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FOOD & TRAVEL

# Serving up splendor Downeast

By **Alexandra Hall** Globe correspondent, Updated August 5, 2019, 8:12 p.m.



Crab benedict during brunch at Arogosta, in Deer Isle, Maine. ALEXANDRA HALL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

DEER ISLE, Maine — When chef Devin Finigan tells you “The sky’s the limit,” you’d be forgiven for thinking she’s talking about the shimmering, expansive ocean view she’s facing while sitting in Aragosta, her just-reopened Deer Isle restaurant. Except that the sky in that never-ending view seems to have no limit whatsoever. And in actual fact, she’s talking about all of the things she can do now that she’s moved her lauded restaurant from nearby Stonington to this resplendent 21-acre property.

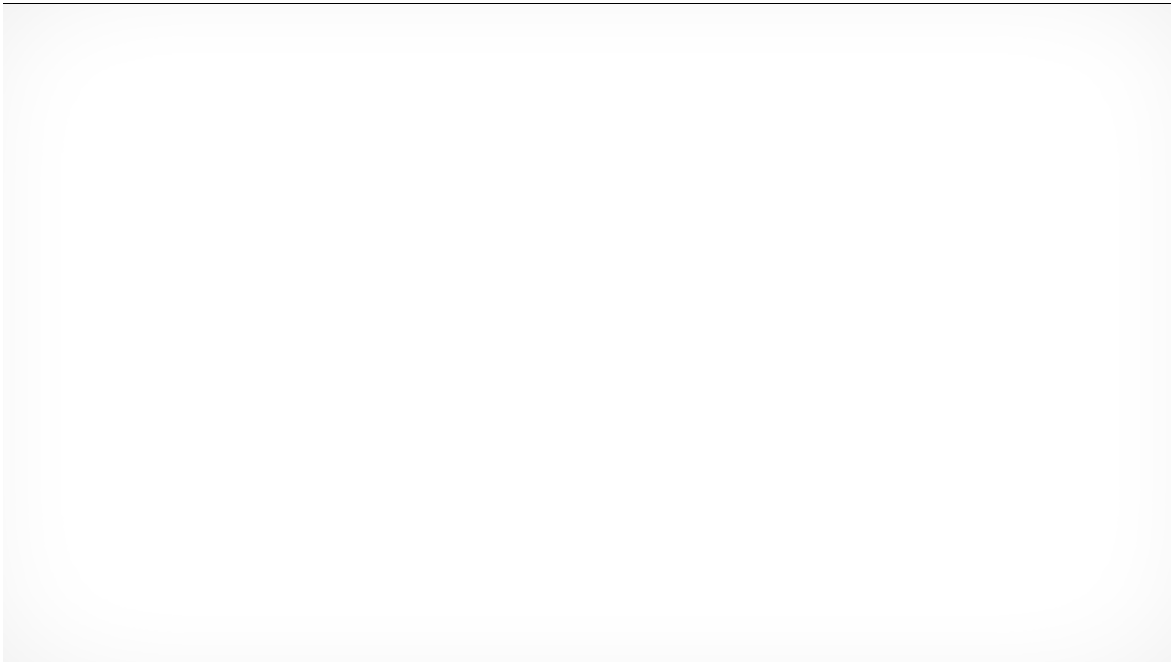
By “things” she can do, she means things like making her own salt from the cove’s beach, catching mackerel with her family to serve in the dining room, grinding her own flour for the focaccia, making her own ricotta, ice creams, and butter — from which she gets buttermilk to add to pancake mix for brunch service. There are plans in place to build a brewery on-site, and to acquire an aquaculture license to farm oysters right out of the bay. Oh, and said bay has four moorings edging Penobscot Bay — known for its world-class sailing waters, setting it up as a Mecca for food lovers who sail. Meanwhile, she and husband Luke Hartmann have overhauled the property’s cottages and suites, filling them with pristine white linens, local artwork, and vases bursting with wildflowers. In other words, Aragosta is suddenly a destination restaurant. “After four years of dreaming about moving the restaurant here, it’s happened,” she says. “This whole area is just incredibly special.”

Turns out, she’s not the only one who thinks so, or who’s been dreaming of opening an ambitious restaurant here. The chef who’s just taken over Aragosta’s old digs in Stonington Harbor is none other than two Michelin star-blessed Ryan McCaskey of Acadia (which spotlights Downeast-inspired fine dining) in Chicago. He spent summers here as a kid starting when he was 9 years old — and, in a head-spinning game of musical restaurant chairs, he later worked at the Goose Cove inn that Aragosta has now replaced. Decades later, after earning fame in Chicago, when he

wanted to open a second restaurant, Deer Isle was still on his mind. “I’ve never forgotten about the area. It’s always been my escape. Somewhere with less stresses for me,” he says. “The way of life here is something you don’t see other places.” And so last month on the southern tip of Deer Isle, he opened Acadia House Provisions, an eatery in the casual spirit of his old summer respites.

And to be sure, his new endeavor comes off a lot like a vacation. Couples in flip flops and sundresses play cornhole on the deck against a backdrop of the breezy salty, working harbor — a juxtaposition of gritty fishing boats and pristine islands. Libations are named after Grateful Dead songs, and dishes like Taunton Bay Oysters with blueberry mignonette sing the praises of local harvests. Around the corner where Main Street meets the wharf, past a library that looks like someone’s private home and several small inns, there’s a sign on the outdoor community message board that reads, “Buy Local — Local Shopping Means Local Jobs.”

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Both of the area's two culinary heavyweights concur. "Supporting community and farm to table isn't a trend Downeast," says McCaskey. "It's truly about shaking hands with and really knowing the farmers down the street. There's something amazing and very European about how we get our food there." Meanwhile, though Finigan would seem to be making nearly everything on her own, she's in fact been working with so many local farmers, fishermen, and tradesmen, craftspeople, woodworkers, and artists to build and run Aragosta (and in a handful of cases, even backing them to get bank loans so they could buy new equipment), that it was eventually one of those farmers, Eliot Coleman of Four Seasons Farm, who introduced her to the investor who helped her purchase the Goose Cove property.





A server on the patio at Acadia House Provisions, in Stonington, Maine. ALEXANDRA HALL FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

As if on cue, Coleman and his wife Barbara Damrosch walk in the restaurant's front door as we're talking, smiling and carrying a bag of carrots. "We're going to wander the beach and go eat carrots," he announces. After welcoming him, Finigan says, "He's one of the leaders behind the entire organic movement. Most of the vegetables on our plates comes from their farm." For example: The intensely flavorful beet salad with pickled shallots, house-made ricotta, and creamy grilled lemon aioli. The list of other area suppliers and artists Finigan rattles off as friends goes on and on: There's Abby Barrows of Long Cove Sea Farm ("They just had a baby and have her out on a raft while they're farming") whose oysters Finigan dabs with lemon-shishito and blazes in her wood-fired oven. There's Bagaduce Farm, which raises ducks exclusively for Aragosta to roast with nectarine-thyme sauce. Those carrots that Coleman brought over? After serving them, she dehydrates their tops and turns them into a dust for

cocktail rims.

It would be easy — and arguably accurate — to surmise that it's that kind of attention to every detail that makes any place feel special. But Finigan insists that the inspiration flows in multiple directions.

“We're so fortunate to live among so many talented artists and farmers,” she says. “And because the peninsula is so tightly intertwined, the more you support local people, the more it comes around. We all just feel lucky to live here. There isn't a spot like this anywhere,” she says. Hartmann chimes in, gesturing to the bay. “This is Goose Cove on Penobscot Bay. And then from there on out, it's just the Atlantic. It's an environment that's so crisp and feels so new and untouched.” Adds Finigan, “I feel like we're finally home.”

**Aragosta**, 300 Goose Cove Road, Deer Isle, Maine, 207-348-6900,  
aragostamaine.com.

**Acadia House Provisions**, 27 Main St., Stonington, Maine, 207-367-2555,  
acadiahouseprovisions.com.

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