

SPECIAL **Chesapeake Bay** ^{CBM} EDITION

THE TRAVEL ISSUE



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TRAVEL ISSUE 2022 \$7.99US/CAN



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In Good Taste

A slew of chefs and an enthusiastic community have transformed Easton into a top dining destination

CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS

BY TIM EBNER



It can be easy to bypass Easton along Maryland's bustling Route 50 corridor. After all, the highway is the main route from D.C., Baltimore, Philadelphia, and beyond to points south and east along Maryland's Eastern Shore, bringing throngs of beachgoers and tourists to waterside retreats in serene settings like St. Michaels, Tilghman Island, or Oxford, or beach vacations along the Atlantic. But skip Easton and your stomach may regret it. What this central spot may lack in Chesapeake Bay views or pristine beaches, it more than makes up for with a top-notch dining scene unlike anything else on the Eastern Shore.

By its very location, Easton has a strategic advantage for creative chefs looking to open a restaurant away from an urban center. The town is located between farms and the water, which means direct access to some of the freshest produce and seafood in the region. Easton is also home to a popular farmers market, open every Saturday from April to December, rain or shine, from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

That access, plus its inherent hospitality, makes Easton stand out from other locales, argues Daniel Pochron, Executive Chef of Hunters' Tavern. "You'll find a variety of fresh ingredients that are cultivated for delicious, unique,

and local cuisine," he says.

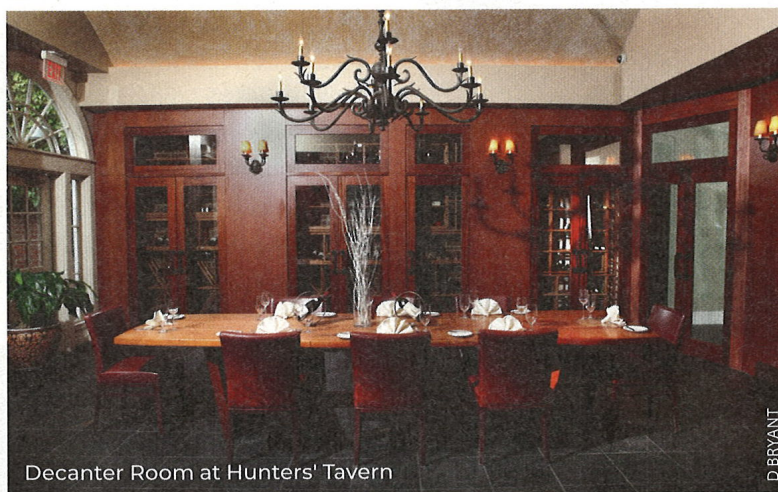
"Easton is also filled with several independent restaurants offering their own unique take on Eastern Shore cuisine. We welcome diversity and have a passion for sharing our cuisine, impeccable service, unique dining experience, and history with

everyone who walks through our doors."

As the signature restaurant of the historic Tidewater Inn, Hunters' Tavern embodies comfort-food cooking. It's well known as a restaurant for special celebrations and family gatherings, but locals also flock here for more casual affairs. Their outdoor patio overlooking the heart of downtown is

an especially festive place to gather for Sunday brunch, ideally with a mimosa or Old Bay Bloody Mary in hand.

And while there are oysters and crab dip on the menu—this is the Bay, after all—Pochron is experimenting with a menu that brings together the regional influences of the Eastern Shore with other food-centric destinations, such as Louisiana. "I believe Hunters' Tavern defines itself as a Southern-style restaurant with European influence," he says. "For instance, the turtle soup has been on the menu for well over 50 years, [and it] derives from the South, and New Orleans Creole cuisine." ▶





Daniel Pochron

EXECUTIVE CHEF
HUNTERS' TAVERN

"You are getting
food here that you
aren't getting
everywhere else."

Another dish setting them apart is a more technical take on fried chicken. Pochron sous vides his chicken, cooking it low and slow for maximum juiciness, and serves it alongside a side of braised collards, butternut squash bacon hash, and tomato gravy. "There are also so many other wonderful dining options in Easton where you can get a one-of-a-kind experience, making it a destination for all types of food and drink lovers," says Pochron. "You are getting food here that you aren't getting everywhere else."

NEW CHEFS AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT

One of the more recent dynamics fueling Easton's epicurean boom is chefs who are crossing the Bay Bridge to open new restaurants in a community eager to embrace them. Tiger Lily is the latest example of this trend. It comes from Executive Chef Tyler Heim and General Manager Austin Smale, who got his start working in restaurants in Annapolis, including Vin 909 and Level. In October 2021, Smale helped open this new bar/restaurant hybrid focused on hyper-seasonal ingredients, with a mission to serve the freshest tacos on the Eastern Shore.

"This is definitely a taco-driven menu, with more than a half-dozen options, and subtle influences from cuisines found in South America and Asia," Smale says. "Each taco plays a role on the menu with deliberate flavor profiles, from a chili-braised brisket taco to one stuffed with roasted sweet potatoes, plus fish and shrimp tacos."

There is a taco to match any mood here, and Tiger Lily pairs these perfectly with tiki cocktails, which are quick to



After School tacos at
Tiger Lily



*Austin Smale
Ketan "K" Patel
Tyler Heim*

TIGER LILY

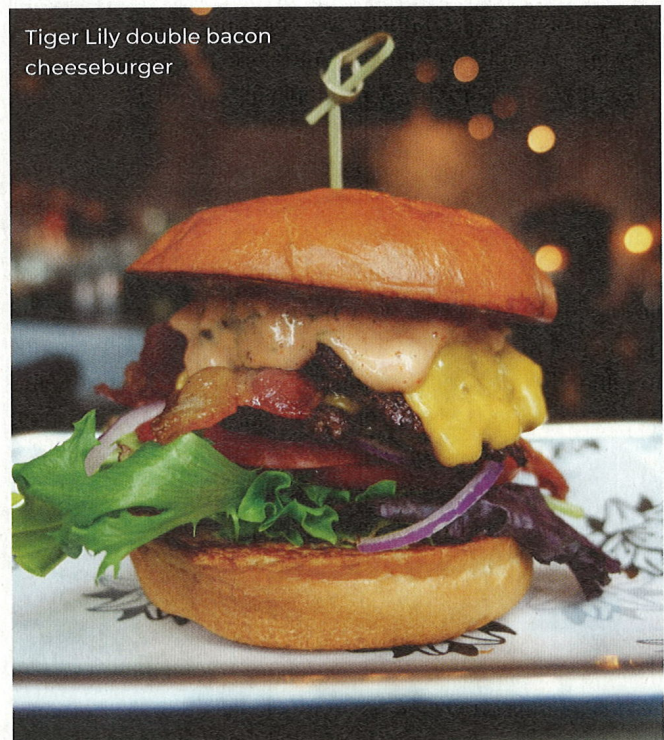
"I think it's to the credit of this community, which has been so supportive of us from the start."

capture your eye, too. On the drink menu, you'll find small-batch mezcals, spicy margaritas, and brightly colored tiki drinks with exuberant finishes, including a few flame-garnished cocktails. "We're trying to create drinks with balance but also have fun with the experience too," Smale says. Tiger Lily quickly gained a devoted following in just a few short months. "I think it's to the credit of this community, which has been so supportive of us from the start."

Customer loyalty is also how Emily Chandler, the owner of Piazza Italian Market, has stayed in business for over a decade. Chandler originally hails from Northern Virginia and moved to Easton 13 years ago to deliver a taste of Italy to the Eastern Shore. Tasty goods at her combination cafe/shop include hearty lasagnas, freshly made paninis, and a pantry of Italian provisions and wines. Along the way, she's made friends, who she now knows as regulars, and she credits the loyalty of these customers for keeping her in Easton even after all these years.

"I sincerely believe that food can create and sustain a community," she says. "I think it's the people that live here, who make this such an incredible place. We live in a community of food lovers and well-traveled people—people who support small businesses consistently."

Chandler appreciates the wide range of restaurants and flavors in Easton, and recognizes it as a top eating destination in the Mid-Atlantic, not just for visitors but also for locals. She herself is a regular at both Out of the Fire and



Tiger Lily double bacon cheeseburger

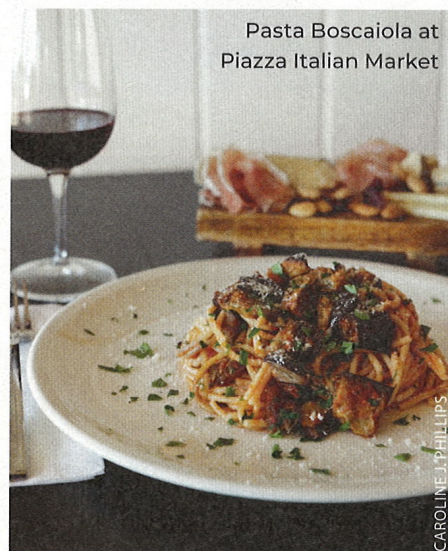


CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS

Emily Chandler

OWNER
PIAZZA ITALIAN MARKET

“We live in a community of food lovers and well-traveled people—people who support small businesses consistently.”



Pasta Boscaiola at Piazza Italian Market

CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS



Charcuterie at Piazza Italian Market

CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS

Scossa, two top-rated, locally owned restaurants. “I think the more food destinations we have, the more people are finding their way to Easton,” she says. “If you love to travel, and you love delicious food, especially Italian fare, then come visit us. Easton is definitely worth the detour.”

A NEWCOMER BRINGS RAVE REVIEWS

A lot of attention has come to this historic town lately, by way of Bluepoint Hospitality. Ask anyone in the local food scene and they’ll likely say that Bluepoint’s founder Paul Prager, a multi-millionaire entrepreneur, has pushed Easton in new culinary directions in the last few years.

Harley Peet is the executive chef behind Prager’s vision, and he’s gained critical acclaim for creating a number of bucket-list eating spots. “We have made great progress in a short amount of time, and it is certainly our goal to be considered a premier dining destination,” Peet says.

This restaurant and retail group has brought everything from elegant French fine dining at Bas Rouge to world-class Scotch served at The Stewart, plus hard-to-find Italian wines and authentic Roman-style pizzas served by slice at Roma Alla Pala. But if you’re looking for a full range of flavors and sips, head straight to The Wardroom. It’s an all-day cafe and market that transforms into an intimate date night option, offering Mediterranean-inspired pastas and top wines from around the world.

The menu is divided into four sections—charcuterie, salads, house-made pastas, plus desserts—and it’s a space where you’re invited to linger. You can peruse the

marketplace, which carries local provisions including cheeses, or stop by for a wine list curated by Lead Sommelier and Beverage Director Natalie Tapken, with labels hailing from the U.S., Italy, Spain, France, Austria, and Germany. You can sample a number of them via self-service Enomatic wine dispensers, which pour by the ounce or by the glass.

On the dinner menu, dishes like shrimp pantescia pays homage to the Bay; it's topped with sun-dried tomatoes, grown locally and prepared in-house. For something simpler and extremely savory, try the cacio e pepe—a bucatini pasta dish that comes served with a four-pepper blend and a heaping mound of fresh Pecorino Romano cheese. ▶



Bas Rouge

NICOLE FRANZEN



Sticky toffee pudding at The Stewart

SCOTT SUSHMAN



CAROLINE J. PHILLIPS

Harley Peet

EXECUTIVE CHEF
BLUEPOINT HOSPITALITY

“We have made great progress in a short amount of time, and it is certainly our goal to be considered a premier dining destination.”