

Roll with it

A Maine seafood shack classic finds a home

on a fine dining menu **by Amber Gibson**

The almost 60-year-old Red's Eats in Wicasset, Me., is open only from April to October, but their famous lobster rolls (recipe, plateonline.com) stay on Ryan McCaskey's mind year-round. The executive chef/owner of Chicago's Acadia was inspired by Red's Eats, and the countless other lobster shacks that dot the Maine coast, to come up with his own version of a lobster roll. An abundance of luscious fresh lobster compelled him to get even more creative on his tasting menu.

McCaskey remembers spending summers in Maine as a child, when lobster only cost a couple dollars a pound and he could get it anywhere from Home Depot to gas stations. He estimates his Stonington lobster roll at Acadia is 99 percent like the lobster rolls in Maine, with the addition of chives as an element of freshness. "I have a purist mentality," McCaskey says. "I wanted to not take a fine-dining approach." Instead, he focuses on getting the freshest lobster; he buys his lobster from his childhood best friend's next door neighbor in Stonington, Me.

Debbie Gagnon, owner of Red's, seconds the freshness principle. "We just give people only the freshest food and plenty of it," she says. "When we have shedders [soft-shell lobster] in, you'll find me putting three tail sections on the roll instead of two."

"Outside of Maine, I would bet that ours is the next freshest," McCaskey says. "The lobster arrives at [the sup-

pliers'] house at 4 p.m. in 38 degree F tanks, which lulls them to sleep. They're at the restaurant at 10 a.m. the next day and prepping them is the first thing we do each morning. As soon as you pick them up, their claws fly back. They haven't even been out of the water for 24 hours."

Just like at Red's, McCaskey serves his lobster roll on a split-top hot dog bun brushed with butter and toasted. His buns are imported from a gas station up the street from his childhood home. "The outside gets crispy and toasted while the inside steams and stays soft," he says.

With an abundance of fresh prime lobster in house, McCaskey's bound to use the crustacean in more innovative applications, like his compressed lobster tails with uni miso gelato. This luxe appetizer is garnished with raw matsutake mushrooms, pickled corn and truffle oil. "I love the contrasting elements," McCaskey says. "There are so many delicate flavors in just three bites."

Stonington lobster, corn, miso uni gelato and truffle (\$14, recipe, p. 97)

* *Kabosu* will finish 'cooking' the lobster with its acidity.



* Be precise with gelato measurements to ensure proper texture.



**Stonington lobster roll, buttered bun,
paprika, chives (\$18, recipe, p. 97)**



* Serve the lobster roll with salt and vinegar chips.

* Flip your buns to toast both sides, with a tablespoon of butter per side.

* Aim for 4 ounces of lobster per roll for the best lobster/bun ratio.

* Don't overcook the lobster. If it's even overcooked by 30 seconds, it won't be good.