

New England
Chefs Beat

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BY SARAH SPIGEMAN





Kerry Altiero Chef and owner of Cafe Miranda in Rockland, Maine prepares the night's special of cod from Port Clyde Fresh Catch.

THE ONSET OF WINTER in the Northeast often means beautiful snowfalls and crackling fires in the hearth. But as the months drag on, the winter turns from pristine white to a murky gray, and the memories of fresh lettuce, perfectly ripe tomatoes, and the smoky char of steaks on the grill—or even Christmas cookies—are distant memories. But there are those who cook to beat those winter blues, even when the sun seems to have set by 3 p.m., and the temperature barely reaches double digits. These survivors create delicious food year-round, and keep it interesting and exciting to the palate. How do they get their culinary inspiration through the long New England winter? What do our chefs do to keep customers flocking to their restaurants no matter how cold outside? And what ingredients do we overlook when we keep on paying a king's ransom for imported tomatoes that taste like cardboard?

Chef Kerry Altiero, of Cafe Miranda in Rockland, Maine, has found people deep in the throes of winter craving "dark flavors, roasted, charred in my brick oven, ragus, pork chops and kraut, baked cheese dishes." A recent menu special included a free-form pasta served with house-made beef sausage accented with fennel fronds, black pepper, coriander seeds, and hot Italian cherry peppers. The richness of the meat tempered with the sweet fennel, fragrant coriander, and spicy peppers is as flavorful and innovative as you might expect from Altiero.

Equal parts motocross enthusiast and gleeful wizard in the kitchen, Altiero is a staunch advocate for locally grown and farmed produce and meats. He grows his own herbs and vegetables at Headacre Farms. While it might be a headache for him, it allows him to keep costs down for customers while ensuring that he knows exactly what he puts into his dishes each night. He buys products year round from Dandelion Springs Farm, Sewell Organic Orchards, and other locally based, organic, and/or natural farms to ensure customers eat fresh and varied foods.

Although he reveals that everyone loves the scent of "real stock bubbling away on the stove, permeating the restaurant," he maintains that some people *think* they don't like winter foods simply because of their names. (It does make sense. Who wants to eat something called grits? It sounds like the squidgy bits one pulls out of a clogged drain.) And yet, anyone who has had a truly great bowl of grits knows how transcendently delicious this humbly named dish is. Delicious root vegetables like rutabagas, the winter root Chef Altiero calls a "vegetable orphan," are ignored simply because their name is unfamiliar and people are not used to preparing them. Yet, Chef Altiero divulges that,

roasted in the oven, the vegetable releases all its starches and sweetness, making even the most stubborn root vegetable hated come around.

He cooks other root vegetables as well, from local producers like Crmyn of Maine and liVeskeag Farms, to make the most of vegetables this season. Yet, even with access to the freshest and most local ingredients, Chef Altiero suffers, by his own admission, year-round cabin fever. Could you really expect anything else from the man who put "Lambshank Redemption" on his menu? He gets his creative juices flowing with help from an unlikely and hardly local source: pineapple. As he says: "Get a pineapple and see where it goes from there." With ripe pineapple, a can of coconut milk, and some fresh mint, anyone can be instantly transported to the beaches of some tropical isle. Just

What do our Northeast chefs do to keep customers flocking to their restaurants no matter how cold outside?

don't look outside or you will see that your windshield has frozen over yet again. When that happens—and it will—it's time for a little stronger medicine.

Though he favors "sex ... and strong red wine" to tide him over in the coldest of months (and, really, who doesn't?), Chef Altiero has found that his Redneck Martini is popular with customers. Comprised of "Sevall Orchards organic apple cider, warm (not hot) with a slice of apple," it seems to cure what ails us all! With a little help from his own farm, local producers, and the ingenuity he was born with, Chef Altiero manages to keep the cabin fever away from Cafe Miranda and his guests coming back for more.

Chef Peter Davis, who runs Henrietta's Kitchen in The Charles Hotel in Cambridge, Massachusetts, agrees with Altiero that customers crave "hearty and warming flavors when it is cold outside ... smoked and braised anything." Davis, who practiced his craft in such exotic locales as Hong Kong and Singapore before becoming chef at Henrietta's Table, is devoted to using only natural and locally produced products of all sorts. Every single vegetable on his New England fare menu is organic and locally grown. Even in the dead of winter, customers enjoy locally grown beets and Brussels sprouts. He uses locally caught fish and naturally raised meat products to ensure a "fresh from the farm experience" for his diners. A supporter of sustainable



Chef Peter Davis of Henrietta's Kitchen
in Cambridge, Massachusetts

agricultural farming, he makes sure that the vendors he works with, like Nesenkeag Farms and Pete's Greens, do not use any genetically modified practices, and that they grow their produce without chemicals. He even takes it a step further, with the "herbs growing outside in my hothouse" to keep them fresh and quality excellent.

Though he claims he does not get cabin fever and "loves cellared root vegetables," Chef Davis suggests people cooking at home when the cold wind blows "spice it up with local root veggies and different varieties of turnips." The savory-sweet taste of mashed turnips with melting butter and a sharp kick from Pecorino Romano cheese could nudge anyone out of their baked potato rut. The most important component to keeping cabin fever at bay for Chef Davis is twofold - it is not just the natural flavor of the ingredient, but where it's grown. The location of the product is as close to your kitchen as possible, there is no way for the final dish to be anything but exciting and delicious.

In Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Ristorante Massimo's Chef Jethro Loichle is also a fan of "having a neighborhood farm that the community can enjoy, but coming to a restaurant and seeing someone do something wonderful and creative with it is what our restaurant is all about." Chef Loichle is an ardent supporter of local farmers, fishermen, and butchers. As someone who raises pigs himself, he prefers to keep food "as close to the land as possible ... seeing a head of lettuce bloom [from] the size of a marble to a bowling ball to eating it - there is nothing more beautiful." To that end, he grows herbs and vegetables in his own greenhouse and buys produce exclusively from local farmer Andy Siver, of Sage's Greens and Garlic. He also purchases fish exclusively from the "Portsmouth fishing co-op. All our lobster, scallops, cod, hake." The co-op is a group of local fishermen who fish every day that the weather allows and supply the restaurant with ingredients like the day-boat cod in the *peste con patate*. Chef Loichle is committed to knowing who caught his fish, when they caught it, and making sure that it is fresh and local. As he puts it "prices go up and down according to how cold and choppy the waters are and what the fishing quotas are, but no matter what

the fluctuations may be, I support local fishermen." Even when the wind is furious and fishermen cannot go out, Loichle wards off cabin fever, saying, "I love the feeling of knowing your beans are all put up, and your meat is ready to braise, but you have to be prepared. Get your vegetables brined, your tomatoes canned. Make sure your pigs are ready to be made into bacon, guanciale, pancetta, sausage, ham ... you have to think ahead."

He takes advantage of the winter to start looking through seed catalogs. While he is preparing hearty stews and "Tuscan kale", "braised cannellini beans," he is already choosing seeds, planning his warm weather beans, tomatoes, and leucocenes of all varieties so that they will be ready by the time spring comes. It is all about "staying ahead of what you're going to be out of." For example, "root vegetables take 120 days to grow. If you want beets, you had better plan ahead! Loichle waxes almost poetic about how "beets fresh from the ground just bleed sugar. They are so sweet when they are roasted, it's like biting into an apple in the sun." Chef Loichle's mission, whatever the season is: "Don't be out of touch with your food ... support your neighbors, family, and community. We take delicious, local products to tell the truth about the vegetable ... I'm going to serve you what I would want to eat." And that sounds just fine by me.

I realize now that my cabin fever has, all these years, been of my own doing: While buying rock hard avocados, I should have focused on local turnips like Chef Davis. While ordering imported fish that was frozen and tasteless, I could have been feasting on local delicacies while supporting my community, as Chef Loichle does. And now I realize that Chef Altiero's Redneck Martini could only be made from fresh, local, apple cider.

Look outside your window. Is it gray and blustery out there? Is there a winter farmer's market in your neighborhood? Or perhaps the weather is not too bad today, and you can see the fishing boats off the coastline as you tuck your sweater around your shivering frame. While normally I would lament with you and bemoan the duration of the cold and wet part of the year, I now think of roasted celery root and freshly caught lobster, braised pork, and rich stews and think: this isn't so bad.

Recipes on the following page.

Couscous Cakes

These cakes can be made smaller if needed, and you could add crab, cooked fish, herbs, chopped spinach, or - well, you get the idea. Serve with stewed tomatoes, or with any type of meat or bean ragu. This mixture can also be used to stuff peppers, zucchini or small eggplant. This is really a multi-use thing, born of "What do I have in the larder during a snowstorm?" Chef Kerry AUiero, Cafe

Miranda, Rockland, Maine

2 cups couscous
V3cup basil, chopped
1/3 cup Pecorino Romano cheese,
finely grated

7 eggs

V3cup flour

1 teaspoon salt and pepper

Olive oil

1. Cook the couscous according to package directions and allow to cool.
2. Add all other ingredients and mix well. Let rest for an hour, then stir thoroughly again.
3. Heat a heavy bottomed or cast iron pan. Add oil and heat until hot but not smoking.
4. Shape 1/2 cup portions into cakes, about 3 inches across and 1/2 inch thick. Add to pan and saute until golden brown. Turn over and cook until lightly browned on the other side.



Cafe Miranda's Redneck Martini

2 ounces of Hendrick's Irish gin
4 ounces warmed apple cider
Apple slice for garnish

1. In a martini glass, combine gin and cider, Garnish with an apple slice.

BBQ Grilled and Braised Lamb Shanks

This wonderful lamb recipe comes from Fresh & Honest: Food from the Farms of New England and the Kitchen of Henrietta's Table by Peter Davis and Alexandra Hat! with photos by Heath Robbins. These fall-off-the-bone, delicious shanks are terrific served with witted greens, spinach, or braised cot'lards.

4 lamb shanks

1/4 cup Dry BBQ Rub (see below)

1 gallon Chicken Stock

1/2 cup Bourbon BBQ Sauce (see below)

1. Rub the shanks with the Dry BBQ Rub until totally covered.
2. Place shanks on a hot grill and cook on all sides until lightly charred.
3. Remove the shanks and put them in a heavy-bottomed saucepot and cover with the stock.
4. Place on the stove and bring to a boil, then reduce to a simmer.
5. Cook the shanks until the meat is tender and pulls from the bone (approximately 3 hours).
6. Remove the shanks from the pan and reduce the sauce to desired consistency, Then add the Bourbon BBQ Sauce, and cook for 10 more minutes.
7. While the shanks are still warm, pull the meat from the bone.
8. Place the meat back in the sauce to reheat and serve.

Serves 4

Bourbon BBQ Sauce

4 cups ketchup

1 cup water

1 tablespoon garlic, chopped

1/2 cup brown sugar

1 teaspoon Tabasco sauce

1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce

1 bay leaf

1/2 cup Jim Beam bourbon

1. Combine all ingredients in a pot except for the bourbon.
2. Bring to a boil and cook for 1 hour.
3. Add bourbon, simmer for 20 minutes more.

Serves 8

Dry BBQ Rub

2 tablespoons paprika

2 tablespoons chili powder

2 teaspoons salt

2 teaspoons onion powder

2 teaspoons garlic powder

2 teaspoons cumin powder

1 teaspoon cayenne

1 teaspoon dried thyme

1 teaspoon white pepper

1. Mix all ingredients together in a bowl. Keep covered until ready to use.

Makes 1 batch

Roasted Beets and Pan-Seared

Day-Boat Scallops

This appetizer is one of Jethro Loichle's, (Executive Chef at Massimo's in Portsmouth, New Hampshire) favorites, incorporating great seasonal ingredients and beautiful jumbo scallops.

V2 pound red beets, scrubbed (1-2 medium sized beets)

V2 pound yellow beets, scrubbed

1 bulb of fennel

6 large shallots

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 tablespoon sherry vinegar

1 teaspoon Dijon mustard

Salt to taste

4-6 day-boat U-10 scallops depending on party size

1. Preheat oven to 350°F. Line a large piece of aluminum foil with parchment paper. Place only the red beets in center of parchment. Drizzle with 1 tablespoon of olive oil and dust with salt. Fold aluminum foil to enclose beets. Repeat process with yellow beets and then with shallots and place all 3 packages on a small baking sheet and roast until tender (about 1 hour for the beets, about half an hour for the shallots)
2. Once the beets and shallots have been removed from the oven, allow them to sit until no longer hot to the touch. Rub or peel off the beet skins and discard. Slice beets 1/4 inch thick and lay them on plates, alternating colors.
3. Dust the scallops with salt. In a medium-high heated pan, add 2 tablespoons of olive oil and saute the scallops, Cook on one side for 2 minutes, then turn off the heat and flip the scallops to their other side to sear, keeping them in the pan (for a minimum of 1 minute Keep warm),
4. In a medium bowl, whisk together vinegar, mustard, roasted shallots, a pinch of salt, and 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Slice the fennel bulb as thinly as possible, Dress the fennel with this mixture.
5. Place the scallops on top of the beets and then garnish with the fennel and vinaigrette. Enjoy!

Serves 4-6

How do you beat cabin fever?

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