

Welcome to Portland

Now let's eat!

BY HILARY NANGLE

Before *Bon Appetit* named Portland “America’s Foodiest Small Town” last year, culinary tourists had already discovered the city’s seemingly insatiable appetite for all things food-related.

When it comes to creative cuisine, “the audience here is always receptive, if not wildly enthusiastic,” according to Sam Hayward, chef/partner of Fore Street, a foodie destination known for its organic ingredients and local seafood and game cooked over an applewood fire.

Hayward should know. Portland emerged on the national table in 2004, when he won the James Beard Foundation’s Best Chef: Northeast award. He later passed the spatula to Hugo’s chef/co-owner Rob Evans, who won the title last year. Like Hayward, Evans also has a philosophy of using local ingredients, and Hugo’s menu might include, say, spice-roasted Maine monkfish.

This year’s Portland Beard nominees include Krista Kern Desjarlais, chef/owner of Bresca (regionally inspired French and Italian dishes), for Best Chef: Northeast; Hayward for Outstanding Chef; and his Fore Street for Outstanding Restaurant.



Atlantic Cod and Lobster Chowder at Sea Glass restaurant at the Inn by the Sea

Why Portland? Its dining scene is rooted in the late 20th century, when alternative-minded folks discovered this *other* city by the bay. “The market, the sources, the farmers, and a growing health-consciousness on the part of the dining public all came together at about the same time,” Hayward says. Their collective thinking was, and still is, fresh and local. “The farm-to-table movement gained traction in a lot of places, but I can’t think of any place where it happened with such intensity and concentration as Portland,” he says.

“It starts with the product,” Evans agrees. “The seafood here is obviously some of the best in the world.” Also, many chefs have one-on-one relationships with farmers, who grow specific heirloom crops or raise rare livestock for their kitchens alone. Others, such as Lee

Skawinski, take it even further. His partners actually own a farm that grows much of the produce for his restaurant Cinque Terre.

Local products, and local talent, too: Southern Maine Community College, with its main campus in South Portland, offers the state’s largest culinary arts program. Students learn their trade in some of Portland’s best restaurants (555 and Vignola), and graduates run the kitchens at hot spots like Ribollita.

Visitors should also try Local 188 for tapas, Sea Glass for fresh seafood, and Caiola’s for upscale comfort food. New and notable restaurants include the Latin-inspired Sonny’s, El Rayo Taqueria, and Nosh Kitchen Bar, a twist on a New York-style deli. Despite the seemingly crowded market, restaurants keep opening, and Portlanders always seem hungry for more.

COURTESY OF INN BY THE SEA

STONEWALL KITCHEN

EST 1991



Portland, York, Camden – ME • North Conway, Portsmouth, Rochester – NH
Avon, South Windsor – CT • National Harbor – MD

Shop anytime: STONEWALLKITCHEN.COM • 800.207.JAMS (5267)