The Concierse TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

THE WHITE BARN GETS TASTIER

BY DIANE BAIR AND PAMELA WRIGHT GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

s the saying goes: Everyone loves progress; no one likes change. And, no one certainly likes it when you mess with a good thing. So, when Matthew Padilla took over as executive chef at the venerable White Barn Inn Restaurant, a rare AAA Five Diamond and Forbes Five Star dining experience in Kennebunk, Maine, well, there were mutterings.

"It was a bit intimidating," Padilla admits. "I was nervous about living up to the reputation of the restaurant and past chefs, but I was also excited about the opportunity to put my own stamp on things." Padilla is a Relais & Châteaux veteran. He was ex-

ecutive chef at Dos Brisas in Washington, Texas, and oversaw the fine dining restaurant at The Little Nell in Aspen, Colo., also a Relais & Chateau property. He's worked at Michael Mina's flagship Michelinstarred restaurant, and spent several months training at the award-winning Noma in Copenhagen.

"This is my first time on the East Coast," he said.

"I was really drawn by the history and the role that food has played in the region. The history of the property was also a

driving force for me."

The beloved and longstanding White Barn Inn Restaurant will celebrate its 46th anniversary this year. When it opened in 1973, it was a pioneer on the culinary stage, offering ultrasophisticated dining in a refurbished Maine 1860's barn. The juxtaposition of elegant, stylized dining in a rustic setting was revolutionary, way before "rustic chic" became common.

The setting is much the same: high ceilings and timber

beams, glossy pine floors, and rafters filled with farm implements. Tall windows allow views to lighted paths and gardens. Under the rafters sit white linen-topped, candlelit tables, and original art.

But the menu has changed subtly and slowly under the helm of Padilla, who must play a delicate balancing act between the old and the new, attracting vounger, more adventurous diners while still satisfying the generational clientele and staying true to the property's culinary pedigree. For example, the former lobster fettucine in a cognac sauce has been replaced with a lighter, lobster and morel mushroom linguine with carrots and Calabrian chili, topped with crunchy chicken skin cracklings, and served as a small bowl appetizer. The beef tartare is brilliant: a roasted trough of warm, buttery bone marrow serves as the platter for strips of raw tenderloin, lightly drizzled with a parsley aioli, sprinkled with crispy shallots and served with brioche. It hits all the right warm-cold, soft-crunchy, sweet-savory notes. A duo of foie gras comes with sauterne gel, apple cider gastrique, and caramelized apples. The creamy, ul-



ABOVE Beef tartare features a roasted trough of warm, buttery bone marrow serving as the platter for strips of raw tenderloin, lightly drizzled with a parsley aioli, sprinkled with crispy shallots, and served with brioche. **BELOW** Maine lobster comes with a champagne lobster glace, cauliflower, gnocchi, fennel, and morel mushrooms.

tra-fresh beet soup is garnished with trout roe, adding depth and pop. Main dishes have been updated, too. Yes, there's more lobster; locally caught, shelled, and deconstructed, served with champagne lobster glace, cauliflower, gnocchi, fennel, and morel mushrooms. The seared scallops come with kumquats, crispy sunchokes, sweet potato, and sautéed spinach. The prime beef ribeye is served with black trumpet mushrooms and black garlic.

Padilla's forward-thinking approach includes a strong local, farm-to-table ethos, and a commitment to sustainability. "As a chef, I want to have less impact on the environment by working with local purveyors and with sustainable ingredients," he says. "I think that's a powerful thing to do."

And, if anyone's missing the old standby dishes? "Periodically, and on special occasions, we'll bring back the classics on the menu," he says. White Barn Inn Restaurant at White Barn Inn, Auberge Resorts Collection; summer hours: Monday-Thursday, 6-9 p.m., Friday-Sunday, 5:30-9 p.m., 207-967-2321, www.aubergeresorts.com/whitebarninn/

Diane Bair and Pamela Wright can be reached at bairwright@gmail.com.



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Executive chef

Padilla took

of the White

over the helm

Restaurant in

Maine, bringing

combinations.

Kennebunk.

new flavor

Matthew

Barn Inn

CALLING ALL BIRD LOVERS

Catch the first sighting of warblers, vireos, orioles, flycatchers, and other seasonal visitors at two bird-themed festivals taking place in coastal Maine. In Deer Island and Stonington, the annual Wings, Waves & Woods Festival (May 17-19) includes bird walks and lectures, and boat trips to Seal Island with possible sightings of Atlantic puffins, razorbills, common murres, black guillemots, and great cormorants. \$35 registration includes entrance to all activities except where fees are noted. On Mount Desert Island, the Acadia Birding Festival (May 30-June 2) also features walks and lectures, as well as visits to an active breeding site for Peregrine Falcons in Acadia National Park, and offshore adventures including guided kayak and canoe tours, and - from the deck of a whale-watch catamaran — a tour of puffins and more on Petit Manan Island, and whales and pelagic birds 25 to 30 miles offshore. Trips \$10-\$90. www.acadiabird-

CONTEMPORARY PLAYS DEBUT AT HISTORIC SITE

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Inspired by the landscape and history of Mount Auburn Cemetery, Patrick Gabridge (the cemetery's first Playwright Artist-in-Residence) has written a series of site-specific plays that will be fully staged with professional actors, and premier on the cemetery's grounds. Presented in two sets of five unique plays each, "The Nature Plays" (June 1-9) highlight the National Historic Landmark's rich natural environ-

ment; and "The America Plays" (Sept.



14-22) bring to life a few of the historic personalities buried there, whose visions still resonate in American culture today. Audiences will experience the performances at various locations, within a one-mile walking distance on paved and unpaved surfaces. Each series offers eight performances over the course of two weekends. Saturdays and Sundays at 1 and 5 p.m. Rain or shine. \$35. Registration required. mountauburn.org/the-nature-plays

THERE

KIDS LEARNING ADVENTURES IN ECUADOR CLOUD FOREST

Mashpi Lodge, set within a 3,200-acre reserve in the tropical cloud forest in Ecuador, has launched a new program for kids ages 6 years and older. The Forest Steward Program introduces young visitors to the magic of the tropical forest while raising awareness of how to protect the fragile biodiversity of forests around the world. Led by Mashpi's team

of native rangers, activities include hands-on techniques for walking safely through the forest; using tree leaves as whistles for bird calls; ways to camouflage hats with paint to avoid startling forest creatures; and the use of field guides to identify insects, leaf patterns, and animal species likely to be spotted on outings. Excursions feature day hikes to waterfalls and placid swimming holes; night walks to spot nocturnal animals; visit to the Life Centre Butterfly Farm; Sky Bike ride above the lush dense canopy; and more. Rates from \$1,098 per room per



night, includes shared transfer from Quito, all meals, all guided activities within the reserve, Wi-Fi, soft drinks, and use of rubber boots and rain ponchos. 844-738-5895, www.mashpilodge.com/family-travel/

CHIC HOTEL BRAND DEBUTS IN DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Experience the wildly varied landscapes of the Dominican Republic including mountains, beaches, rain forests, and marinas — at one of five boutique properties debuting on the island. The new luxury brand, Mint Hotels & Residencies, offers guests the opportunity to visit multiple properties and locales with The Mint Experience, a seamless connection to diverse destinations by private helicopter, seaplane, or private car. Or stay in one place and enjoy the best that each has to offer, including golfing, poolside lolling, relaxing spa treatments, fine dining, hiking and mountain biking, eco-touring, ziplines, and more. Upon landing at

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