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BETTER LIVING IN GREATER BOSTON

SUMMER 2009

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A TASTE OF NANTUCKET

THERE ONCE WAS A CHEF FROM NANTUCKET

MICHAEL LASCOLA
PROVIDES A TASTE
OF THE ISLAND, WHETHER
YOU GO THERE OR NOT

BY ALEXANDER STEVENS

On paper, it looks like a fairy tale. Boy meets girl while they're both working one summer at a restaurant on Nantucket. They fall in love. Over the years, they both rise up through the ranks at the restaurant. They marry. They buy a house. The owner offers to sell them the eatery. They buy it, and rebuild it in their image of the perfect restaurant. They have a baby and live happily ever after in their own little piece of paradise.

Come to think of it, in reality, it looks pretty close to a fairy tale, too.

That's the story of Michael LaScola and his wife, Orla Murphy-LaScola, both in their mid-30s. And, if you're going to Nantucket this summer, do yourself a favor and dine at their restaurant, American Seasons. The food is exquisite. If they're offering the lobster bisque, try it. If they're offering the grilled loin of lamb with lamb ravioli, try it. If they're offering the wild blueberry lemon tart for dessert, try it. And I can almost guarantee you they'll be offering the foie gras doughnut with rhubarb jam, a perfect little creation that's classic LaScola — a reinvention of the ultimate comfort food. And so, well, you know, try it.

If you're not planning to go to Nantucket, you can still get a taste of American Seasons. Later in this story, chef LaScola offers up his recipe for



seared scallops with cauliflower veloute.

The restaurant isn't right in the heart of the downtown, but that's part of its appeal. It's an ideal, 10-minute leisurely walk down picturesque Centre Street — just enough to whet the appetite before the meal, and just enough to aid the digestion afterward.

"It's great when tourists find us," says Orla, cradling three-month-old Roan. "They feel like they've found some place unique and special."

With its wall murals painted by a local artist and colorful hand-painted tables, it has the comfortable feel of a bistro, but the food is fine dining.

"We love this place," says Michael. "It has a great soul, and it just needed to be taken care of. It's an old building. There's not a straight line in the place. But it's very comfortable. When you first walk in the door, you actually feel relaxed, like you're in someone's house."

Maybe that's why about 75 per cent of its diners are locals, the couple estimates.

They're drawn there in part by LaScola's commitment to local food. By mid-season, the restaurant gets about half its produce from the island — Nantucket Mushrooms and a regular harvest from the beloved Bartlett Farms. And then, of course, there's the bounty from the sea — striped bass, summer flounder, scallops, lobsters and clams, to name a few.

Under Orla's guidance, the wine list has blossomed as well.





Various textures enhance this scallops dish.

Lower left: Orla Murphy-LaScola and Michael LaScola

PHOTO BY ORLA MURPHY-LASCOLA

American Seasons offered about 100 wines when the couple took over. Now diners can choose from more than 500, all American, as the restaurant's name demands. They make the trip to Napa Valley at least once a year to cultivate relationships with wineries.

It's a lot of work.

"It's always something," says Michael, who repeats the refrain that any owner-chef can sing — running a restaurant is a 24/7 proposition for the nine months a year that they're open (they close before Christmas for three months). "You're responsible for everything. You give up so much of your life. The time is ridiculous. People think it's fun. But it's also hard. Cooking is the fun part."

OK, so it's not quite a fairy tale. But still, you get the feeling that the LaScolas wouldn't want it any other way.

"When someone takes the time to compliment you on a meal, or tells you they loved a bottle of wine that you had to travel to Napa to get," Michael says, "it's all worth it." *

SEARED SCALLOPS WITH CAULIFLOWER VELOUTE, GOLDEN RAISINS, ALMOND BUTTER

VELOUTE:

- 1 head cauliflower cut into florets
- 1 clove garlic, fine dice
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 teaspoon salt & pepper
- 1 teaspoon sugar

In a medium pot, add 1 quart water, garlic, salt and pepper. Bring to a simmer, add cauliflower and simmer for 30 minutes. Strain. Put in a blender and puree, slowly add cream. Puree until smooth and season to taste, with salt, pepper and sugar.

BROWN BUTTER VINAIGRETTE:

- 1/2 pound butter
- 1/4 red onion, small dice
- 3 tablespoons sherry vinaigrette
- 3 tablespoons golden raisins
- 1/4 cup toasted almonds, sliced
- 1 teaspoon capers

- 1 teaspoon salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon sugar

Place butter in a medium pan, brown over a medium heat. Place all other ingredients in a bowl and whisk in brown butter.

- 2 pounds scallops (under 10 per pound)

Clean and dry scallops.
Warm oil in a pan until hot.
Place scallops in pan and allow to caramelize.

TO PLATE:

Place a serving of the veloute in the center of the plate. Scoop a serving of the scallops on top of the veloute. Drizzle the vinaigrette around the edge of the plate.