



MELISSA OSTROW



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GRACE HOTELS

**A SAMPLING** of signature dishes: Island Creek's lobster (left), Island Creek's razor clams (middle) and Vanderbilt Grace's Pan Roast Cod Saffron Butternut Squash (right).

**CULINARY TRAVEL**

# LURING GUESTS WITH STAR CHEFS

Gourmands Savor New England Flavor With Food, Specialty Drinks

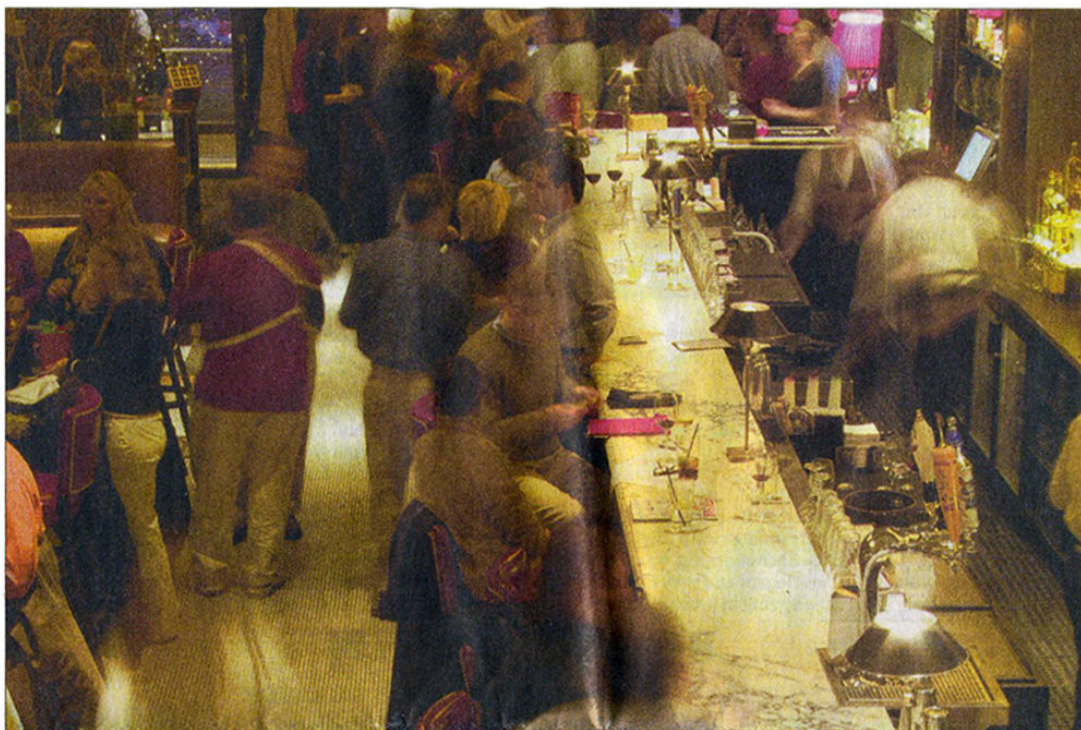
**BY ANDREA E. MCHUGH**

Special To The Courant

**C**elebrity chefs have been winning the hearts, and wallets, of gastronomes

far and wide for years as dedicated devotees plan pilgrimages to dine at the hotspots that made them famous. Today, hotels and inns are luring culinary luminaries to lead in-house restaurants (many eponymously named) so travelers can experience a comprehensive palate-pleasing getaway.

Culinary travel is a booming market attracting gourmet adventurers who collect dining experiences like others do passport stamps. With no shortage of exceptional talent behind the line throughout New England, foodies far and wide are flocking to stay, dine and play in one-stop-shop delicious destinations where menus are as important as thread counts.



**EASTERN STANDARD** in the Hotel Commonwealth in Boston's Back Bay has a signature marble bar.

ADAM GESUERO



"The presence of celebrity chefs — especially those with household names — can go a long way toward changing a city's image," says Nicholas DeRenzo, associate editor at Budget Travel. "Back in the 1990s, when top chefs began opening restaurants in resorts on the Vegas Strip, the city started its major transformation from a bachelor party stop to a high-end destination targeting luxury travelers, foodies, and culture hounds. South Beach, Miami, then followed suit, and now even unexpected destinations like Atlantic City are getting in on the act."

In this region the Vanderbilt name has been synonymous with Newport, R.I., ever since America's robber barons made the City-by-the-Sea their Gilded Age playground. So when Greece's Grace Hotels Group acquired a property originally commissioned by Alfred Gwynne Vanderbilt in 1909, they appropriately called the boutique hotel Vanderbilt Grace. The company's first U.S. acquisition, the doors of the downtown hotel opened in April 2011 and quickly secured Grand Chef Relais & Chateaux Jonathan Cartwright as the hotel's chef de cuisine, best known for making his mark at the distinguished White Barn Inn in Kennebunk, Maine (considered a sister property).

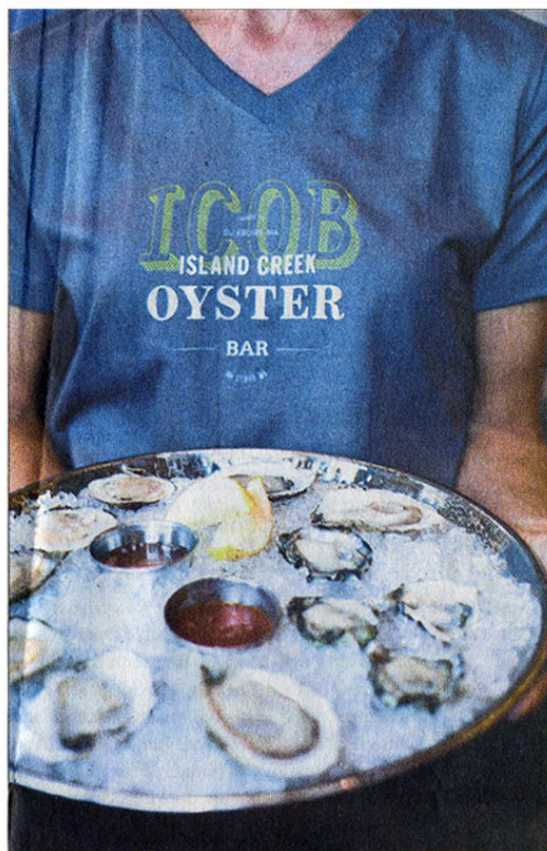
Muse by Jonathan Cartwright, located inside the 33-room hotel, recently

CULINARY, F4



SAM GRAY

**THE ISLAND** Creek Oyster Bar, right, located in Boston's Hotel Commonwealth, offers a variety of oysters. The Hawthorne, above, features the liquid creations of master mixologist Jackson Cannon.



MICHAEL PIAZZA



# Celebrity Chefs Create Culinary Travel Destinations

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unveiled a "Vintage Vanderbilt" menu based on a historic menu from 1912 found within the Vanderbilt family records. A tribute to the mansion's long and illustrious history, it features lobster bisque and Oyster Poulette, while the vintage dessert is a meringue with clotted cream and raspberries. Guests looking for a strictly authentic recreation of the 1912 menu can do so with two weeks' notice (four guests per table required) for \$225 per person with a wine pairing, \$160 per person without. The multi-course meal unfolds in the elegantly-appointed, jackets-required dining room. Select dishes from the vintage-inspired menu are also served in the Conservatory, a repurposed, sun-filled solarium. Wine and cheese tastings, wine dinners, lobster dinners, cigar nights and other savory events pepper the hotel's summer calendar. Cocktails (including the signature Grace Cocktail — a blend of Grey Goose La Poire pear-flavored vodka poured atop muddled lemongrass and mixed with pear puree, honey syrup, a dash of apple juice and garnished with a sprig of fresh mint) are best enjoyed on the rooftop deck with sweeping views of Newport Harbor, or on the manicured garden terrace, set in the shadow of Trinity Church's iconic steeple.

## Hotel Commonwealth's Trifecta

Nestled in the heart of Boston's Back Bay, the Hotel Commonwealth has long been the heartbeat of Kenmore Square, often credited as the cornerstone of the neighborhood's more recent revitalization. But when Garrett Harker opened Eastern Standard restaurant there in 2005, it raised the hotel's culinary bar. Defined as an American Brasserie, Eastern Standard ambience is defined by tables dressed in crisp white linens, Boston's longest marble bar (46 feet), cavernous ceilings and floor-to-ceiling glass doors framing the action on Commonwealth Avenue.

Despite its chic surroundings, the restaurant, praised by national magazines including *GQ* and *Esquire*, is decidedly unpretentious with candy-apple red leather banquettes and a street-side patio that's hopping this time of year, never more so than before and after Red Sox games (Fenway Park is just steps from the restaurant). Though its reservation book is full of the names of local Bostonians, the restaurant equally caters to hotel guests by offering a daily breakfast menu in addition to lunch, dinner, Sunday brunch, and a coveted late-night dining menu available Fridays and Saturdays, 12:00 a.m. to 1:30 a.m.

Eastern Standard is perhaps best known for its cocktail and wine offerings with more than 60 craft cocktails and a dozen boutique wines from around the world. While you're



**THE MOUSE**, top, in the Vanderbilt Grace boutique hotel. Eastern Standard restaurant (above, left) and Island Creek Oyster Bar (above, right) are in the Hotel Commonwealth.



there, you might catch a celebrity or two—luminaries from Bobby Flay to Barbara Streisand, have been spotted at Eastern Standard.

The hotel upped its culinary ante in 2010 when it opened Island Creek Oyster Bar. The 100-seat restaurant (plus an additional 75-seats in the bar vicinity) is the brick-and-mortar manifestation of the harvest at Island Creek Oysters in Duxbury, an oyster farm less than an hour away founded by Skip Bennett whose coveted bivalves can be found on such prestigious menus as Per Se (NY), The French Laundry (CA) and The White House. Its oyster menu alone features 12 to 18 varieties daily including rarities from small growers across the country in an effort to not only please discerning palates, but to educate diners about oysters and sustainable farming practices. The menu also offers classic New England fare sourced mainly from local or small-producing farms including line-caught grilled swordfish, Maine lobster

(a summer staple) and bluefish caught in the waters off nearby Cape Cod.

Completing their culinary and cocktail trifecta, The Hotel Commonwealth christened The Hawthorne earlier this year, thrilling craft movement connoisseurs. Considered one of the country's master mixologists, proprietor Jackson Cannon (along with Harker) has channeled the geniality of a bygone era by offering a highly-curated selection of rare cognacs, tequilas, whiskey and well-aged rums in an intimate, chic setting.

"I have restaurants that clearly enhance the guest experience, but they're also local favorites, so guests are eating where the locals eat which enhances the authentic Boston experience," says Adam Sperling, Hotel Commonwealth's general manager.

## A Maine Offering

For a quieter retreat farther north, the Hidden Pond resort in Kennebunkport, Maine, is tucked among 60 lush acres on the

state's southwesterly coast. With private luxury cottages, bicycles, yoga, tai chi, three miles of marked nature trails, and watercolor classes with the artist in residence, the relaxing, tech-free resort has already earned an enviable reputation. It caught the eyes of gourmands when James Beard Award-winning chef and restaurateur Ken Oringer took the helm at Earth, an open air restaurant that welcomed guests for the first time last year. Capitalizing on Hidden Pond's bucolic setting, Oringer crafts Earth's dishes and drinks with ingredients freshly picked from the 800-square foot organic farm on-site. Mixology classes, for example, use local infused liquors and spirits showcasing the resort's on-site bounty. Seafood, including bluefin tuna and of course, Maine lobster, is also locally sourced. Guests always have free range at the farm as well, welcome to curb their cravings between meals by picking treats from the garden to their heart's content. The restaurant's aesthetic also takes a cue from Mother Nature, with eco-friendly elements throughout and a "tree chandelier" carved from a local apple tree. Earth at Hidden Pond is a seasonal resort, open now through October.

For more information: Vanderbilt Grace, 1 Mary St., Newport, RI 02840, 401-846-6200, [www.vanderbiltgrace.com](http://www.vanderbiltgrace.com); Hotel Commonwealth, 500 Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215, 617-933-5000, [www.hotelcommonwealth.com](http://www.hotelcommonwealth.com); Hidden Pond, 354 Goose Rocks Road, Kennebunkport, ME 04046, 207-967-9050, [www.hiddenpondmaine.com](http://www.hiddenpondmaine.com)



**HIDDEN POND**  
**EARTH** at the Hidden Pond resort in Kennebunkport features a tree chandelier.