to **Hearth & Harbor** for seafood-topped wood-fired pizzas; pick up fresh-baked dessert pies at **IslandBound Treats**.

SHOP HERE

For iconic take-homes with style, go to **Bramble & Stone** in Southwest Harbor and **Slack Tide Shop** near Thurston's in Bernard. Browse and buy exquisite pieces at **Sabina A. Wood Art & Antiques** and revel in vintage high design and art at **Good Design Here**, both in Northeast Harbor. Scoop up bright, irresistible decorative pieces, linens, and more at **Rusticator** in Seal Harbor.

RUSTICATE HERE

Explore **Acadia National Park's** 47,000 breathtaking acres and the botanical splendor of the **Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden** in Seal Harbor.