YEARS OF BEST of MAINE

Down East

Best of the Best
2008

BUTCHER
Bisson’s Meat Market
112 Meadow Rd., Topsham. 207-725-7215.

We’re reluctant to share this superlative, because the family-owned Bisson’s Meat Market is one of those perfect places that you want to keep to yourself so it won’t be spoiled by popularity. Located in rural Topsham, the butcher shop has been in business for 87 years turning out hand-cut meat, sausage, pepperoni, raw milk, and butter, and other products. “The beef jerky is our number one seller,” Cindy Bisson told us. “We make it 800 to 1,000 pounds at a time and can’t keep it in stock.”

EURO DELI
Morse’s Sauerkraut & Euro Deli
3856 Washington Rd., Waldoboro. 207-832-5569. morsessauerkraut.com

Oh, for the days when Morse’s Sauerkraut & Euro Deli in Waldoboro was our own little secret! An excellent European-style deli and café on a back road in the middle of nowhere would seem an unlikely candidate for overexposure. But Morse’s has gotten so popular — thanks a lot, Boston Globe — it can be hard to get in the door on weekends. Still, Morse’s famed ‘kraut, its 10-year-old cheddar, and fabulous Kraut Haus restaurant (think spaetzle, schnitzel, and Reuben’s) make this a must-visit destination. Danke schön!

2009

HOT SAUCE
Captain Mowatt’s Canceaux Sauce
207-773-8047. wohesperus.com

It’s not every day when a Maine hot sauce heads into the habanero heart of darkness that is New Mexico and burns the doors off the local competition. But that’s what Dan Stevens of the Portland-based W.O. Hesperus Company did with his Canceaux Sauce — a fiery mix of jalapenos, African birdseye, japonese, and cayenne red chilies, with just the right touch of sugar, vinegar, and garlic. Stevens’ homemade concoction took first place in 1999 at the Scovie Awards in Albuquerque (and again at in 2000 at the Scovies in Reno). No, we had never heard of the Scovie Awards either, but we will testify to the superiority of this sweet and scalding sauce. W.O. Hesperus’ other picante pickles, jerky, and rubs warm our hearts, too. Available at finer stores and specialty shops.

SPECIALTY FOOD SHOP
The Cheese Iron
200 U.S. Rte 1 Suite 300, Scarborough. 207-883-4057. thecheeseiron.com

The Cheese Iron bears zero resemblance to a back street in Paris’ Montmarte. Zero. So the Cheese Iron — a European-style shop offering more than 200 domestic and international cheeses, from chèvres and bleus to aged cheddars — already gets a prize for its sheer unlikeliness. But what really distinguishes this shop is the expert advice of the people who work here and their devotion to what they call the holy trinity of food — cheese, wine, and bread.
The Maine potato is such an enduring and delicious epitome of starchy goodness, and the Fox family, of Aroostook County, has been growing potatoes for so long (since the 1800s), that you begin to wonder why they waited to get into the chip business. No matter. The chip that Rhett Fox refined in the back room of his Mapleton convenience store has been worth the wait. Made with russet potatoes, sliced by hand, and fried until dark (“but not too dark” in Fox’s words) in canola and corn oils, these are, amazingly, the only potato chips actually manufactured in Maine. Available in three flavors — plain, salt and black pepper, and barbecue — they also happen to be addictive. Fortunately, they’re cholesterol and trans-fat free, too. Available at fine markets.

**Fox Family Potato Chips**

888-304-8281. foxfamilychips.com

There’s nothing like a rich piece of chocolate cake to sweeten an afternoon. For a leisurely respite from the bustle of Portland, settle into Bar of Chocolate Café, a dark, brick-walled comfy café and wine bar nestled on Wharf Street. Pick up a paper, order a coffee, and don’t pass on dessert. Well known for an extremely decadent chocolate torte, the café also makes a chocolate cake with sea salt caramel frosting. It’s near perfection — not too sweet, not too dense, just moist enough, all topped of by a touch of creamy saltiness that keeps you craving more.

**North Creek Farm**

24 Sebasco Rd., Phippsburg. 207-389-1341. northcreekfarm.org

Next time you’re heading to Popham Beach, pick up a picnic lunch at North Creek, a 19th-century saltwater farm about 12 miles south of Bath. The paninis, served on Borealis bread, elevate the humble sandwich to a gourmet treat. Among the offerings: The Bev (tuna, artichokes, tapenade, and Gruyere), the Surfer (smoked turkey, Spruce Mountain wild blueberry chutney, arugula, and Gruyere), and our favorite, smoked salmon, cream cheese, roasted red onions, and fresh dill. Allow time to stop and smell the roses — North Creek’s nursery boasts some rare and fragrant varieties.

**2011**

**SANDWICH TO GO**

North Creek Farm

24 Sebasco Rd., Phippsburg. 207-389-1341. northcreekfarm.org

No offense to Maine’s signature sandwich, but sometimes we crave the meat of lobster’s humble cousin. Sweet and flaky Jonah crab — the kind you most often find in a bun around here — is nearly as different in taste and texture from Maryland’s famous blue crab as from...
lobster. The delicate meat demands a light touch and gets it at King Eider’s. Held together with a smidgen of mayo and seasoned with fresh dill, chives, and a hint of pepper, the generous serving of crabmeat fairly overflows its toasted and buttered hot dog roll. It is simplicity perfected.

GOURMET SPREAD

Casco Bay Butter
207-370-7072. cascobaybutter.com

Movie night is full of tough decisions: Comedy or drama? Sea salt or honey? Wait, you’ve been putting regular butter on popcorn? Up your spread game with the rich, seasonal flavors churned out by Alicia Menard and Jennell Carter of Casco Bay Butter. This is having-guests-over butter, with a high butterfat content and perfect-for-pairing varieties like truffle and lemon chive. Launched with a KitchenAid mixer two summers back, Casco Bay is now sold in some 50 stores and farmers markets, including NYC’s gourmand-beloved Zabar’s.

AUTHENTIC MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Vazquez Mexican Takeout
38 Main St., Millbridge. 207-546-2219. facebook.com/vazquezmex

Romana Vazquez’s homemade tortillas are the key. Using imported ingredients (“There’s nothing around here that you can use to make authentic Mexican food,” says daughter Juana), Romana creates from-scratch tortillas just the way she made them growing up in Apaseo el Alto, in central Mexico. That provides the foundation for a true south-of-the-border experience Down East. Further cred: Vazquez Mexican Takeout originated in a bus, where Romana sold tacos, burritos, and chimichangas — along with more exotic selections like guacarache, pozole, and mole — to migrant rakers in Washington County’s blueberry fields.

FARM STAND

Stutzman’s Farm Stand & Bakery
891 Douty Hill Rd., Sangerville. 207-564-8596.

There are farm stands, and then there’s Stutzman’s. Third-generation farmers Sid and Rainey Stutzman have turned a small, backroad farm stand into a community hub, with fresh produce, yes, but also homemade baked goods, wood-fired pizza, and Sunday brunch set to live music. Regulars include painter Alan Bray, who points out, “You can sit in the dining room, look out over the farm, and see people picking what you’re eating.” It doesn’t get more farm-to-table than that.

2016

CHEESEMAKER

Lakin’s Gorges Cheese
461 Commercial St., Rockport. 207-230-4318. lakinsgorgescheese.com

If you think ricotta is just filling for pasta, think again. Nothing like the stuff in the plastic tubs from the grocery, Allison Lakin’s delicate, sweet, fresh ricotta will inspire you to create soft, fluffy omelets, simple dinner salads, and, when tossed with berries, nuts, and honey, a sublime pudding-like dessert. If stinky is your jam, consider Lakin’s Grandiflora, an aged, slightly funky washed rind cheese, or her pungent Cascadilla Blue. Because milk is affected by what the cows are eating and where they are in their lactation cycle, Lakin works with only one supplier, Tide Mill organic dairy farm in Edmunds, ensuring consistently delicious results.

BREWERY

Allagash Brewing Company
50 Industrial Way, Portland. 207-878-5385. allagash.com

Allagash sold its first beer 21 years ago this month, a notable anniversary in the booze biz. Since then, countless other craft breweries have come online in Maine. Several belong in any conversation about the state’s best — but at the end of the day, only Allagash belongs in a conversation about the country’s best. (If you don’t believe us, take it from James Beard Award judges, who nominated Allagash founder Rob Tod for this year’s distinction of outstanding wine, beer, or spirits professional.) What sets the brewery apart? It’s the mix of perfected mainstays (the classic triple, say, or the ubiquitous white ale), exciting experimental beers (spontaneously fermented sours, previously thought only makeable in Belgium’s Senne River Valley), and continued additions to the regular and rotating lineup (like St. Klippestein, a silky, rich, and woody bourbon-barrel-aged stout, or the new Sixteen Counties, a Belgian-style pale accented with layers of hop flavor). The only thing more exciting than what Allagash does now is what they might do next.

2017

CHARCUTERIE

Charcuterie of Unity
Leelyn Road, Unity. 207-948-1777.

Did you know Unity is on the way to pretty much anywhere you want to go in Maine? Either that or we’re just finding excuses to detour so we can stop at Charcuterie of Unity for delicious dried sausages, bacon, and smoked cheese made by Matthew Secich, a former four-star-restaurant chef who joined Unity’s Amish community a few years back. He and his wife, Crystal, staff a simple cabin-turned-butcher-shop, where ropes of kielbasa, andouille, chorio, and smoked mozzarella hang temptingly from hooks above the counter. Lanterns provide the illumination, and the Seciches use a hand-powered slicer to cut ham, sweet beef bologna, and other goodies. Their three kids come and go, often pitching in to ring up orders on a hand-cranked cash register. It’s always a pleasure to visit their good-natured, family-run shop — and impossible to leave without a bag or two of their irresistible wares.

COFFEE ROASTER

Coffee Roasters of the Kennebunks
163 Port Rd., Kennebunk. 207-967-8304. coffeeroastersofthekennebunks.com

Just $1? For a rich, smooth 12-ounce coffee? Nowadays? Indeed so at Sandra Duckett’s homey coffee shop/retail store/lunch counter/bakery in downtown Kennebunk, where the first thing to catch your eye (and tickle your nose) is the mid-19th-century, German-made Kaffeehuis (coffee house) Roaster she still uses, inherited from her father’s shop in Cambridge, Massachusetts. According to Duckett, her father sold Dunkin’ Donuts the recipe for its original house blend. (There, by the way, the coffee will run you twice as much.)
LAKESIDE ROMANCE

Lodge at Moosehead Lake
368 Lily Bay Rd., Greenville. 207-695-4400. lodgeatmooseheadlake.com

How luxurious is the Lodge at Moosehead Lake? So luxurious there’s a fireplace in the bathroom of the Katahdin suite. The other carriage-house suites at this oasis of North Woods elegance are equally regal. And each of the five guest rooms in the main building comes equipped with its own theme illustrated in custom hand-carved furniture. This isn’t a place to bring the kids, but for rustic romance (at a price) the Lodge at Moosehead is just the ticket.

SNOWMOBILE TRAIL

Maine Interconnected Trail System (ITS) 83
Aroostook County. mesnow.com

Snowmobiling is big business in Aroostook County, and for good reason — the snow comes early, gets deep fast, and stays late. ITS 83 is the main drag, the Interstate 95 of snowmobiling in northern Maine, flat, wide, and groomed smoother than the ice on Long Lake. Once the rail bed for the Boston and Maine, the trail passes near or through all the major communities, such as Presque Isle and Caribou, yet shows off plenty of countryside, from wide-open potato fields to deep woods. In fact, don’t be surprised to find a hotdog stand out in middle of nowhere, manned by members of the local snowmobile club. Even an Interstate made of snow needs its rest areas.

ROCK CLIMBING INSTRUCTION

Atlantic Climbing School
67 Main St., Bar Harbor. 207-288-2521. acadiaclimbing.com

There are not many places around the globe where climbers can practice their vertical gymnastics at the water’s edge, and the pink-granite Otter Cliff, in Acadia National Park, has got to be among the most user-friendly. Atlantic Climbing School has been leading visitors to the edge (and over it, actually) of this 60-foot-tall outcropping for more than 30 years, and he’ll set a top rope that’s right for your physical and emotional level. Classic routes like Rock Lobster (rated 5.9+, or challenging) ascend a giant detached pillar, while others like Rip tide (rated 5.11+, very difficult) test even the toughest rock jocks, with tiny holds and overhanging finger cracks.

NORDIC SKI CENTER

Carter’s X-C Ski Centers
420 Main St., Oxford (Rte. 26). 207-539-4848.
786 Intervale Rd., Bethel. 207-824-3880.
cartersxcski.com

If 95 bucks for a lift ticket isn’t lifting your spirits in winter, we still recommend hitting the trails . . . the flat ones. You know, cross-country trails, the ones requiring you to break a sweat to get anywhere. For our money, the best people to get you trekking are the folks at Carter’s X-C Ski Shop, with centers in Bethel and Oxford. A family affair, Carter’s has been renting and selling equipment for more than 40 years, and their passionate expertise will set you on the right path, no matter what your skiing savvy or skill. Both centers feature miles of groomed trails to traverse — just you, the skis, and the trees.
RUSTIC LAKE RETREAT

Hunter Cove Cabins

For many Mainers, three things represent the Triple Crown of success and happiness: A boat, a dog, and a camp. The first two can be had relatively easily, but if you’re not ready for property taxes and maintenance bills, you’ll do well to book a stay at Hunter Cove Cabins. This cozy six-acre complex has seven board-and-batten one- and two-bedroom cabins. Your boat can tie up at the dock on the lake, and your pup is as welcome in your cabin as you are.

SECRET BEACH

South Beach

Unless you’re one of the lucky souls with a home or rental on Long Island, a 3-mile-long, 1-mile-wide haven in Casco Bay, getting to South Beach is, well, no day at the beach. First, you have to catch a ferry at the Casco Bay Ferry Terminal in Portland (boats leave several times a day in summer and, no, you can’t take your car). Then, after a 45-minute ride, you must hoof it, beach gear and all, to the other side of the island, a 20-minute walk. None of this is unpleasant, mind you, but it does require planning. We think it’s worth it. This serene largely state-owned beach has fine white sand and views of an island-sheltered cove.

ULTRALIGHT BACKPACK

Hyperlite Mountain Gear

“Ultralight” equipment is the latest trend in backpacking, so it’s no wonder Hyperlite Mountain Gear, a designer, manufacturer and supplier outdoor gear, is attracting attention for its Windrider Ultralight Pack. Made from the high performance sail-making fabric Cuben Fiber, the frameless, waterproof Windrider weighs only 23.5 ounces, yet easily carries thirty-five pounds of gear. Designed for long-distance hiking, we think it makes a great daypack too.

SECRET TOUR

Bath Iron Works and Maine Maritime Museum

Especially since 9/11, there have been few places where you can witness the military in the making. But in the City of Ships, the men and women at Bath Iron Works and the Maine Maritime Museum have teamed up to offer one-hour narrated tours that tell you everything you might want to know about how 1,500-ton Aegis destroyers and the new Zumwalt-class destroyers are assembled right here alongside the Kennebec. Most of the tour guides are themselves retired navy sailors or BIW workers (often both!) who keep the tours (passengers are confined to trolleys for security reasons) lively and fun. The $30 per person tour fee includes two days of admission to the maritime museum.

OCEANFRONT CAMPGROUND

Lamoine State Park

Love Acadia National Park, but not the crowds? Lamoine State Park offers campers easy access to the park and a quiet place to lay their heads after a day of hiking and biking. Sitting on the shore of Frenchman Bay just east of the Trenton Bridge, the park offers spectacular views of Cadillac Mountain, Acadia’s highest peak. Campsites are tucked in a white birch grove (the best are 56 to 61, all tent sites). With a sandy beach, relatively calm water for kayaking, and a picnic area, the park is a fine place to while away the day, too.

WINTER RETREAT

Hidden Valley Nature Center

Two cabins and a yurt are tucked in among nearly 30 miles of wooded trails at this midcoast gem of a nature preserve. Each is

SPA TREATMENT

Soakology Foot Soak and Tea

Experience head-to-toe relaxation through the calming power of tea at Portland’s Soakology. Sample from the teahouse’s loose-leaf teas, then choose from a selection of more than twenty concoctions of foot soaks under the categories of relaxing, uplifting, curative, or moisturizing. Give your feet the Pine Tree State experience with the “Maine Woods Salts” — a blend of detoxifying sea salts, spruce, and rosemary essential oils.

DAY TRIP

Down East Scenic Railroad

Some 40 volunteers give their time to keep the restored excursion trains running on this historic stretch of the Calais Branch Line. The narrated route passes through woods, a wildlife-rich wetland, and a rail yard where vintage cars and equipment are refurbished. Pack a lunch for the picnic tables in the canopied (and fenced-in) open-air car. Tom Testa, president of the railroad’s preservation trust, says passengers range from infants in slings to a retiree who once announced, “The last time I got on a train in Ellsworth, I got shipped overseas to World War II.” Today’s passengers return to the station after a 90-minute trip (we promise).

SURF SHOP

Wheels n Waves

Located in Maine’s surfing capital, Wheels n Waves is the state’s oldest surf shop. Don’t let its funkiness fool you. Over the course of nearly forty years, owner Vic Brazen has built this Route 1 shop into a haven for both serious surfers and those picking up a board for the first time. Receive surfing and paddleboarding lessons starting at $40 for two hours.

TRAIL

Maine Island Trail

2010

2011

2012

2013

2014

2015
accessible by a short hike in summer, but the best time to visit Hidden Valley is in winter, when volunteers groom some ten miles of silent and varied cross-country ski terrain (intrepid skiers break trail throughout the rest of the property). Less than a mile from the parking area, the roomy yurt sleeps six on bunk beds and stays toasty with a woodstove heating the domed, circular room. It’s a perfect base camp for outdoor adventure.

**2015**

**OLD-SCHOOL FUN**

**Palace Playland. 1 Old Orchard St., Old Orchard Beach. 207-934-2001. palaceplayland.com**

Sure, Maine has more glamorous funfairs, but this is the last place in New England to enjoy the classic summer experience of a seaside amusement park. Old Orchard Beach’s Palace Playland has been around in one form or another since 1902 and offers a kind of greatest-hits package of honky-tonk: a Ferris wheel and carousel, skeeball and bumper cars, a funhouse and fortunetellers, and (of course) a rollercoaster, offering a unique view of OOB’s famous pier. Come on Thursday and stay for the fireworks.

**CAMPGROUND UPGRADE**

**Maine Forest Yurts**

430 Auburn-Pownal Rd., Durham. 207-400-5956. maineforestyurts.com

Survivor winner Bob Crowley used some of his reality-show winnings to open this yurt retreat in 2013. Maine Forest Yurts is a 100-acre property on Runaround Pond with two furnished yurts, each 24 feet in diameter, spacious and modern variations on the round dwellings favored by nomads of the central Asian steppes. Why yurts? “My dad built one for himself out of birch wood and sail cloth,” says Page Crowley, who manages the yurts for her parents. “We love the energy and the circular space. They’re just magical.”

**SAUNA**

**Nurture Through Nature Retreat Center**

888-207-7387. ntnretreats.com

One sign of a good sauna is that you have to walk through the woods to get to it — just one thing the beautiful cedar-lined sauna at Denmark’s Nurture Through Nature Retreat Center (NTN) has going for it. Lined with prayer flags and situated next to a whispering brook (perfect for a post-steam dip), the wood-fired sauna follows the traditional Finnish model, taking hours to heat to 160–200 degrees, when spring water ladled over hot rocks will fill the room with steam. Make an appointment in summertime, when retreat season peaks in NTN’s yurts and eco-cabins, or visit from October through April (when you most need a steam bath anyway) on Super Sauna Saturdays, relaxed open-sauna evenings that are a steal at $15.

**2016**

**DAY HIKE**

**Old Speck Mountain**

Grafton Notch State Park, Bear River Rd., Newry. 207-824-2912

With its cable handrails, iron rungs, and ladders, the Eyebrow Trail on Maine’s fourth-highest mountain (4,170 feet) is not for the faint of heart, but it’s great fun with amazing rewards. The steep, rugged alternative to the lower part of the Old Speck Trail, the Eyebrow Trail passes along the edge of Eyebrow Cliff, overlooking Grafton Notch. Either trail will take you to the wooded summit, where an open observation tower awaits — and what a view! Before you are the rugged Mahoosuc and the Presidentialys, bellowing all the way to the horizon.

**TRIVIA NIGHT**

**Paddy Murphy’s**

26 Main St., Bangor. 207-945-6800. facebook.com/paddymurphyspub

Trivia nights are a great reason to go out with friends on a midweek evening instead of just plugging into Netflix at home. No need to gum up that elegant simplicity with esoterica or hyper-competition. At Paddy Murphy’s easygoing affair, you get some questions right, others wrong, and it doesn’t matter anyway because you have fun.

**FAMILY MUSEUM**

**Seashore Trolley Museum**

195 Log Cabin Rd., Kennebunkport. 207-967-2800. trolleyuseum.org

“‘For the younger people, street cars are a new thing. For the older people, it’s memories,’” says Seashore Trolley Museum volunteer John Middleton, nicely summing up the broad appeal of this sprawling electric-railway museum. Its roots date to 1939, when three railway enthusiasts chipped in to buy a single museum. Its roots date to 1939, when three railway enthusiasts chipped in to buy a single vintage streetcar. Neil Kinner’s 14-seat craft uses bicycle-style passenger pedals to power 90-minute voyages across Casco Bay. Unlike spin class, though, the pressure’s never too high: there’s a back-up motor in case you poop out. And you don’t need to be a hipster to appreciate the BYOB policy and Instagram-friendly views. It’s more booze cruise than exercise, really (though it doesn’t hurt to have pretty ripped quads).

**2017**

**FESTIVAL**

**Acadia Night Sky Festival**


In 1999, the National Park Service added the protection of natural lightscapes to its mission, calling national parks “some of the last remaining harbors of darkness.” Acadia has since emerged as one of the NPS program’s stars (sorry). Free of the light pollution that obscures all but the brightest celestial bodies for some two-thirds of the world’s population, the park protects the largest expanse of naturally dark sky east of the Mississippi. Now in its ninth year, the Acadia Night Sky Festival celebrates darkness with stellar events like films and workshops, plus star parties at Sealaw and Cadillac Mountain, where volunteer astronomers from all over New England set up telescopes and point out constellations and other heavenly features for visitors. Just bring your night-vision flashlight and sense of awe.

**CRUISE**

**Maine BayCycle**

Bell Buoy Park on Commercial St., Portland. 207-370-9508. mainebaycycle.com

When spin classes, craft beer, and urban cycling have all become passe, what’s a Portland hipster to do? Combine all three — on a boat. Like a paddleboat on steroids, Neil Kinner’s 14-seat craft uses bicycle-style passenger pedals to power 90-minute voyages across Casco Bay. Unlike spin class, though, the pressure’s never too high: there’s a back-up motor in case you poop out. And you don’t need to be a hipster to appreciate the BYOB policy and Instagram-friendly views. It’s more booze cruise than exercise, really (though it doesn’t hurt to have pretty ripped quads).

**CIVILIZATION ESCAPE**

**Cutler Coast Public Reserved Land**

Off Route 191, Cutler. 207-941-4412. maine.gov/cutlercoast

This Bold Coast preserve’s 4-mile stretch of soaring, wave-beaten cliffs is spectacularly wild, buffered from the nearest roadway by 1 1/2 miles of forest. Ocean views are ever-present (and other hikers few) as you pass through woods and open meadows and across cobble beaches that sing with the ebb and flow of the waves.
THE MAINE YOUTH ROCK ORCHESTRA DOES INDEED ROCK. SO MUCH SO, THAT THEY WERE OUR PICK FOR BEST BAND IN 2016.
2011

**ART DEAL**

*Colby Museum of Art*

5600 Mayflower Hill, Waterville.

207-859-5600. colby.edu

Art for the masses. Make that great art for the masses, and it’s all absolutely free at the Colby Museum of Art, Maine’s largest art museum. From the giant, floor-to-ceiling paintings of Lincolnville’s Alex Katz to the modernist masterpieces of John Marin, the museum offers a complete tour of Maine’s artistic landscape. The gorgeous, three-story, glass Alford Lunder Family Pavilion, which opened in 2013 and was designed by Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects of Los Angeles, is worth a visit in itself. When you’re done, a stroll around the campus is a must-do, as this Waterville institution is without a doubt one of the most gorgeous in the state.

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**SEASIDE CONCERT HALL**

*Opera House at Boothbay Harbor*

86 Townsend Ave., Boothbay Harbor.

207-633-5159. boothbayoperahouse.com

The Maine coast is dotted with a surprising number of terrific performance spaces, and one of the finest is located right in the heart of Boothbay Harbor. Headliners such as Mark Knopfler, Jackson Browne, and Paul Stookey have all performed in past years at the circa-1894 Opera House at Boothbay Harbor. Having served as everything from a roller-skating rink to a mini-mall over the years, the Opera House today features top-notch lighting and sound systems and even a gorgeous, full-service bar in the former meeting room of the Knights of Pythias.

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**2012**

**ENCHANTED EVENING**

*Blackfly Ball*

* Machias Valley Grange, Bad Little Falls Park, Machias. 207-669-4176, beehivecollective.org*

On the evening of the third Saturday in August, Bad Little Falls Park becomes one big writhing dance floor as hippies, rednecks, and just plain folks don costumes and boogie in harmony to the music of local and visiting bands (they’ve included the Rude Mechanical Orchestra, the Auroratones, Samuel Doores & the Tumbleweeds, and, always, the Machias Ukuleles). The roar of the rushing falls, the bobbing string lights on the footbridge, and the intricate murals fluttering from the trees add to the magic. Closely associated with the Machias Wild Blueberry Festival, this quirky and thoroughly Down East party is hosted by the nonprofit Beehive Design Collective, which creates graphic campaigns to address a range of social and political issues.

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**WILDERNESS ART GALLERY**

*North Light Gallery*

256 Penobscot Ave., Millinocket.

207-723-4414. artnorthlight.com

Maine’s art galleries tend to be clustered in seaside towns, and the art within inspired by the stunning light, colors, scenery, and culture of the coast. Less common is fine art about Maine’s interior, so the North Light Gallery is a special delight. Opened in 2005 by Marsha Donahue, North Light’s collection includes Donahue’s own sumptuous watercolors of the Katahdin backcountry along with paintings, drawings, ceramics, sculpture, photography, and other artworks by more than two-dozen artists whose muse is in the North Woods.

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**2013**

**CONCERT VENUE**

*Stone Mountain Arts Center*

695 Dugway Rd., Brownfield. 207-935-7292. stonemountainartscenter.com

Tucked away in the foothills of the White Mountains, the Stone Mountain Arts Center has become one of the state’s premier spots to experience live music. While owner and singer-songwriter Carol Noonan manages to consistently lure such big-name acts as Mavis Staples, Martin Sexton, and Béla Fleck, the venue’s charm lies in its architecture. A converted 200-year-old barn with a cathedral ceiling and exposed beams, Stone Mountain manages to be both grand and intimate.

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**ART TOUR**

*Winslow Homer Studio*

portlandmuseum.org/homer

See where one of America’s greatest artists got his inspiration. For the first summer ever, Winslow Homer’s studio is open to the public. Stand where he painted many of his masterpieces, including Weatherbeaten and Cannon Rock, and admire the view that served as his muse. Tours are conducted by the Portland Museum of Art and are limited to four per week and only ten visitors at a time. You must reserve your spot in advance to see this historic landmark. Vans depart from the Portland Museum of Art at 7 Congress Sq., Portland. 207-775-6148.

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**SENIOR EDUCATION**

*The Maine Senior College Network*

207-780-4128, maineseniorcollege.org

Started in 1997 at the University of Southern Maine, the Maine Senior College Network is a consortium of seventeen independent learning centers from York to Fort Kent. Courses include everything from foreign languages to religion to the history of opera, all for a minimal tuition and annual membership, starting from twenty-five dollars. No tests, papers, or grades — just intellectual stimulation for those over the age of fifty. Find the college nearest you.

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**2014**

**HIP-HOP ARTIST**

*Spose*

pdank.com

He’s awesome. The Wells-bred rapper, born Ryan Peters, said so himself in his 2010 hit, “I’m Awesome,” a tongue-in-cheek anthem in which he also declares himself “cornier than ethanol / cheesier than provolone.” But Spose is no novelty act. Sure, he’s got a song in which every word starts with “R,” and he’s surely the only rapper to name-check the Sea Dogs and Paul LePage. But smart wordplay and crowing about home turf are among hip-hop’s foundational traditions. In fact, Spose’s quick wit is as much a throwback to hip-hop’s Bronx-based infancy as his York County upbringing is to the genre’s expanding frontiers.

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**MOVIE THEATER**

*Saco Drive-In*

969 Portland Rd., Saco. 207-286-3200. thesacodrivein.com

The venue may feel like a throwback, but behind the scenes, it’s straight-up 21st century. This thanks to Honda’s Project Drive-In campaign, which last year gifted the nation’s second oldest drive-in a digital projector after thousands of fans voted in an online contest to help save it. Like many drive-ins, Saco’s couldn’t absorb the $100,000-plus cost of the mandatory switch to digital (the place still sells a large popcorn for $5). If you haven’t seen the viral video of stunned manager Ry Russell accepting the prize (at projectdrivein.com), you’re missing the feel-good hit of the year.

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**COMMUNITY ENRICHMENT**

*Sweet Tree Arts*

4 Church St., Hope. 207-763-2770. sweettreearts.org

Regular readers of Down East know how much we admire the town of Hope. The artists, craftspeople, and young professionals who have moved into this little Camden Hills town over the past 15 years are intent on growing a close-knit, supportive community. The latest addition to this happy mission is Sweet Tree...
Arts at Hope Corner, where young and old alike learn to paint with watercolors, play the bagpipes (founder Lindsay Pinchbeck’s husband Chris is a bagpipe maker), and even make life drawings of elephants, courtesy of Sweet Tree’s neighbor, the Hope Elephants rehabilitation facility.

**2015**

**INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT**

@christopher_buerkle

instagram.com/christopher_buerkle

The best feeds on the popular Instagram photo-sharing app are those that treat users to five-second vacations whenever they steal a glance at their phones. Of late, our favorite Instagrammer is Chris Buerkle, a part-time barista, part-time bartender, part-time commercial photographer who traded New Orleans for Portland a year-and-a-half ago. Buerkle’s feed nicely balances the urban, pastoral, and backcountry elements of Maine’s character. Whether he’s shooting a Penobscot Bay ferry ride, a Portland cemetery, or the view from atop Tumbledown, his snapshots feel intimate and his perspectives fresh. Follow for a Maine insta-getaway.

**MUSICAL AMBASSADORS**

Tumbling Bones
tumblingbones.com

Unquestionably Maine’s most popular tap-dancing-string-band-world-folk-fusion quartet. Tight harmonies and the impressive foot percussion of founding member Pete Winn set Tumbling Bones apart from legions of beardy, folk-revivalist bar bands — but so does the Portland group’s passion for cultural exchange. Last November, the U.S. State Department sponsored Tumbling Bones on a goodwill tour of Romania, Georgia, Bulgaria, and Ukraine; this spring, they visited Ukraine and Estonia at the invitation of U.S. Embassies there. The group’s experience abroad is their home audience’s gain — a Tumbling Bones show is as likely to feature a Georgian a capella dirge as a rendition of “Rocky Top.”

**CIVIC ART PROJECT**

Portland Mural Initiative
portlandmuralinitiative.org

Vibrant towns deserve great public art, which is why four exterior walls along the East Bayside Trail are becoming canvases for Portland artists

Jenny McGee Dougherty, Tessa Greene O’Brien, Will Sears, and Greta Van Campen. They’re the first in a slate of annual installations envisioned by the Portland Mural Initiative, spearheaded by Sears and O’Brien and launched this year with a $5,000 grant from SPACE Gallery’s Kindling Fund (itself supported by New York’s Andy Warhol Foundation). The project emphasizes community buy-in — its first two murals will be unveiled with a community dinner in late June or early July.

**2016**

**DANCE TROUPE**

Alison Chase/Performance
alisanchase.org

In January, Brookville–based choreographer Alison Chase and her Alison Chase/Performance company premiered a new piece in New York: in Tracings, a coquettish female soloist slinks among (and sometimes on) three male dancers whose movements are meant to conjure Maine’s rough-hewn shoreline. A founder of the acclaimed modern dance company Pilobolus, Chase has spent recent months prepping for a series of 10 location-specific outdoor performances on the Maine coast, starting in Brookville on July 25. The New York Times recently praised her “physical inventiveness and storytelling sensibilities,” and her penchant for surprising collaborations is equally impressive. Back in the aughts, puppeteers and heavy equipment operators were among the conspirators at AC/P’s memorable performances at the Stonington granite quarries; the upcoming En Plein Air/Dancing with Steel performances will be accompanied by Maine’s Atlantic Clarion Steel Band. Bucksport’s Fort Knox Historic Site and Freeport’s Wolfe’s Neck Woods State Park are among the sites welcoming a visionary at the top of her game.

**BAND**

Maine Youth Rock Orchestra
maineyouthrockorchestra.org

The coolest thing about the Maine Youth Rock Orchestra is that they in no way seem like a “youth orchestra.” Yeah, they’re kids, but they slay. The twenty-five 12- to 18-year-olds are part of a program offered by the Maine Academy of Modern Music, a Portland-based nonprofit rock school. Directed by Kevin Oates, the band aims to expose students to life as pro musicians and the wide variety of genres they can play as string instrumentalists. (Rock? Check. Rap? Check. Metal? Check.) They only had their first rehearsal in February 2014, and they’ve since performed with dozens of artists (at last year’s State of the State concert, we saw them jam with seven in one day). This year, they became the first youth orchestra ever to tour with a national band, Boston–based The Ballroom Thieves — their collaboration even landed a video spot on NPR’s All Songs Considered.

**2017**

**BOOKSTORE**

Elements
265 Main St., Biddeford. 207-710-2011.
elementsbookcoffe beer.com

It doesn’t have the state’s widest selection, but the new and used titles at Biddeford’s Elements are impeccably curated. It’s also Maine’s only bookstore where you can read your purchase while enjoying a pour-over coffee, a pint of craft beer, or charcuterie plate. Elements pulls off the bookstore/cafè/bar concept with high style.

**PODCAST**

Millennial
millennialpodcast.org

In her debut episode in early 2015, Portland’s Megan Tan declared that her podcast would tackle “what no one teaches you: how to maneuver your 20s.” Thankfully for listeners (particularly those of us feeling a bit saturated by hyper-scrutiny of millennials’ angsts and appetites), she’s done way more. In three seasons chronicling life after a college degree, Tan’s ruminative, diaristic podcast has explored the seductive lure of urban living, the pleasures and perils of adult relationships with parents, and the struggle to marry one’s passion to one’s work — universal themes, all. Tan (who records in her closet) is an earnest and resourceful reporter, interviewer, and soliloquist, and The Atlantic hailed her podcast as one of last year’s best. Millennial is well worth streaming, regardless of your generation.

**BAR SHOWS**

Eureka Restaurant & Tavern
5 School St., Stockholm. 207-896-3196.

Eureka’s concert slate would be impressive enough if the rustic pub were in Kittery or Camden. But it’s in Stockholm, 10 miles from the New Brunswick border, at the tippity top of the state. A half-dozen shows a month in the summertime (four or five in the off-season) feature the best of the Portland and Boston music scenes, with an emphasis on roots and alt-folk, plus the occasional national touring band (our man in The County caught a Nashville duo a few weeks back). How do they pull it off? It helps that music booker (and Aroostook native) Travis Cyr is himself a touring singer-songwriter, with good relationships among Maine musicians. Next up: the “Eurekakostik” mini-festival (July 7–8), featuring Cyr, Portland bluegrass heroes Tricky Britches, songstress Sorcha Cribben-Merrill, and more. (Also, the place has great poutine!)
Yeah, yeah, Martha Stewart herself is a part-time Mainer. But what Martha boasts in ubiquity, North Haven’s own Angela Adams has in street cred and style. A savvy businesswoman who would never be rude to the help, Adams—who has her own retail store in the Old Port—designs gorgeous rugs, housewares, and handbags. If you think we’re jealous of her, well, you just might be right.

**Tapestry Bags**
Portmanteau
5 Wharf St., Portland. 207-774-7276. portmanteauonline.com
You don’t run a specialty shop for nearly 40 years in Portland without knowing your customers. Long before other designers got into the tote business, Portmanteau was making exquisitely elegant tapestry bags and doing its part to turn the Old Port and its environs into northern New England’s premier shopping district. We’re partial to Portmanteau’s “chartwear,” shirts and totes patterned with maps of Casco Bay. But what else would you expect from the Magazine of Maine?

**2009**

**Patio Furniture**
Weatherend Estate Furniture
800-456-6483. weatherend.com
We don’t know about you, but we’re tired of disposable patio furniture that barely makes it through a Maine summer before looking too beat up to save. Back in the early 1900s, Norwegian-born landscape architect Hans Heistad combined simple yet elegant designs with Maine boatbuilding techniques to turn out classic outdoor furniture that is still around a century later and has provided the inspiration for Weatherend Estate Furniture. Constructed of mahogany and teak using traditional mortise-and-tenon joinery at the company’s headquarters in Rockland, the furniture can be found on decks and shoreside lawns all over the world, as well as in corporate offices and Disney World. Nothing Mickey Mouse about this outfit. Weatherend doesn’t have a showroom, but you’ll find a list of retailers on its website.

**Hooked Rugs**
Searsport Rug Hooking
11 West Side Dr., Vernoa Island. 207-249-0891. searsportrughooking.com
Claiming to be “Maine’s largest rug hooking and design studio” doesn’t sound like much until you discover that Julie Mattison and her mother, Christine Sherman, attract some 500 students to their classes each year and serve customers from all over the world through a thriving website.

**Eco Friendly Shop**
The Green Store
71 Main St., Belfast. 338-4045. greenstore.com
Sustainability is more than just the cause du jour for the Green Store, which was selling...
nontoxic baby toys before nontoxic was even a word and composting toilets before most people would even say “toilet” out loud. Founded in 1994 by Ellie Daniels and three friends with $30,000 and absolutely no experience in retail sales, the store has become a mecca for people who want to live lightly on the planet. It’s still in the same ancient building with tin ceilings and a funky wooden floor, and it still sells the constantly popular plastic bag dryer, a wooden contraption with eight fingers that lets you wash and reuse those plastic bread bags until they can’t be used again — at which point Daniels will tell you to cut them into strips to tie up tomato plants.

2010
GARDEN ACCESSORY
Pike’s of Maine Garden Hod
Maine Garden Products. 207-613-2973. mainegarden.com

Nothing beats our Pike’s of Maine garden hod for carrying the harvest from garden to kitchen. We rinse and drain our veggies right in the basket, which is made of PVC-coated wire mesh on an oak frame with a steam-bent oak handle. We’ve also been known to put this carrier to work in the off-season, as a tote for mail and CDs.

PLAYHOUSE
Kids Crooked House
888-447-5446. kidscrookedhouse.com

No matter how old you are, Kids Crooked House inspires play. Designed by two Windham dads eager to peel their kids away from the TV, these assemble-it-yourself miniature houses are all bowed roofs, angular windows, and leaning columns, as if a gang of 8-year-olds had been handed scrap lumber, hammer, and nails. In fact, the houses are sturdy, durable — and a lot of fun.

2011
TEE SHIRT DESIGN
Silbley’s Birds, Liberty Graphics
58 Main St., Liberty. 207-589-4035. libertygraphicshirts.com

Ornithologist David Silbley’s superb field guides to North American birds are prized for their detailed watercolor illustrations. You needn’t be a birder to appreciate the beauty of these paintings, thanks to Liberty Graphics’ David Silbley line of organic cotton tee shirts. Our favorite: the worm’s eye view of a red-tailed hawk in flight, its wings outstretched and its gorgeous tail feathers fanned.

COTTON THROWS
Brahms Mount
115 Main St., Freeport. 800-545-9347. brahmsmount.com

The hardest part about buying one of Brahms Mount’s cotton herringbone throws is choosing a color. There are 25 of them — simply beautiful shades of blue, green, orange and red — and they happen to look great together. Fashioned on antique shuttle looms in a mill on the Kennebec River in Hallowell, the throws sport hand-twisted fringe. Soft and warm, they’re just the thing to cozy under on a chilly night.

CONTEMPORARY COTTAGE
Furniture
75 Market St., Portland. 800-860-8955. furnitured.com

Furniture reinterprets camp furniture by stripping away the gentle curves, bead board details, and oversized knobs, and zeroing in on the simple lines. Drawing further inspiration from the silhouettes and sharp angles of timber-framed barns, founder Brian Haddock and his crew of designers and cabinetmakers have created a sophisticated, contemporary collection of beds, bureaus, bookcases, and tables, in maple and birch. The palette — oranges, yellows, purples and blues — is playful and bold.

2012
SIDE TABLES
Fineartistmade
207-853-9504. fineartistmade.com

Patrick Mealey and Joyce Jackson bring to furniture design the same blend of traditional aesthetics and clean, contemporary lines that they employ in the historic kitchen renovations for which they are known in and around Eastport. A generous round surface makes the Mill Cove Table their most practical side table. It gets its sophisticated whimsy from the legs — two interlocked pieces accented by circular cutouts. Another of our favorites, Roque Bluffs, a pedestal table perfect for a potted plant or vase, has tapered legs hugged by curved supports. Made of poplar, the tables are named for two of Down East Maine’s most beguiling landmarks.

FLOAT-ROPE BASKETS
Custom Cordage
151 One Pie Rd., Waldoboro. 207-354-0013. customcordage.com

You’ve probably noticed the colorful rope doormats that have cropped up on porches all over Maine. They are made from floating ground line, which lobstermen were ordered to stop using for setting their traps a few years ago as part of an effort to reduce whale entanglements. The Gulf of Maine Lobster Foundation has taken more than a million pounds of the stuff off lobstermen’s hands, and Custom Cordage, a rope maker, was among the first businesses to acquire some and transform it into something new. Just as durable and weatherproof as the doormats, these cheery and very practical totes are great for organizing and toting almost anything, indoors or out.

SILKSCREENED PILLOWS
Erin Flett
Westbrook. 207-839-7187. erinflett.com

Happy designs and playful colors are the hallmark of Erin Flett’s style. A graphic designer, Flett makes her pillow covers with the soft, slightly textured cotton fabric known as reproduction barkcloth, a contemporary version of the Asian material once made from tree bark. Many of her hand-drawn patterns are inspired by her surroundings, managing to be rustic and hip at once. Among them: Ashley Pine, with its fir trees and cones, which was created for a friend’s Sebago Lake camp. Squirrel, a bushy-tailed critter nibbling an acorn, is Flett’s take on a regular visitor to her backyard. Flett’s true heart, though, is in her boldly abstract and sophisticated patterns, like Art Deco Mirrors and Zig Zag.

2013
SECONDHAND KIDS’ CLOTHES
Lots for Tots
240 Route 1, Falmouth. 207-347-8601; 152 Route 1, Scarborough. 207-883-1100. lotsfortots.com

The wealthy suburban communities of Scarborough and Falmouth are great towns to look for those bargain deals on second-hand kids’ clothing and toys. Lots for Tots, with a location on Route 1 in both towns, offers a great selection of kids’ stuff at prices that won’t make you squeamish even if your toddler outgrows it. Flett’s true heart, though, is in her boldly abstract and sophisticated patterns, like Art Deco Mirrors and Zig Zag.

HOME DESIGN STORE
Home Remedies
83 West Commercial St., Portland. 207-899-0135. homeremediesmaine.com

Owner Rachel Ambrose designed her home decor store, Home Remedies on West Commercial Street in Portland, with an open-concept plan. The result is a 4,000-square-foot space where you can get inspired by all the stages of interior design in the same room.
Enter the store, located in the historic Star Match Co. building, and flip through Ambrose’s many fabrics, observe the processes of sewing and re-upholstery, and browse a carefully selected assortment of rugs, furniture, wallpaper, and other home items.

**2014**

**Décor**

**Belfast Bay Shade Company**

1 Franklin St., Belfast. 207-735-8237. belfastbayshadecompany.com

Printmaker Dina Petrillo’s gardens are the source of the botanical motifs that elevate her lampshades to works of art. The shades are made with kozo papers, whose durable bark fibers interact with etching ink to gorgeously hue results. Each printed shade is one of a kind. “We feel they make an important connection to our friends who are farmers,” Petrillo says. “We’re celebrating place and land and plants.”

**PET STORE**

**Planet Dog**

211 Marginal Way, Portland. 207-347-8606. planetdog.com

Portland’s longtime source for green, durable doggie toys and accessories hit a milestone last year when Planet Dog’s charitable arm topped $1 million in grants and donations over its 17-year history. Two percent of every Planet Dog sale helps therapy-and-service-dog organizations, search-and-rescue outfits, and police and military K–9 units. Not that your goldendoodle cares about this when she’s chomping down on a recycled-plastic, non-toxic chew toy, but it’s nice to know your pet purchase is making a few other tails wag.

**2015**

**GROWER’S EVENT**

**Annual Fedco Tree Sale**

213 Hinckley Rd., Clinton. 207-426-9900. fedcoseeds.com

It’s just two days in late April or early May, but ever since 1984, the annual Fedco Tree Sale has been a red-letter event for Mainers with a green thumb. The Fedco warehouses just off I-95 in Clinton are filled with apple, peach, pear, plum, cherry, and nut tree saplings, plus blueberry bushes, rootstock, and vines, and close to 3,000 folks come from all over the state to shop and visit with friends they may not see again until the Common Ground Country Fair. It’s a rite of spring.

**2016**

**COOKWARE**

**Culinarium**

culinariumkitchenware.com

Scarborough’s Jordan Castro had no concrete plan for a concrete business. A specialist in concrete–mix design, he once made a concrete salt–cellar for his own use that so impressed friends, he started selling them online. That led to Culinarium, which Jordan founded with his wife, Annastasia. The company offers a full line of concrete kitchenware, though it’s not the same stuff that makes up your sidewalk — it’s an “advanced cementitious mix,” using small particulates combined with recycled marble and granite dust from the countertop industry. The resulting products look like ceramic or aluminum, but with handsome and distinctive colors and textures.

**RECLAIMED MATERIALS SHOP**

**Portland Architectural Salvage**

131 Preble St., Portland. 207-780-0634. portlandsalvage.com

For homeowners and pros in search of historic materials to weave into renovations, or to take the shine of new construction, Alice Dunn’s venerated Bayside showroom is the promised land. The four-story, 20,000-square–foot former coffin factory is loaded with period furniture, patinaed fixtures, paneled doors, stained–glass windows, fireplace surrounds, and all manner of delightful bric–a–brac. A San Francisco transplant who repaired and sold classic motorcycles before moving into restoring houses, Dunn opened her first storefront in 1996, after discovering a dearth of locally available vintage materials. Now in its fourth location, the shop expanded again last fall with the unveiling of the Portland Salvage Reclaimed Wood Warehouse on Westfield Street. There, you’ll find rustic flooring, paneling, beams, and barn doors. (Toast your purchase with a pint at craft beer maker Bunker Brewing, conveniently located next door.)

**2017**

**TOY STORE**

**At Once all Agog**

28 Main St., Cornish. 207-625-3322. onceallagog.com

This anchor of Cornish’s Main Street is so piled with playthings that they spill out onto the sidewalk. Find everything from Maine-made wooden toys to techy learning aids to plush dolls to cool indie board games — and a staff that’s geeky about everything on the shelves. Worth stopping, if only to ogle the store’s whimsical window displays.

**RETRO FURNITURE**

**Modern Underground**

103 Main St., Waterville. 207-200-1290. modern-underground.com

Part of what makes shopping at Modern Underground such fun is its funky location: you slip behind the brick storefronts lining Waterville’s Main Street, pass the chain-link fence, go down the flight of concrete stairs, and step through the massive red industrial wooden door into a 3,800-square–foot windowless basement with a rough concrete floor and an unfinished ceiling that tends to squeak with footfalls from above. The subterranean space is filled wall–to–wall with 1930s–1970s–vintage designer chairs, tables, tableware and kitchenware, stereo lighting fixtures, and other period doodads. Owners Lisa and Brian Kallgren have been scouring garage sales and auctions for American, Northern European, and Italian mid–century pieces for something like 20 years — long before retro was en vogue — and reselling the pieces to customers around the world. Lisa refinishes many of the wood and upholstered pieces herself, while Brian claims responsibility for the “crazy” stereo collection stacked against the back wall, including a pair of 1964 JBL speakers — each one as big as a woodstove and, at 250 pounds, nearly as heavy. One savvy–shopping couple recently flew up from Miami to purchase a 10–foot Widdicomb cherry dining table and matching chairs for $2,400. It’s a set that Brian suggests could have fetched 10 times that amount elsewhere. Those retro prices? Yeah, we like those too.

**GREENHOUSE**

**Moose Crossing Garden Center**

3033 Rte. 1, Woodboro. 207-832-4282. moosecrossinggardencenter.com

Why’s it such a pleasure shopping for annuals, perennials, and veggie starts at Moose Crossing every spring? Because after nearly 45 years in business, the Lupien family has cultivated not only a crazy vast selection (they have 19 greenhouses of growing and retail space), but also an air of laid–back approachability. The staff can answer your weirdest gardening questions, and the little loaner wagons (for towing your purchases) are a reminder there’s something childlike and fun about the whole endeavor of growing things. If you’ve driven past in late summer, you’ve likely observed the ritual of the annual mum count, when the store fills its lot with chrysanthemum pots (25,000 last year) and tracks their sales a day at time on a reader board out front — it’s how many midcoast dwellers count down to fall.