



CARRYING ON A FAMILY TRADITION AT FISHERMAN'S INN

By **Gail Greco** Photos by **Tony Lewis, Jr.**

Not having to cook makes me giddy like a tourist. Pampered with food by the Bay is escapist and adventuresome, even if only locally. After a recent visit to the Fisherman's Inn in Grasonville, I left bubbly satisfied, and even with a souvenir!

I could not have requested a better table as the hostess sat us by a picture window with views of Kent Narrows and the restaurant's soothing seaside garden. The sun was still high at 6:30, dappling light onto a waterfall, bubbling over a rocky ledge and nestled into a grotto surrounded by fountain grasses and flowers of purple statice.

Pooling bubbles sent me in search of a bloom between the swashbuckling cocktails on the menu, like the Bloody Point Bloody of pepper vodka or Sailor's Painkiller of rum and coconut, to find Flower Power, a refreshing botanic mix of St. Germain Elderflower liqueur, champagne, and peel-me-a-grape frozen table grapes in a chilled stem glass. It was like drinking

an edible bouquet with a tang. My dinner partner was relishing a grog of orange vodka and Triple Sec, his lips pursing his way through the Kent Narrows Crush, its palate passage smoothed with fresh orange from the rind.

A tuna sashimi with seaweed salad and a cargo of baked soft pretzel with crab and artichoke dip stoked our meal while a nearby table was slurping up an appetizer of steamed Italian mussels and chef's fried calamari. Fried oysters also could have complemented my drink as I eyed some of the 400 oyster plates collected by Miss Betty Thomas Schulz, the restaurant's longtime matriarch and daughter of the original owner. The plates punctuate the dining areas, along with pictures of the Thomas family, who opened the restaurant in 1930.

You take in all this tradition with chef Paul Worsdendorf's food. At the helm for 20 years, he keeps things fresh, complementing tables with local ingredients from field and sea. My delicate crab-dabbed Sauteed Scarlet Snapper Francaise came with local asparagus. A tomato salad boasted chef's own nutty and buttery mozzarella! Chicken Chesapeake with Crab Imperial exemplified the mix of down-home cooking with the refinement of culinary style and enough pizzazz to wow a discriminating tourist.

Specials are always offered at Fisherman's, and this night, I also sampled a grilled jumbo shrimp-and-scallops kebab over orzo—smoky and fresh with a chili verde sauce. My partner picked a filet mignon with a creamy gorgonzola melt and garnished with a frazzle of batter-fried onions.



Seafood ranges from rockfish in season to coastal lobster, and there is an ample selection of red meats, reasonably priced with plenty to eat. The pastas are available with seafood, chicken, or veggie, and my hunger for the grain was satisfied by substituting spaghetti for potatoes. I reached for my partner's side of homemade stewed tomatoes just to taste, but ended up so in love with the flavor that I tossed them into my pasta. Finally, I paused before ordering dessert, which no true tourist would do without.

I chose a brownie baked in a mini cast-iron skillet that came hot to the table with melted Belgian chocolate and my choice of hand-churned Fisherman's Inn ice cream, the pistachio gelato. Tammy, who has waited tables here for an amazing 27 years, knew that my partner would want the Fisherman's version of Mississippi Mud Cake instead of the Lemongrass Mango Sorbet. I would go to Fisherman's just for the desserts if so much else did not also tempt me. The dessert list appeals to the kid in all of us. This is, after all, a family restaurant.

The night we had dinner, the table next to us seated a family of 22. But because the upholstered booths absorb sound and there are no exposed warehouse style ceilings, we did not hear them or the suspended model train quietly chugging along the ceiling. A lush new carpet helps, too, with bubbles under your feet in a memorable design of undulating waves. Three mirrors—like portholes—help the room feel like a casual dining space aboard a cruise ship. And there is also the modern but warm, intimate, and newly renovated lounge with floors of wooden sailboat decking.

The restaurant's evolutionary story is charming and rich. In a crab shell: Captain Alex Thomas and his wife Mae opened the original Fisherman's while living upstairs with their two children, sometimes sleeping on the front porch and renting their own bedrooms for overnight anglers wanting to troll the Narrows. Jump to 1971 and the larger restaurant opened with daughter Betty and son-in-law Oscar Schulz, plus a seafood market and their more casual crab deck on the water, all lumped together as Fisherman's Village. Fires, floods, and down economies never stopped the family from continuing their service, now run by the Schulz children.

In Miss Betty's Fisherman's Inn Cookbook, you can find pages of Fisherman's lore, including how Capt. Thomas hunted marsh muskrats and folks enjoyed a floating theater. "I shouldn't forget to mention," she wrote, "the floating theater that traveled, or was towed, to small towns up and down the Eastern Shore, including here at the Narrows...and an auditorium seating 700." Miss Betty wrote the cookbook in 2005; she passed away just two years ago at age 87, a long way from that six-year-old who slept on the family porch to accommodate travelers. Miss Betty's book came home with me as the perfect souvenir for the nights when I do have to cook!

Gail Greco is a food and home interiors writer and a photo art director/stylist. Author of 16 books and TV producer/host for the Discovery Channel and PBS, she is a Knowledge Partner at Yahoo and chef/editor of the DuPont Teflon cooking website. She lives and works on the Eastern Shore and in Sarasota, Fla.