

National Spotlight Shines on Kennebunkport Ice Cream Shop

by Valerie Marier

When Lauren Guptill opened Rococo Artisan Ice Cream in Kennebunkport in 2012, she never dreamed that, two summers later, TripAdvisor would rank her shop sixth in the nation for quality, quantity and outstanding consumer reviews.

Just how did this engaging, enthusiastic and entrepreneurial 30-ish Berwick native, who grew up working the concession stand at her family-owned Hackmatack Playhouse, garner this coveted recognition from the world's largest travel site?

"It all started when I was in Argentina," Guptill says, sounding intriguingly like the theme of a Paul Theroux novel.

During a post-college visit to Argentina several years ago, she sampled and got hooked on the country's signature gelato-style ice cream.

"Argentine ice cream emerged out of the wave of Italian migration there in the late 1800s," Guptill says.

"Italian gelato, dense and packed with flavor, tangoed with Argentina's vibrant dairy culture, and the result is an ice cream that's creamy and fresh."

Guptill describes the process with a slight reverence, "It's frozen slowly and whipped with less air, then served slightly warmer to enhance the flavors. Rococo Artisan Ice Cream uses this same style in our small batch production."

Guptill adds that Ro-



Rococo owner Lauren Guptill scoops some unique artisan ice cream flavors for eager customers, including her father Michael, far right. *Courtesy photos*

coco uses only locally sourced ingredients, including natural creams and milk from Hatchland Farms in New Hampshire.

Customers streaming up from Dock Square into Rococo immediately recognize they're about to taste something new and different just by looking at the flavor board.

Consider these choices: Curry Carrot, Molasses Gingersnap, Malbec & Berries Sorbet, Moxie Soda, Lemon Thyme Shortbread and Hot! Hot Chocolate with cinnamon and cayenne, plus dozens more.

This is truly not your father's ice cream parlor.

During its first season, Rococo's featured ice creams included 70 percent "normal" flavors, such as vanilla, chocolate and strawberry.

Today, in a complete reversal, the shop serves 70 percent exotic flavors versus 30 percent regular.

"We are known as a destination for something different," Guptill says.

"We are also passionate about our customers finding a flavor they like, so we do lots of sampling."

There's even a suggestion box for customers who want to propose unique fla-

vors. "If we make it, the first pint is yours!," Guptill says.

In choosing the name of her company, Guptill wanted a descriptive word that confirmed she was not plain old vanilla.

She says, "The rococo art movement in 18th-century France was whimsical and ornate, and characterized

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by being more playful with witty artistic themes.

It was about not following the norm. It was about shaking things up." Mission accomplished.

During the winter months, Guptill boards up her shop and heads to the airport to feed her other passion: travel.

"I like sampling ice cream in foreign countries and in our major cities," she says.

She finds that small shops in cities like San Francisco and New York can be more edgy and "that inspires me."

Creative energy runs in Guptill's veins and, considering her family background, Rococo's success is no shocker.

In 1972, her grandfather, S. Carleton Guptill, founded the Berwick-based Hackmatack Playhouse where her father Michael then served as producer and director at this popular summer stock theater for 45 seasons.

Guptill's mother is a renowned chocolatier whose Azul line of unique chocolates was originally developed as a concession stand treat for guests of the Hackmatack Playhouse.

Today, her tasty chocolate truffles and turtles

sell in specialty shops and farmers' markets throughout southern Maine, including Kennebunkport's Rococo.

"When you grow up in a family business, you learn customer service early, like how to wait on and talk to people, and how to think creatively," Guptill says. It's a lesson she learned well.

To sample Rococo Maple Fig Jalapeño or Banoffee Pie or Chai Cardamom and other exotic flavors, stop into 6 Spring Street in Kennebunkport; open through October 31, 11:30 AM to 10:30 PM (or until you're finished sampling and selecting). FMI call 207-251-6866.



Eager patrons sneak a peek at the new flavors being offered before Rococo opens for the day.



Lauren Guptill, owner of Rococo, finds inspiration for her unique flavors while travelling. photo by Judith Hansen