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Maine Lobster Rolls Rise from Humble Beginnings to Restaurant Menu Favorite

by Valerie Marier

Maine's favorite sandwich first gained national Appetit declared it "the dish of the year." Foodies took even more note when, three years later, it graced the cover of Gourmet magazine. Overnight, "our" crustacean concoction headlined menus from Massachusetts to Florida.

With all due respect to these Johnny-come-lately bibles of gastronomy, lobster rolls have been a decades.

"We've been serving lobster rolls since 1973,' said Ashley Padget of Alisson's Restaurant in Kennebunkport's Dock Square. "In fact, this year, in one month alone, from June

27 to July 27, we sold 6237 lobster rolls."

Maine's culinary crown Times. jewel. For certain, not many self-respecting Mainers would even THINK of ordering one in Hackensack, New Jersey.

Lobster rolls are the de Pine Tree state staple for rigeur welcoming meal lobster roll was created by for visiting relatives and Harry Perry at his Milford, out-of-state guests. One area businessman, who frequently travels overseas, declares he "won't leave ever, that the Connecticut Logan Airport for a long flight without having a lobster roll first."

Truthfully, no one knows the exact moment Whether eaten at the a Downeast lobsterman's éclat in 2006 when Bon beach or on the back deck, wife slathered a piece of at a food shack near the white bread with mayo, ocean or on a river dock at slapped on leftover tail high tide, even at an up- meat, and labeled it lunch. scale Ogunquit restaurant Even the words "lobster with white linen table- roll" didn't appear in print cloths, lobster rolls are until 1937 in The New York

Most Mainers credit Bayley's Lobster Pound at Pine Point in Scarborough as the provenance for this famous sandwich. Those "from away" insist the Connecticut restaurant in the 1920s.

Keep in mind, howversion featured lobster meat sautéed in hot butter, which is not the protocol for traditional Maine lobster rolls.

ingredients make the tastiest lobster roll. There's

hardly a cook from Kittery to Skowhegan who hasn't sampled a neighbor's "se-Tongues have also cret" recipe at one point, wagged forever as to what and wondered, "What's she got in there?"

The best recipes always

start with fresh lobster meat, "sea to table," as it were.

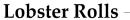
split hot dog roll with crustless sides on the lobster rolls served at her food truck. Barnacle cally sells 300 lobster rolls sauce. We are tradition-

Stephanie Nadeau, owner of Ocean Roll, swears by a top-

Manager Stu says, "We use three lobster rants don't chopped celery, and a dab of mayo and necticut roll."

At the Cape Pier Chowder House in Cape Porpoise, Wanda Daggett's parts of the long-standing recipe showcases 3.5 ounces of lobster the tail, the meat per roll. She adds one claws and other ingredient. "I go light the knuck- on the Hellman's, and only les. A lot of Hellman's real mayonnaise other restau- - by eye. Nothing else."

Some cooks enhance the do that. Then 3.5 to 5-ounces of lobster we add a little meat that go into a roll with a dash of lemon juice. Oth-



horse radish — continued on page 31



Cape Pier Chowder House offers views of Cape Porpoise harbor, the ideal setting for enjoying a lobster roll stuffed with fresh Maine lobster.

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ers add a dollop of smoked bacon mayonnaise, a sprinkling of chopped chives, even a hefty tablespoon of Stonewall Kitchen's ed chef and author Lemon Herb Aioli. Then there are those who top the roll with smoked paprika Soup Swap. or celery salt.

"And you never shred says," The hot the lobster, like they do with tuna." says Wanda Daggett. "It's gotta be in nice chunks."

Hands down, the preferred lobster roll bun is interior." a New England-style topsplit hot dog roll with crust- matter. At Alisless sides. "It would be blasphemous if we used a different roll," says Stephanie Roll, the red food truck on Route 1 just north of Han- Both are popular with our there are many favored side dish, the manager

naford Supermarket in Kennebunk.

As for prepping the roll, every chef consulted for this article agreed with Kathy Gunst, notof 14 popular cookbooks, including

Gunst dog roll MUST be toasted in butter to give it a good golden brown crusty exterior and a soft

Size doesn't sons, Padget says, "We serve a sam-

Nadeau, owner of Ocean lobster rolls and also an gluten free." extra-large eight-inch roll.



Ashley Padget of Alisson's, in Dock Square, Kennebunkport, says they sold over 6000 lobster rolls in a recent month.

pler platter of three small customers. We also offer other favored choices.

tato chips.

suggests that and dill pickles are lobster roll."

Pressed as to his recom-And all sides agree that mendation for a favorite side dishes to en- of Barnacle Billy's said, hance the lobster "Honestly? A rum punch. roll. Without a But actually, chowder is the doubt, the most best. They just go togethpopular side? Po- er." Adds Wanda Daggett, "Oh my God, yes, clam Kathy Gunst chowder."

"Our customers seem to "making the chips prefer chips and slaw, and from scratch is most of them want to eat preferable." Oth- them at our picnic tables," ers insist they'll Ocean Roll's Nadeau said. only eat Cape Cod But perhaps the most tell-Potato Chips or ing answer came from a "some killer Tor- 15-year-old tourist sitting res chips" with at one of Nadeau's tables. their rolls. Cole When asked his favorite slaw, French fries side dish, he said, "Another



Barnacle Billy's in Perkins Cove typically sells 300 lobster rolls on a busy July Saturday. They haven't changed their recipe in 56 years.