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A CHARDONNAY MASTER IN CABERNET COUNTRY

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JULY 31, 2014

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**FOOD PHOTOGRAPHS
BY ANDREW McCAUL**

The *Wauwinet Lady* ferries guests from town to this boutique hotel on the eastern end of Nantucket.

AN EVENING IN NANTUCKET

Topper's at the Wauwinet entertains in style ★ BY OWEN DUGAN



The Wauwinet has been hosting parties on the eastern edge of Nantucket

since the elegant Victorian inn opened in 1875. The festive tradition continues, with small gatherings and week-end-long weddings for which guests reserve the entire hotel. Regardless of the scale, speak to staff at Topper's, the Wauwinet's *Wine Spectator* Grand Award-winning restaurant, and you will be told they feel they are entertaining in their home every day.

"We take it personally," says Jennifer Hudson, director of food and beverage at the 32-room hotel. "One of my daily routines is to go down to the dock and greet the *Wauwinet Lady*, to welcome each guest, and walk up to the hotel with them." Port and cheese are served every afternoon, and drinks are often taken outside in the evening. "We pop in and chitchat," Hudson says. "It's really like a cocktail party; very intimate."

For this menu, Topper's supplied three dishes and wine matches representative of the casual sophistication on display there, especially in their deck menu. We see this as a sundowner party: a low-key get-together with friends before a dinner.

The dishes are all based on local products, but also include more worldly flavors. Executive chef Kyle Zachary strikes a delicate balance; he has to satisfy guests who expect classic New England fare, but also those looking for something new. He has a fine dining background from time at the Wheatleigh, a Best of Award of Excellence winner in western Massachusetts, and a couple of years in Germany, before which he'd been sous chef at Topper's. "The island called to me. It does that to a lot of people," he says.

One advantage to the first dish, Zachary says, is that "it is made for sharing." With party food, it helps if portion size can be adjusted and the prep can be done ahead of time. Zachary describes the togarashi-spiced hamachi pizza as "easy to eat, high-end comfort food; luxurious ingredients, but fun." The fish is indeed lush, and the piquant, aromatic Japanese spice blend gives a palate-awakening light heat, with pickled cucumbers and mayo made with yuzu keeping the whole thing from getting too rich. Remember, this is early evening in the summer; keep things light and bright.

Cellar master Craig Hanna looks to Champagne for the match. The 24-year Topper's veteran has seen a change over the years in how this wine is consumed at the hotel: "Back then, a lot of Champagne

went to rooms. It still does, but now people realize it's good not just for celebration but also great with food." He also finds that Champagne works well here because "guests rarely order steak."

The Drappier Brut Nature Champagne Zero Dosage NV is his choice for two reasons. First, none of the added sweetness from the process called *dosage* means a more acidic, refreshing wine. "That makes it great with the togarashi," Hanna explains. In a discussion of party wines, he says it's important to serve wines that might be worthy of contemplation but don't demand it: "This is a very versatile wine. We will pour this before dinner, [or] with dinner. It's a very open style."

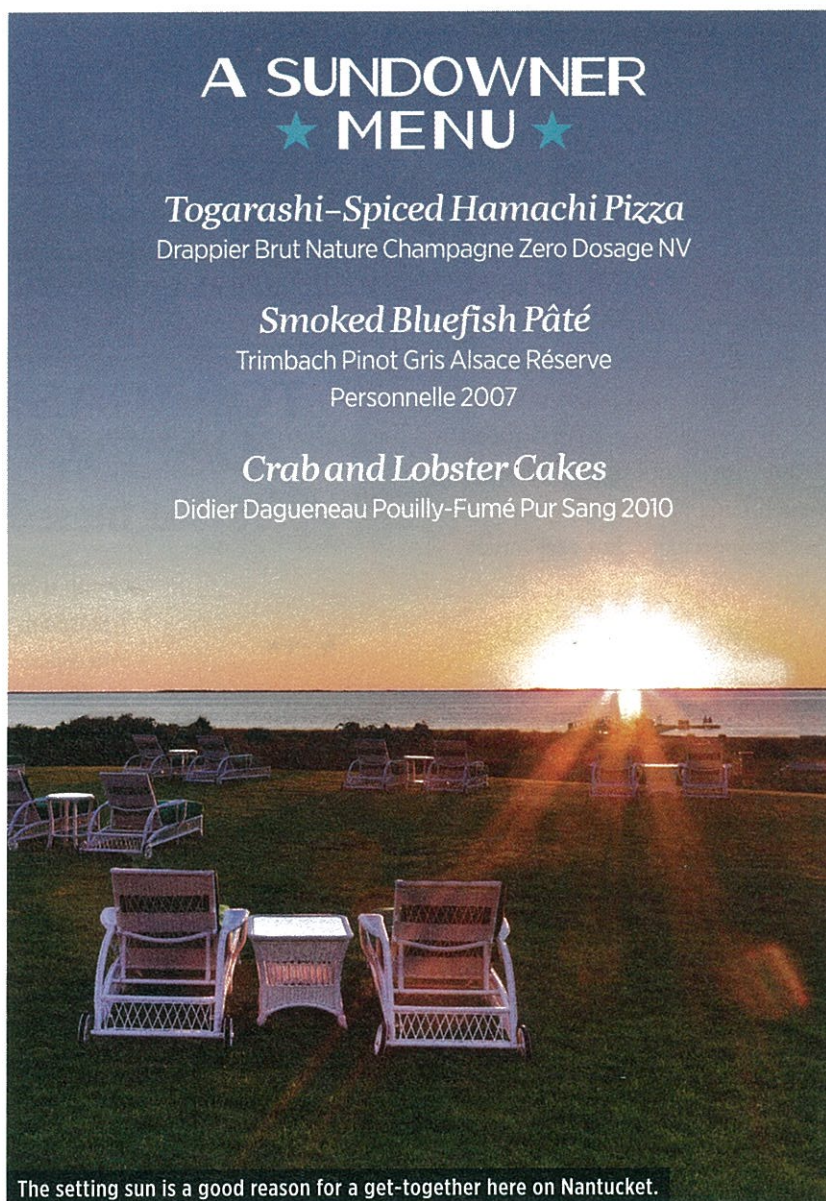
The second reason is more personal: Winemaker Michel Drappier visited and poured his wines at a dinner at Topper's during the annual Nantucket Wine Festival this year.

The second dish is built around a local favorite. "Smoked bluefish pâté is

something you see a lot around the island," Zachary says. "It's a classic Nantucket hors d'oeuvre." He makes it more cosmopolitan by adding curry powder to the cracker on which it is served. Taste the cracker by itself and the curry is obvious, but with the toppings, it becomes a faintly exotic grace note. Bluefish can be oily and strong-flavored, but the smoking cuts both qualities somewhat, and a garnish of radish slices, celery and fast-pickled onions adds color and brightness. As Hanna says, "People who never eat bluefish love this dish."

Hanna suggests serving the pâté with Trimbach Pinot Gris Alsace Réserve Personnelle 2007. First of all, "Alsace Pinot Gris is great with light smokiness," Hanna says. "Trimbachs have a very distinct style. They all have a little more richness, and while some Pinot Gris have no acidity, or taste late-harvest," the Trimbach has good structure and no discernible sweetness. Most important, Hanna adds, "This wine has balance, like the dish."

While the first two dishes bear Zachary's stamp, the third is a local product through and through. "The crabcake was here before me and will be here for a long time. It's the owner's favorite dish," he explains. It is quintessential Yankee simplicity on a plate, but with a dash of old money. Crabmeat is gussied up by the addition of an equal portion of lobster, with just enough binder to hold it all together. A drop of mustard cream provides a little extra bite, and a corn relish sweetens it up.



A SUNDOWNER MENU

Togarashi-Spiced Hamachi Pizza
Drappier Brut Nature Champagne Zero Dosage NV

Smoked Bluefish Pâté
Trimbach Pinot Gris Alsace Réserve
Personnelle 2007

Crab and Lobster Cakes
Didier Dagueneau Pouilly-Fumé Pur Sang 2010

The setting sun is a good reason for a get-together here on Nantucket.

For this dish, Hanna approaches matching by weight: "It has lobster and crab, but I would call it medium, not rich. There is the mustard quality, the lightly smoked corn. It's not a heavy dish." He chooses the Didier Dagueneau Pouilly-Fumé Pur Sang 2010. The late Dagueneau could coax a lot of flavor out of his Loire grapes. "I've visited there," Hanna says. "I'm friends with his kids [who continue his work]." Dagueneau's premier bottling is probably the Silex. For matching purposes, though, Hanna has a choice to make. "Silex may be my favorite Sancerre," he sighs. "But it's too racy for this dish. The Pur Sang is more open, and has broader appeal. It's a better party wine."

The practical advice from Hudson, Zachary and Hanna is borne out in the menu that follows. Use recipes that can be prepared ahead and assembled last-minute, and so require little cooking on the spot. Don't try to show off, and give yourself time alone and with your friends: "Simple is still impressive. Guests appreciate that very much,

too," Hudson says. "Save an hour to prepare yourself and relax."

Zachary echoes her: "Don't overdo it; it's fun for no one. People forget that guests are there to be with you."

Hanna can speak at length about different glassware required for a simple party (e.g., flutes for Champagne) as opposed to a wine dinner (Champagne in glasses for white wines). But the biggest decision is this: "Consider a cocktail party versus a dinner. Which is it? Because if it's a cocktail party, people want their drinks cold."

TOGARASHI-SPICED HAMACHI PIZZA

TO MAKE THE SESAME FLATBREAD

¾ cup warm water
1 teaspoon yeast
½ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
¼ cup sesame seeds, toasted (half black, half white)
1 tablespoon dark sesame oil

1. Using a stand mixer, combine water and yeast. Add salt, olive oil and sesame seeds. Mix on low with a dough hook for 1 minute. Increase to medium speed; mix 10 minutes.
2. Place the dough in a clean bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.
3. Divide the dough into 6 pieces. Form each into a round, and place on a greased sheet tray. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 1 hour.
4. Preheat oven to 450° F. Dust a work surface with flour, and roll out each round to an ⅛-inch-thick circle. Dock by poking all over with a fork. Brush with sesame oil, season with salt and bake 5 minutes.

TO MAKE THE TOGARASHI-SPICED HAMACHI TARTARE

12 ounces hamachi, finely chopped
¼ cup chives, chopped
3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 tablespoon togarashi spice mix
Kosher salt

1. Mix all ingredients together and season to taste with salt.

TO MAKE THE YUZU MAYONNAISE

½ cup mayonnaise
2 tablespoons yuzu juice

1. Combine the ingredients well. Refrigerate in a squeeze bottle until needed.



SMOKED BLUEFISH PÂTÉ

TO MAKE THE CURRY-LAVASH CRACKERS

1 cup bread flour
¼ cup semolina flour
1½ teaspoons butter, softened
1½ teaspoons cider vinegar
1 tablespoon Madras curry powder, toasted
1 teaspoon sugar
¼ teaspoon salt
¾ cup water

1. Combine all ingredients in the bowl of a stand mixer. Mix with a dough hook for 10 minutes at medium speed.
2. Cover and refrigerate for 30 minutes.
3. Preheat an oven to 325° F. Dust work surface with flour, and roll out the dough to ⅛-inch thick. Transfer the dough to a sheet pan.
4. Dock the dough and brush with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt, and bake for 3 minutes.
5. Remove from oven, and cut into 2-by-3-inch rectangles.
6. Return to oven, and bake another 3 minutes, or until golden brown.

TO MAKE THE SMOKED BLUEFISH PÂTÉ

14 ounces smoked bluefish, shredded
12 ounces cream cheese, softened
¼ cup lemon juice
¼ cup chives, sliced
¼ cup capers, chopped
Salt
Freshly ground black pepper

Freshly ground black pepper

1. In a food processor, mix the bluefish, cream cheese and lemon juice until smooth. Fold in the chives and capers. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

TO MAKE THE PICKLED RED ONIONS

1 medium red onion, sliced into thin rings
1 quart Champagne vinegar
1 pint sugar
2 bay leaves
2 sprigs thyme
1 star anise

1. Place the onions in a nonreactive container.
2. Combine all other ingredients in a sauce pot, and bring to a boil, then remove from heat.
3. Pour the liquid over the onions while still warm, and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 6 hours or overnight.

TO MAKE THE QUICK-PICKLED CUCUMBERS

1 medium cucumber, sliced very thinly
¼ cup rice wine vinegar
¼ cup sugar

1. Heat the sugar in the vinegar until it dissolves. Let the liquid cool, then cover the cucumber with it, cover the dish, and refrigerate overnight.

TO MAKE THE AVOCADO PUREE

1 Hass avocado
2 tablespoons lime juice
Kosher salt

1. Blend the avocado with the lime juice until smooth. Salt to taste.

To assemble: Top each flatbread with equal amounts of the following, in this order: Avocado Puree, Yuzu Mayonnaise, Hamachi Tartare, Pickled Cucumber. Garnish with cilantro. Serves 6.

To assemble: Place equal amount of smoked bluefish pâté on curry-lavash crackers (or substitute lavash, sprinkled lightly with curry powder before assembling). Garnish each with a few celery and radish slices and pickled onion rings. Serves 6.

CRAB AND LOBSTER CAKES WITH ROASTED CORN RELISH AND MUSTARD CREAM

TO MAKE THE CRAB AND LOBSTER CAKES

½ pound crabmeat
½ pound lobster meat
¼ cup mayonnaise
¼ cup bread crumbs
1 tablespoon whole-grain mustard
2 teaspoons lemon juice
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
1 tablespoon chives, chopped
Kosher salt
Freshly ground black pepper
4 tablespoons clarified butter

1. Carefully and without breaking it up too much, make sure the crab meat has no pieces of shell.
2. Chop the lobster meat.
3. Gently combine first 8 ingredients. Season with salt and pepper.
4. Form 8 cakes and sauté in butter until golden brown, about 5 minutes per side.

TO MAKE THE ROASTED CORN RELISH

¾ cup corn kernels, from 2 or 3 cobs
¼ cup cider vinegar
½ cup olive oil
1 teaspoon mustard seeds, toasted
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
¼ cup diced red peppers
¼ cup diced red onion
1 tablespoon parsley, chopped
1 tablespoon chives, chopped

1. Preheat an oven to 350° F. Roast ears of corn in their husks for 35 minutes. Let cool, then cut kernels from cob.
2. Pour the cider vinegar into a mixing bowl and slowly whisk in the olive oil.
3. Add the toasted mustard seeds, and season with salt and pepper.

4. Combine corn, peppers and onion and toss with vinaigrette.
5. Add the herbs and season with salt and pepper.

TO MAKE THE MUSTARD SAUCE

1 cup crème fraîche
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
3 tablespoons lemon juice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

1. Whisk all ingredients and season with salt and pepper.

To assemble: Spoon equal amounts of sauce over each cake, then top with relish. Serves 4. □

