

# portland, me

GREEK WINE, GREAT CHEESE + TOP MAINE INGREDIENTS



When I landed at Maine's Portland International Jetport recently, the girl at the rental-car desk told me she'd moved there from Portland, Oregon, and that she thought the East Coast Portland was just as cool. I found that hard to believe. One city has a reputation for great food, wine and bars, and the other has a reputation for great...lobster.

To be honest, Portland wasn't exactly a culinary wasteland before. Chef Sam Hayward's 11-year-old **Fore Street** (288 Fore St.; 207-775-2717) is one of the Northeast's great restaurants; at **Hugo's** (88 Middle St.; 207-774-8538), chef Rob Evans (an F&W Best New Chef 2004) prepares a truly avant-garde menu. And then there's **Browne Trading Company** (Merrill's Wharf; 800-944-7848), the seafood supplier to many of New England and New York's best kitchens.

But after my weekend in Portland, I realized that its food scene has gotten all-around terrific. Over at

**Five Fifty-Five** (555 Congress St.; 207-761-0555), chef Steve Corry has spent the last four years perfecting dishes that emphasize local ingredients, like fennel-crusted Casco Bay monkfish. Chef Abby Harmon of **Caiola's** (58 Pine St.; 207-772-1110) is obsessed with grains, and I had an addictive dish of *grano* (pastalike pearled wheat) and carrots in a creamy tomato sauce there. Caiola's also pours Greek

wines by the glass, which are hard to find even in Manhattan. On Munjoy Hill, a once-dicey area that has become the city's new restaurant epicenter, there's the one-year-old

**Bar Lola** (100 Congress St.; 207-775-5652). Co-chefs Josh Potocki, Christian Kryger and Guy Hernandez serve everything small plate-style, from warm bread salad to Maine shrimp on soft polenta.

But the biggest surprise I found in Portland might well be its emerging cheese scene, especially since **The Cheese Iron** (200 U.S. Rte. 1, Scarborough; 207-883-4057) opened last summer. Launched by Vincent Maniaci, who apprenticed at England's legendary Neal's Yard, and his wife, Jill Dutton, the sunny store has a small aging cave and an excellent selection, from local Kennebunkport Dry Jack to a European favorite of mine, nutty Tête de Moine. It also carries good-looking sandwiches, sterling silver cheese knives, about 200 wines and even hard-to-find charcuterie like *lachsschinken*, a German cold-smoked pork. One of the few things the Cheese Iron doesn't have? Lobster. —Kate Krader

## Standout Bakery

One of Portland's best new bakeries is two-year-old **Two Fat Cats** (47 India St.; 207-347-5144). The Fat Cats' specialty is classic American baking—tender apple and cherry pies and marshmallow buttercream-filled whoopee pies. Also notable: Two of those yummy whoopee pies and five large, nutty chocolate chip cookies cost me less than \$12.

At Two Fat Cats Bakery, co-owner Kristen DuShane (BELOW, CENTER) makes all-American desserts.

