

SUNDAY, MAY 25, 2014

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High: 60° | Low: 49°  
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1:00 AM

## Dine Out Maine: Food rivals view at Kennebunkport's Ocean

Guess who might come to dinner: A former president.

By John Golden

As we pulled into the parking lot of Kennebunkport's Cape Arundel Inn to eat at Ocean, the highly refined French-inspired restaurant within, I pointed out the Bush compound across the road. Waving in the direction of Walker Point, I told my guest, who wasn't from the area, that President George Bush Sr. and his wife Barbara spend their summers there.

"Who, knows?" I ventured in jest, "Maybe they'll be here for dinner tonight."

Inside, our hostess led us to a banquette for two. I asked if we could have a slightly larger table instead, next to one already set for six. "I'm sorry," she whispered confidentially, "That section is reserved for the Bushes, who are dining with us this evening."

Sure enough, about 20 minutes later, the presidential entourage arrived with little fanfare – it's the Bush's neighborhood restaurant, after all. None of the other diners took much notice. Nor did we (well, maybe a glance or two). But neither the Bushes nor the inn's fantastic setting – a coveted spot on the bluffs along winding and wealthy Ocean Avenue with a spectacular eyeful of ocean below – could tear us away from our dinner. From "tastes" through dessert, the delicious food commanded our full attention.

Our dinner started with a thimble-size portion of a brightly flavored yellow gazpacho (\$3); each of the components – yellow tomatoes, cucumber and aromatics – tasted distinct and intense. With the gazpacho, we sipped craft cocktails, picking from a short list that offers wholly original drinks named by their date of provenance.

The Ocean Avenue "2013" was served in a Champagne flute; its combination of herbaceous Campari, sweet bubbly (Champagne), Plymouth gin and the elderberry flowers of St. Germain made for a delightful summer drink.

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Every seat in the house, inside or out, offers a commanding view of the Atlantic. [click image to enlarge](#)

Photos by Gregory Rec/Staff Photographer



Ocean restaurant at the Cape Arundel Inn in Kennebunkport [click image to enlarge](#)

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### OCEAN

\*\*\*\*

**WHERE:** At the Cape Arundel Inn, 208 Ocean Ave., Kennebunkport. (207) 967-4015; [capearundelinn.com/dining](http://capearundelinn.com/dining)

**HOURS:** Beginning Memorial Day, dinner nightly 5:30 to 9:30 p.m.; Sunday

brunch, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

**PRICE RANGE:** Dinner entrees \$28 to \$35

**VEGETARIAN:** Yes (some dishes)

**GLUTEN-FREE:** Yes (some dishes)

**KIDS:** Yes, welcome

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Goodness is

The dining room at Ocean is a gracious two-tiered space with an intimate bar area in front. No matter where you sit, the ocean vistas are spectacular – it’s picture-postcard Maine. Even without the water, the starched white tablecloths and the gray-and-white striped fabric on the dining chairs and banquettes signal the ambiance of a stylish upper-crust seaside resort. The evening we dined, an attractive crowd contributed to the convivial atmosphere.

Service, however, was intolerably slow; the kitchen moved at a crawl. We arrived at 6:15 for dinner and endured at least 20-minute intervals between every course – the meal took nearly three hours. But in the end, the wait was worthwhile. Ocean chef Pierre Gignac grew up in Montreal, where he trained, apprenticed and began his career. He moved to Maine in 1995 to open the much admired 98 Provence in Ogunquit, running the kitchen for nearly two decades until it closed in 2012. His experience shows on the plate.

We started with “tapas”: The chickpea fries (\$5) were crispy and, like the legume itself, earthy. The cod mousse beignets (\$7) were liltily fluffy fritters, with a surprise inside – the velvety mousse. The fritters paired well with a dipping sauce of sweet chili and mint.

After another long interval, the starters again proved worth the wait. Lobster Thermidor (\$16) may be old school classic French, but it was finely done. The split stuffed tail was set in a light sherry and mustard cream sauce. Inside the tail, chunks of lobster meat mingled with chopped artichoke hearts under a gratinéed Parmesan crust, making for a rich, luscious dish with a luxe texture. The Heirloom Beet Duo (\$11) layered cubes of vibrant salt-roasted, chilled pickled beets in a salad of watercress and creamy goat cheese mousse. Spiced walnuts gave the dish a kick.

The restaurant’s wine list includes a good sampling of American and European wines with many offered by the glass. The Simi Chardonnay (\$12) was a bright, slightly citrusy, lightly oaked white that stood up to the richness of monkfish osso buco (\$29). A Chateau du Bousquet 2010 (\$12), a robust Cote du Borg, with its pronounced bouquet of blackberries and black currants, paired ably with roast lamb loin (\$35).

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**RESERVATIONS:** Yes

**BAR:** Full bar

**WHEELCHAIR ACCESS:** Yes

**BOTTOM LINE:** Located in the swanky oceanfront estate area of Kennebunkport and housed in a vintage Shingle-Style “cottage” now functioning as a luxury inn, Ocean serves an elegant French-inspired menu by chef Pierre Gignac. No matter where you sit, the stylish dining room offers stunning views of the ocean. Stand-outs include gazpacho, chickpea fries, Lobster Thermidor and monk fish osso buco. The wine list is excellent, and the craft cocktails intriguing. The inn has several parking lots.

*Ratings follow this scale and take into consideration food, atmosphere, service and value: \* Poor \*\* Fair \*\*\* Good \*\*\*\* Excellent \*\*\*\*\* Extraordinary. The Maine Sunday Telegram visits an establishment twice if the first dining experience was unsatisfactory. The reviewer dines anonymously.*



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The dining room [click image to enlarge](#)

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