

Checking In: Kennebunkport resorts capture Maine Seaside town is a day's drive away

BY ROCHELLE LASH, SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE JULY 12, 2013



The Boathouse Waterfront Hotel and David's KPT bistro are at the centre of Kennebunkport.

Photograph by: Kennebunkport Resort Collection

The irrepressible Kennebunkport Resort Collection has added two new thoroughbreds to its stable of boutique hotels in this lively Maine tourist town.

The thoroughly renovated Cape Arundel Inn and the all-new Boathouse Waterfront Hotel each capture a quintessentially different meme of coastal Maine. At both, guests are greeted on arrival with flutes of sparkling wine, so that creates a festive air, with the promise of lots more food and drink to come.

The highly respected Cape Arundel Inn started out as a private mansion in the 1890s and has operated as an inn in an aristocratic residential neighbourhood for several years. It is prized for its romantic hilltop perch and panoramic views of the Atlantic Ocean. Cape Arundel Inn is, and always has been, a genteel New England cottage with relatively formal oceanfront dining by candlelight. At dinner, women wear pretty summer frocks and some men even sport blazers.

Now, it is in new hands and two of them hail from Montreal. Pierre Gignac, the executive chef at Cape Arundel's Ocean restaurant, graduated from l'Institut de tourisme et d'hôtellerie du Québec and worked at Prego in the Plateau before opening 98 Provence in Ogunquit, Maine.

At Ocean, Gignac's mostly classic, French-American menu features starters of lobster thermidor, quail, foie gras, scallops and seafood bisque and main courses such as pasta with lobster, rack of lamb and braised monkfish. "Any kind of fish" is his favourite cuisine, he says, and he has so many visitors from Quebec that he speaks French almost every day.

For the morning after, breakfast chef Bill Landenberger prepares decadent delights like French toast layered with baked eggs and Maine blueberries or salmon-and-crab cakes with lemon cream.

Cape Arundel Inn is an attractive mix of tradition and freshness. You can have coffee on the veranda and gaze at the ocean's waves crashing against the rocks. Or you can do happy hour with tapas such as Maine mussels or cod mousse beignets, plus a perky Porch Prelude cocktail — vodka with ginger, orange and mint. The Cape Arundel Inn is a boutique hotel, so if guests want more than food, drink and lounging, they can head for the beach or use the heated swimming pool at a nearby affiliated KRC property.

The interiors have been made over with chic fabrics and plush rugs in a soothing, elegant palette of greys and whites, and soft accents of aqua. It's a warm and timeless look, and all about letting the mesmerizing sea remain the star attraction. There are 14 rooms in three spaces. The accommodations in Seacrest, the main building, have the most historic charm — some with original stained-glass windows, four-poster beds and fireplaces — plus the latest must-haves: flat-screen televisions, renovated bathrooms and pod coffee machines.

Back in the heart of busy, buzzy Kennebunkport, the Boathouse Waterfront Hotel is totally different. It is a brand-new structure facing the harbour near Dock Square, the town's touristy hub of shops and restaurants.

The Boathouse is lively and engaging, with a close-up setting on Kennebunkport's nautical scene. It overlooks working docks lined with yachts, a whale-watching cruise ship, lobster boats and sailboats. With boats bobbing, masts swaying and ropes gently brushing against the wooden piers, the view is quite magical.

About half of the Boathouse's 12 guest rooms have small "cocktail" balconies with this harbour scene. The accommodations are bright and contemporary, with minimalist furniture and high-quality white sheeting and duvets. All rooms have iPod docking stations and a bonus — free Apple TV and Netflix.

But the Boathouse is not the sort of place to stay in your room.

Downstairs, David's KPT, a bistro big enough for 200 revellers, sprawls through the hotel's deck and most of the ground floor. It has been open less than two months, but families and friends already are flocking here for lobster rolls, pizza, grilled steaks and fish skewers. At happy hour — a full three

hours, thank you! — the place is packed with locals and vacationers downing \$4 glasses of Chardonnay and nibbling on oysters, fried calamari, steak tartar and duck sliders. And for true gourmets, chef David Turin takes it up a notch at Opus Ten, a restaurant-within-a-restaurant that features tasting menus and wine pairings.

IF YOU GO

Kennebunkport is a 5½-hour drive from Montreal via U.S. Highways 89 and 93 and Route 101 east to U.S. 95 north.

Cape Arundel Inn & Ocean: 877-455-1501, 207-967-2125, capearundelinn.com; 208 Ocean Ave., Kennebunkport, Maine. Open to guests over 12. Price: approx. \$309-\$629 U.S. per night for two, incl. breakfast, newspaper, bicycles, beach parking pass and use of the heated swimming pool at Old Fort Inn & Resort. Packages available with dinner, and golf cart tour of Kennebunkport with picnic lunch. Ocean serves dinner nightly. Closed Jan.-mid-Feb.

The Boathouse Waterfront Hotel: 877-266-1304, 207-967-8223, boathouseme.com; 21 Ocean Ave.; Town view, \$279-\$289 per night or harbour view, \$399- \$649, all incl. continental breakfast and same amenities as Arundel. Packages done with kayaking, town trolley, schooner cruise, boat rentals and docking slips.

David's KPT Restaurant: 207-967-8225, boathouseme.com/davids; lunch, happy hour and dinner, daily. David's Opus Ten: dinner Tues.-Sat., nine courses, \$75 p.p., plus wine pairings.

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The writer was a guest of the two hotels. The hotels did not review or approve the story.

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