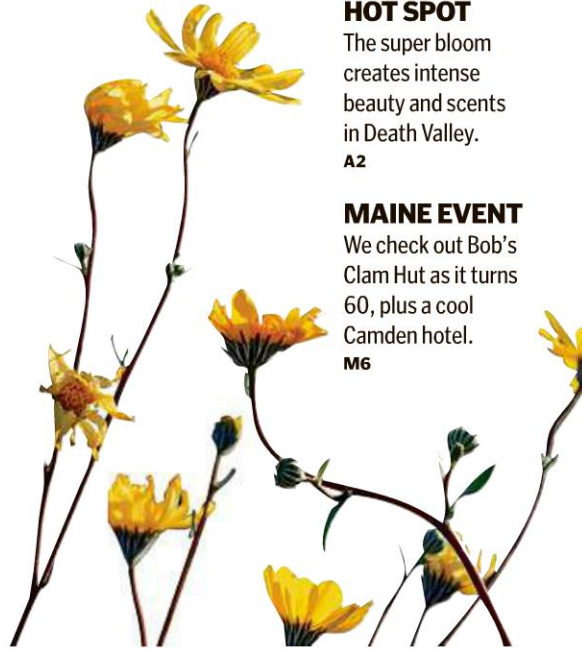


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SundayTravel

Inside



HOT SPOT

The super bloom creates intense beauty and scents in Death Valley.

A2

MAINE EVENT

We check out Bob's Clam Hut as it turns 60, plus a cool Camden hotel.

M6

60 years of clams at Bob's

Route 1 spot to celebrate milestone the coastal Maine way

By Linda Clarke
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

KITTERY — Thirty years ago, Michael Landgarten fell in love. The Flushing, N.Y., native had finished his studies in art history at Bowdoin College in Brunswick, and with his BA in hand, he moved to Boston and tried a music career. When his day job working in computers folded, and with a baby on the way, he decided to buy a business. He wasn't sure what business exactly, but a friend encouraged him to take a look at an old clam shack for sale on Route 1 in Kittery. Native Mainer Robert Kraft had opened the roadside diner 30 years earlier, and it was a viable business, much loved by locals and ardent clam fans just passing through.

Landgarten looked Bob's Clam Hut over, he looked around Kittery. He was smitten. "I fell in

love with Bob's and then I fell in love with Kittery. Actually, I think I fell in love with Bob himself first," Landgarten says with obvious fondness. Though it's Landgarten's 30th anniversary, it's Bob's birthday he's celebrating, and he's doing it the coastal Maine way with Bob's 60th Anniversary Clam Suppah, June 9. The Seasmoke Trio will perform and guest chefs will help cook.

In 1956, Kraft, an avid clam digger, opened Bob's

BOB'S, Page M7

Clams made with egg wash are Lillian-style.



Continuing a clam hut's legacy

►BOB'S

Continued from Page M6

Clam Hut in his parents' backyard. Kraft, who passed away in 2003, cooked the clams, and his mom baked pies for dessert. It was a hit. Soon, the menu broadened to include clam chowder, lobster stew and rolls, and other casual bites. Landgarten points to where the Kraft house once stood and looks genuinely sad. The Kittery Outlets now surround Bob's.

Landgarten admits he didn't so much take over the business as continue Kraft's legacy. "Bob's was very popular. Bob and his family took wonderful care of everything, but the systems and equipment were somewhat outdated and undersized. For example, we had one window with a cashier using a calculator, a scratch pad, and a money-box, and we made tartar sauce using a hand crank grinder."

Bob's switched from being open five days a week in the summer to being open year-round, seven days a week. But one thing remains constant: Kraft's recipe for cooking clams: Dredge them in unseasoned flour and fry them in super clean oil. Done. When long-time cashier Lillian Mango insisted her method of pre-dipping the clam in egg wash was better, Lillian's style clams were introduced. "It started as a small thing to appease Lillian and see how guests responded. We called the dish The Lillian. Internally, we called it 'Stella,' yelling it out 'Streetcar'-style," Landgarten says, name-checking Marlon Brando's infamous yell in the movie, "A Streetcar Named Desire." "Stella is Lillian's first name."

Nowadays, diners can order clams Bob's way or Lillian's, or do a split combining the two: "If you don't like the intensity of the clam and belly, Lil's style is better. The egg-milk wash tenderizes and rinses the clam so they can be less chewy," Landgarten advises. But he stands by Kraft's method: "I prefer Bob's. There's more of the clam flavor — the unadorned salt-sweet flavor that way. I liked hers, but there was no way I'd replace Bob's."



The exterior of Bob's Clam Hut (left) and the raw bar at Robert's Maine Grill across the street.

Note that there's no "Mike's style." With typical humility, Landgarten has put his stamp on Kittery, but not his own name: In 2013, he opened Lil's Cafe (named after Mango) in a converted bank in Kittery's downtown Foreside neighborhood, which is something of a foodie mecca these days. Behind the 18-inch-thick polished steel door of the bank's Mosler safe is the Vinyl Vault, an alcove with old records for sale. But it's the pastry case loaded with irresistible goodies, baked downstairs, that commands attention. Folks linger over a crispy fennel laced salad, or grab coffee and a curly cruller — a doughnut-style pastry beloved by Mainers.

In 2006, Landgarten opened Robert's Maine Grill across the street from Bob's. It's less casual and has a lively bar scene, as well as a deck overlooking Spruce Creek. But Landgarten is not just about business: He's also involved in land and coastal preservation, and his restaurants include solar panels and composting. Local, sustainable fish — billed as "under-loved fish" and including delicious species like cusk or hake — are menu highlights, and oyster shells go back into the ocean for reseeded. Oysters love to live on oyster shells.

Landgarten points to the river by Bob's, which runs under Route 1 into Spruce Creek by Robert's. "It's low tide, you can see where back when Bob opened this place, that would have been where he'd have dug for clams," he says of the muddy expanse edged by tall pines.

Clamming died off as the estuary became blocked because of damming upriver. Petitioning reversed the process.

"We got the river flowing again. We've got fish back in the water," he says softly. As if to

prove the point, a man is casting into the river by Bob's. "We're hoping to get it healthy enough for clamming one day."

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