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LOBSTER ROLLS FOR ALL

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COVER STORY

CAGE MATCH

Lobster rolls win
hands down

BY LAURA YEE



LOBSTER ROLLS MIGHT SOUND LIKE A NEW ENGLAND TOURIST TRAP, BUT THEY'RE JUST AS REVERED IN THE CULINARY LANDSCAPE AS ANY OTHER INDIGENOUS SEAFOOD PLAYING TO LOCAL FLAVORS.

Stretching past their homegrown borders, lobster rolls have hit the road. They're more likely to be highly seasoned by garlic, wasabi and chilies than the standard warm butter or mayonnaise, and often served in bread that's not the classic top-loading bun.

The iconic sandwich is so well received that it's now worthy of its own segment, from Marc Forgione's Lobster Press in New York and the Happy Lobster food truck in Chicago to multi-unit Luke's Lobster (New York, Boston, Chicago and Las Vegas).

"The popularity of lobster rolls is certainly on the rise," says Matt Jacobson, executive director of the Maine Lobster Marketing Collaborative, a nonprofit organization that supports the industry. "We're also seeing the rise of lobster in appetizers, primarily in the South and West regions of the U.S."

Serving lobster on a roll creates a more accessible price point for a protein long perceived as a luxury food item. Diners willing to pay for quality see a \$14 price tag as a gateway to tasting a food that may have been too expensive in the past.

Sustainably raised, cage-caught and hand-harvested, lobster's abundance will likely continue. Here are three takes beyond the traditional.



Lobster Roll Sandwich

*Chef-owner Michael Serpa
Select Oyster Bar, Boston*

5 plum tomatoes, halved
5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
Salt and pepper to taste
1 cup mayonnaise, your recipe
2 large avocados
2 tablespoons lime juice
1 shallot, minced
2 tablespoons lemon juice
Espelette pepper to taste
2 lobsters, about 1¼ to 1½ pound each, cooked
2 toasted ciabatta rolls

Slack out tomatoes on a sheet tray and drizzle with 3 tablespoons oil. Roast in preheated 450 F for 15 minutes or blister over a grill. Reserve liquid for another use. Chop in a food processor, season with salt and pepper and stir in mayonnaise with espelette to taste; set aside.

Mash avocados with lime, shallot and salt; correct seasoning and set aside. Remove meat from lobster, breaking up pieces. Toss with lemon, salt, pepper and remaining olive oil.

To plate, place a layer of avocado on the bottom bun and tomato mayo on the other. Fill with lobster. Makes 2 servings.

A Thousand Lobster Rolls Later

As the executive chef at Neptune Oyster Bar in Boston, Michael Serpa saw more than 100,000 traditional lobster rolls come off the line. He knew he would serve anything but that version when he opened his own place in the city, Select Oyster Bar.

"A lobster roll is very one-dimensional flavor wise," he says. "This sandwich (see recipe) is a little more interesting, has a better texture with the crispy bread, nice fat from the avocado and tomato mayo, but it still showcases the lobster. It also has a lot of acid, which I think helps the lobster shine more than covering it in pure fat."

Word of caution: Lobster doesn't cook evenly. So be careful not to overcook the claws and knuckle meat, which require less time. Serpa recommends cooling down the lobster on the counter because an ice bath can toughen the meat.