

# AMERICAN ICONS: BOB'S CLAM HUT AND ROBERT'S MAINE GRILL

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**July 3, 2015 | By Carey Jones**

Fourth of July is the time for barbecues, fireworks — and celebrating iconic Americana. So we talked with Michael Landgarten, owner of the iconic [Bob's Clam Hut](#) and [Robert's Maine Grill](#) in Kittery, Maine, about lobster rolls, fried clams, and how to run a successful restaurant year after year. Here's what he had to say.

**Why is Bob's Clam Hut considered a Maine icon?** We're in our 60<sup>th</sup> year and business has increased every year. Bob's is an extremely authentic Maine experience. Bob Kraft, the founder, loved clamming and clam shacks. He developed his own recipe and then asked his mother for a part of the backyard to build his Route 1 clam hut. Bob had a vision for how he felt fried seafood tastes best, which is: very light dredging in a simple flour blend of super fresh seafood purchased from small local wholesalers, ultra clean oil, a special fryer oil rotation, and highly talented line cooks.

Quality came first and he was obsessive about it — this is rare in clam huts. I have many of the same characteristics. I love the old traditional Maine seafood shacks but executed as if it was 5-star dining.

**How do you keep your restaurants current while still maintaining what has kept them popular all these years?** We've long had a saying, "stay the same and change." We add new décor and comfort elements all the time. We recently re-designed our menu, making it easier to navigate, with terrific old Maine graphics from *Might and Maine* in Portland. We've also added new T-shirt designs and new ice cream flavors, as well as newly added homemade sauces to accompany our seafood, such as spicy tartar sauce, chipotle mayo and ranch dressing. The south-facing roof just got covered with solar panels a month ago. The core stays the same though – clams and other seafood prepared the same way since 1956.

**The lobster roll, of course, is what most people think of when they hear "Maine" – but what are the other iconic foods they should know about?** Fried clams! We do them two ways – Bob's original recipe and "Lillian" style. Lillian Mangos was a longtime cashier who had owned her own seafood restaurant with her husband for 22 years prior to coming to Bob's. After years of badgering that her clams were better, I relented and decided to give customers the choice of which style they wanted. Now, there's a dish for those who want both Bob's and Lillian's styles — "Clams 2 Ways."