

Kennebunkport Inn has new decor, new chef

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE AUGUST 24, 2012



The One Dock restaurant and lounge at the Kennebunkport Inn in Maine recently underwent a stylish new redesign. Musical duos entertain at One Dock on weekends, giving the lounge a sophisticated supper club feeling.

Photograph by: Irvin Serrano, Kennebunkport Inn

The landmark Kennebunkport Inn in Maine is celebrating 2012 with a dramatic renovation and a talented new chef, making it the newest “old” establishment in town.

The inn recently completed a makeover of its common rooms that has preserved the best of its handsome 1899 Federal-style architectural features and added stunning new decor. Once the epitome of Victorian formality, the Kennebunkport Inn’s One Dock dining room and lounge now are fashionable scenes, with the look and spirit of a chic boutique hotel.

The sophisticated new interiors were conceived by Tim Harrington, the inn’s co-owner, working with designer Louise Hurlbutt of Kennebunkport. Together they created stunning, soigné riffs on a theme of smart ocean blue and white, with studded white leather chairs and a riot of bold, modern stripes and checks throughout. It’s as fresh and crisp as if an ocean breeze had swept away all the old lace and doilies.

Then the designers added a magical mélange of traditional and avant-garde art. One corridor is a mini-museum of weighty 19th-century landscapes in oil with elaborate gilded frames. Turn a corner to a dazzling series of metallic etchings. Sidle up to the bar and the backdrop is a unique, wall-sized photographic mural of lobster boats in the Kennebunkport harbour, glowing with LED lighting.

The new common rooms have a relaxed, anything-goes flow, with guests invited to mingle, move around and enjoy various vantage points. You can breakfast on croissants and coffee on the back sundeck overlooking the Kennebunk River. And on the front patio, which overlooks the passing parade of Main Street, Happy Hour starts at 4 p.m. with such small plates as Maine oysters, crab cakes, flatbread and ribs and big cocktails like the peppery Italian martini and the zingy ginger mint mojito. Musical duos entertain at One Dock on weekends, giving the lounge a sophisticated supper club feeling.

Chef Phil Reid's summer menu features light, lively variations on lobster, cod, duck and steaks. His autumn menu will add lamb ribs, lobster mac'n'cheese, grilled tuna and lobster fettuccine. Gordon Ramsay, television food guru and Michelin-starred celebrity, breezed through One Dock this year and endorsed Reid's seafood pasta as one of his favourite Maine dishes. The desserts also are divine. My favourites are the blueberry cobbler — Maine is famous for blueberries — and the sundae with bourbon-spiked ice cream and cashew brittle.

The inn's 49 guest rooms and suites sprawl over three buildings with a wide range of prices and styles: the Main Mansion and the Riverhouse are connected by a breezeway and the rooms in both sections have a traditional New England style with cheerful, chintz bedspreads, floral carpets and lots of English antiques. The Wharveside accommodations, a best buy, are one block from the main inn atop some shops, with a view of the harbour and simpler, more dressed-down decor suitable for families.

The Kennebunkport Inn has such a strategic location that you can vacation without a car once you arrive. At the centre of town, the buildings straddle Dock Square, the hub of shopping and nightlife in "downtown" Kennebunkport. And the inn lends bicycles to its guests who want to tour around, perhaps heading along picturesque Ocean Avenue, or to the antique shops that line Routes 9 and 1. The inn's Eat-Sleep-Play package invites you to do the town, and includes a lobster boat cruise or a ride on the Kennebunkport's In-Town sightseeing trolley, which tootles by such local high points as historic homes and a Franciscan monastery.

The Kennebunkport Inn is part of the Kennebunkport Resort Collection run by Harrington and his business partner, Debra Lennon. The collection organizes reservations and other linked services at its seven distinctive hotels and three outstanding restaurants. For example, guests at the Kennebunkport Inn are invited to use the heated swimming pool at a nearby KRC hotel, the Old Fort Inn. And the group Dinner Trolley connects affiliated restaurants: Earth at Hidden Pond, where organic gastronomy flourishes in a spectacular, rustic wooded setting, and the Tides Beach Club, a seaside-chic bistro and trendy cocktail bar.

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IF YOU GO

Kennebunkport, Maine, is a 525-kilometre drive from Montreal via U.S. Highways 89 and 93 and Route 101 east to U.S. 95 north.

Kennebunkport Inn: 800-248-2621, 207-967-2621, www.kennebunkportinn.com. Open year-round.

Price: including breakfast, bicycles, beach parking passes, towels and chairs; dinner trolley (nightly through Labour Day, then four nights a week through Oct.); outdoor swimming at Old Fort Inn (seasonal); four room types, rates depend on availability, approximately: US\$169-\$389; two- and three-bedroom suites, \$439. After approx. Oct. 21, it's \$109-\$229 for rooms and \$279 for suites.

Packages: Eat-Sleep-Play includes dinner and a lobster boat cruise or the In-Town trolley (until Oct. 8). Pedal & Paddle features cycling and kayaking along the Kennebunk River. The Decompress package has spa services. The Food Lovers Getaway organizes a schooner cruise and three gourmet dinners (at One Dock, Earth at Hidden Pond and the Tides Beach Club). The Allure Package is a romantic indulgence with Champagne.

One Dock restaurant: 207-967-2621, www.onedock.com; dinner nightly with entertainment until mid-September and then Wed.-Sat.

Kennebunkport Resort Collection: www.destinationkennebunkport.com, links services of Hidden Pond, the Tides Beach Club, Old Fort Inn, Cottages at Cabot Cove, Village Cove Inn and the new boutique hotel, the Grand.

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