

maine.

50 PEOPLE SHAPING OUR STATE



*their bold
visions for
Maine's
future*



+ July 2014

\$5.95US

07>



SUMMER EXPLORING

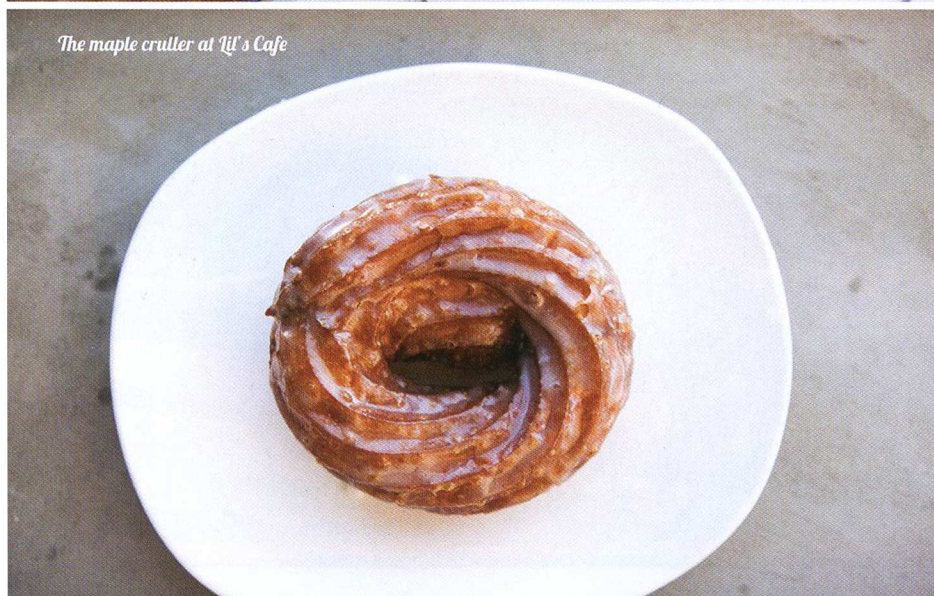
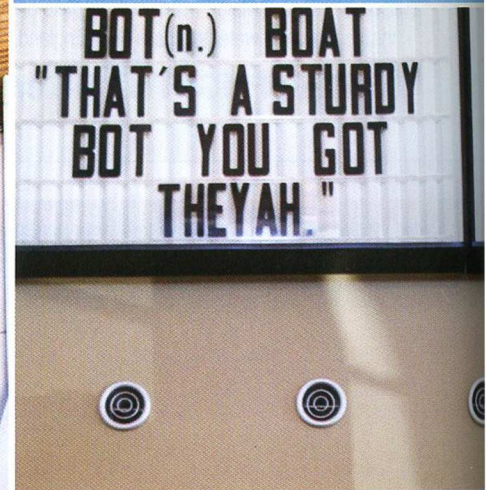
Kezar Lake, Boothbay, and the wild woods



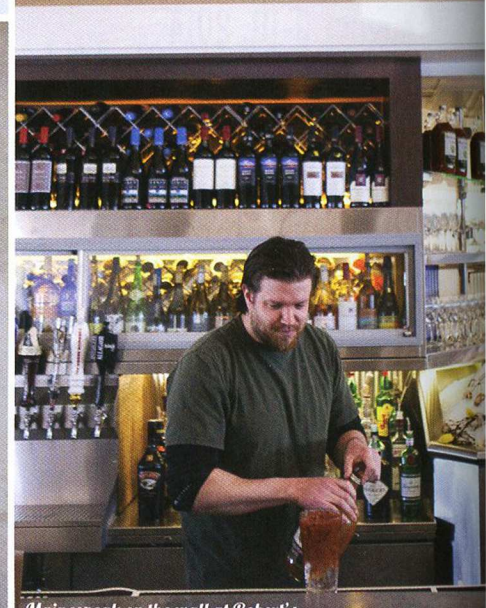
Cold, briny oysters at 'Robert's Maine Grill



A favorite at Bob's: "clams two ways"

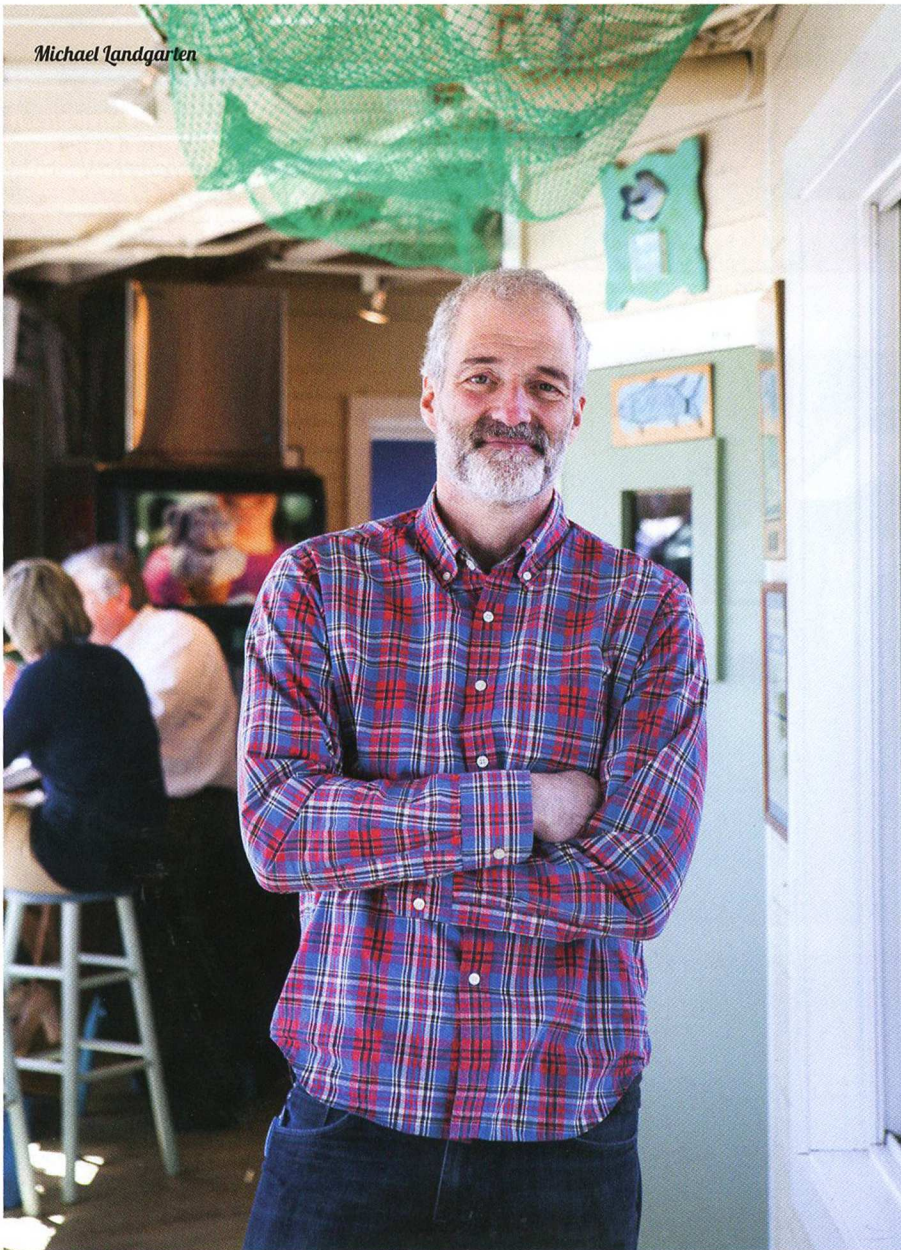


The maple cruller at 'Lil's Cafe



Maple cruller on the wall at Robert's

BOB'S CLAM HUT, ROBERT'S MAINE GRILL, *and* LIL'S CAFE



Michael Landgarten

Upon meeting Michael Landgarten, the first thing I noticed was the man's boundless enthusiasm for all things food. This mannerism is quite rare amongst those who have owned and operated restaurants for close to 30 years, as the business has a tendency to take its toll on both body and soul, but such is not the case with Landgarten. After recently opening his third operation, a coffee shop called Lil's, it would appear that, if anything, he is gaining momentum. Every move he makes is calculated, and done in an effort to "continue to put Kittery on the map for more than just outlet shopping."

Originally an art history major at Bowdoin College who also spent time as a street musician, Landgarten fell into the restaurant business unexpectedly in 1986. At the time he had been working in Boston as a computer programmer, possessing a skillset that he describes as "average at best," when the company closed its city offices and he was laid off. Initially, he aspired to become a full-time musician, but he realized that running his own business could be quite lucrative, especially if he were to find something seasonal that would allow him to play music. As he began his search, a longtime family friend and retired real estate broker mentioned that Bob's Clam Hut in Kittery would be going on the market.

"At first I wasn't interested," Landgarten recalls, "I was on a very short-lived health kick, so fried seafood wasn't really my thing, but after about a month or so of looking at businesses that didn't make sense to me, I decided to visit Bob's for a day. I was shocked to find out that I felt right at home there."

Landgarten was taken with Bob Kraft, the original owner of the Clam Hut. He admired the precision with which Kraft ran his operation; every recipe had been carefully honed and perfected over a span of 30 years. Each day, local regulars would file in at the same time, park in the same space, and order the exact same thing. Kraft's wife, Betty, would often see regulars coming, and have their order prepped before they even got to the window. It was the quintessential family

MICHAEL LANDGARTEN DISHES ON FRYING CLAMS, BUILDING A BUSINESS, AND HONORING MAINE TRADITIONS

Controlled chaos at Bob's Clam Hut

SH YDER	SM.	4.95
	MED.	6.95
	LG.	7.95
AM YDER	SM.	5.95
	MED.	7.95
	LG.	8.95
STER EW	SM.	9.95
	MED.	12.95
	LG.	15.95

CLAMS 2 WAYS
"BOB & LILLIAN"
BOB'S TRADITIONAL
STYLE CLAMS
&
LILLIAN STYLE CLAMS
DINNER \$24.95
BASKET \$23.95



WHAT 'LL
YA HAVE ?



FOR PURE
CRUNCH-IFICATION,
GO WITH *The Lillian!*

-GUY FIE
MOST O
"DINERS, DRIVE-INS & DIN"

PICK-UP

ORDER



Bob's
Clam Hut

operation, with Bob running the back room and prep, Betty handling the breeding of the fried seafood, and their son, Bob Jr., on the expediting line.

"I fell in love with the opportunity to be a part of this. I loved their work ethic and their passion for quality and the process. I adored the respect they had for their loyal customers. The whole thing was so damn authentic, like nothing I'd ever seen before." Landgarten quickly made up his mind and applied for a bank loan. After being turned down by ten different banks, the eleventh finally gave him the money and his ownership of Bob's Clam Hut became a reality.

Although his family members were initially horrified to learn of his career choice, his old friends from college were far more encouraging. "I had somehow forgotten that just a few years earlier I was so obsessed with fish sandwiches and chocolate shakes that I had actually taken the time to establish a rating system for any place within a 30-mile radius of Bowdoin that served them," Landgarten tells me. "I guess it never occurred to me that this might end up being my career."

Six months into his new venture, Landgarten met a woman who would go on to be one of the most important people in his life: Lillian Mangos. He recalls being in the restaurant with his wife one night during the off-season, when an old black Lincoln Continental came lurching into the parking lot.

"The back door opens and this round older woman pops out. There were clearly at least five other people still in the car." Landgarten continues, "She came over to our side door, and the first words out of her mouth were 'you people hiring?' I said 'Not really,' to which she replied 'Well, you should hire me. I'm a good worker.'"

Landgarten asked Mangos, who was 62 at the time, to fill out an application. She declined. Instead, she offered her phone number and told him that she had owned a similar restaurant with her husband for 22 years and reiterated that she was "a good worker." After she left, Landgarten assumed he would probably never see her again, until his wife, to his surprise, urged him to hire her, and he did.

"It was a thrill to work with her," remembers Landgarten. "She was like a partner in the store. She was blunt, dry witted, warm, loved her job, never took a break, and wanted to take all of the orders and act like she owned the place. Customers adored her, as did the staff."

Visitors to Bob's Clam Hut will notice that when ordering a fried clam basket they are given the option of two styles: "Lillian's" and "Bob's." This came as a result of Mangos insisting for 15 years that

her method of frying the clams—involving a milk and egg mix for "washing" before they are breaded, rather than Bob's more straightforward approach of simply plunging them right into the batter—was superior.

"I didn't want to mess with success, and in truth, I personally preferred Bob's recipe. Finally, I relented and figured out a way to offer both styles. We also gave Lillian 15 cents for each order of her style that she sold, which of course caused no end of hysterics as she browbeat customers into ordering them her way."

In 2003, Landgarten began to have the urge to start something new. Business at Bob's was good—his staff couldn't have been more engaged and committed. Yet he felt that it had reached a pinnacle of sorts. He recalls being in New York around that time, where he dined at Mario Batali's Po. The tasting menus that he experienced there inspired him, and the gears began to turn in regards to creating a more upscale restaurant of his own. The idea for Robert's Maine Grill began to take shape. Landgarten envisioned it as an updated version of a classic Maine restaurant. It was also meant to maintain the standards of quality at Bob's, hence the more formal "Robert's" Maine Grill.

When Landgarten found the space for Robert's on Route 1 in Kittery, he approached his architect, Paul Bennett, about renovating the restaurant currently on the lot. "I walked into his office and he had drawn a picture of what would be Robert's on a napkin," he recalls. "It immediately became clear to me that we'd need to build an entirely new place that was meant to last."

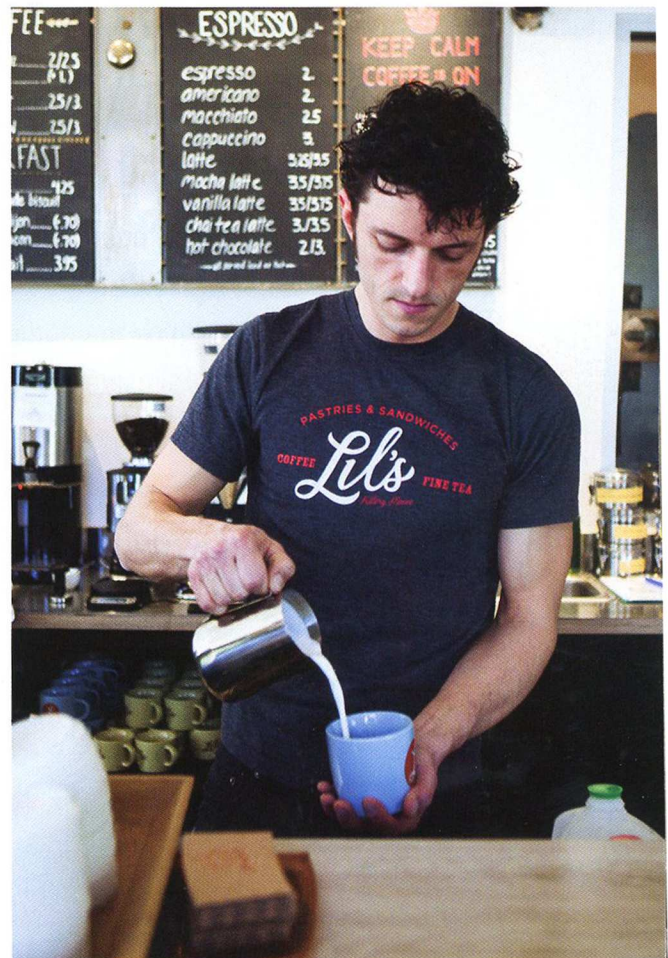
Meant to resemble a house one might find on Kittery Point, the interior of Robert's is open and airy, with wood tables and floors, as well as a beautiful zinc bar. A prominent art installation above the bar features road signs emblazoned with what Landgarten refers to as "Maine Speak," complete with definitions. For example, one reads "Chupta Cappy?" which means, as many of us know, "What are you up to?"

The menu, overseen by chef Brandon Blethen, is extensive, featuring updated versions of classic Maine fare like baked haddock, clam cakes, and lobster. Landgarten reveals that the restaurant goes through

an overwhelming amount of oysters on a daily basis. "I didn't want the food to be too complex or unapproachable," he says, "But we do have the farm- and sea-to-table ethos that sets us apart from the typical 'all-purpose' Maine restaurant." One of these farms, Greenlaw Gardens, is less than a mile away, and Landgarten strives to maintain close relationships with local fishermen and meat purveyors.

Blethen, a Kittery native himself, is not afraid to experiment with bringing a plethora of influences into the kitchen. The addition of Moxie to his bourbon BBQ sauce for steak tips imparts a sweet, slightly bitter characteristic, while chipotle, lime, and cilantro add interest to traditional crab cakes. At lunchtime, the Kittery-style Po' Boy is heaped with crispy buttermilk-fried oysters and a green tomato version of the tangy relish known throughout the South as Chow Chow.

After establishing Robert's as a successful dining landmark, Landgarten didn't have much interest in doing another project right away, until an opportunity arrived in 2011 to purchase a building in burgeoning Kittery Foreside. He describes this neighborhood as based on a lot of small start-ups that do not fit into traditional categories. At the acclaimed Black Birch, for example, the owners are always present.



To him this signals honesty. “I suppose I would refer to them as kind of New Traditionalists.”

At this point, Landgarten’s ongoing obsession with great coffee shops had begun to rival his past relationship with fish sandwiches and chocolate shakes.

“Every town needs one,” he explains, “I wanted to bring world-class coffee and pastries to Kittery.” To make this goal a reality, Landgarten enlisted the help of well-known pastry chef Jennifer Woods, who in turn brought her own seasoned crew made up of bakers Andrew McCook and Sommer Mason. Together, they conceptualized a range of offerings: warm, decadent crullers, croissants, and a plethora of griddled sandwiches. Landgarten tirelessly researched coffee roasters, deciding on Tandem Coffee Roasters of Portland, whose product, he claims, has “been a treat to have in our lives.”

His vision of a superlative coffee shop, opened in late 2013, would find reality as Lil’s Cafe, named after none other than Lillian Mangos. She passed away in 2012, although Landgarten was able to deliver the news of his decision beforehand, which made her “very, very happy.”

Looking back, Landgarten muses, “I fell into this business because I adore food and the incredible opportunity to make people happy by serving it to them.” He discovered an amazing community in restaurants, and a place where he could pursue his passion while creating a healthy work environment for his employees.

And it all started with a healthy appetite for fried fish and chocolate milkshakes.

+

Bob’s Clam Hut
315 U.S. Route 1 | Kittery
207.439.4233
▶ bobsclamhut.com

Robert’s Maine Grill
326 U.S. Route 1 | Kittery
207.439.0300
▶ robertsmainegrill.com

Lil’s Café
7 Wallingford Square #106 | Kittery
207.703.2800
▶ lilscafe.com