

Down East
10

YEARS OF BEST *of* MAINE

Best
of the
Best



EVENTIDE OYSTER CO.
GOT OUR NOD FOR BEST
LOBSTER ROLL IN 2013.
WE THINK IT'S STILL
HARD TO GO WRONG
WITH ONE.

Food & Drink

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.
morsessauekraut.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 Reubens) 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, japones, 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, jerkies, 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' Montmartre. Zero. So the Cheese Iron — a European-style shop offering more than 2000 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.

SNACK

Fox Family Potato Chips

888-304-8281. foxfamilychips.com

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.

2010

BBQ

Bentley’s Saloon

1601 Portland Rd., Arundel. 207-985-8966.
bentleyssaloon.com

If you’ve got a motorcycle (or even if you’re more comfortable on four wheels), don’t miss the pig roasts on Saturdays at Bentley’s Saloon in Arundel. This barn-like, boisterous bar and restaurant hosts a weekly BBQ for as many as 1,200 people. The pork plus two sides runs \$12 and is accompanied by lots of beer, music, and, of course, motorcycles (up to 900 on a busy day). Definitely not fine dining, but a darn good deal.

PIES

Lincoln’s Country Store

434 Camden Rd., Warren. 207-273-2113

How’s this for a Maine gem: an old gas station that doesn’t even accept credit cards at the pump happens to sell some of the best cream pies in the state. Welcome to Lincoln’s Country Store in Warren, where the recipes of Jessie Jacobs were bought by owner Mark Lincoln four years ago. From savory shepherd’s to sweet strawberry, the store offers on average about twenty different varieties of pie. But the cream pies — the chocolate and the peanut butter ones in particular — reign supreme.

2011

SLICE OF CAKE

Bar of Chocolate Café

38 Wharf Street, Portland. 207-773-6667.

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 off by a touch of creamy saltiness that keeps you craving more.

TOFU

Heiwa Tofu

Rockport. 207-505-0797.

A family affair, Heiwa Tofu started as a small, local operation in the fall of 2008 and quickly expanded to bring homemade tofu to eager herbivores across the state. Made from MOFGA-certified organic soybeans grown near Skowhegan, the tofu is like no other. You know how tofu has a nervous texture, how it’s giggly? Heiwa loses the giggle. It tastes very fresh, not beany, and it crisps really well. Look for it in health food stores, co-ops, and markets across the state.

2012

AFRICAN FOOD

Asmara

51 Oak St., Portland. 207-253-5122.
asmaramaine.com

Dinner at Asmara is an ultra-social affair when you order one of the shared platters, which is the tastiest and most fun way to experience chef and owner Asmeret Teklu’s flavorful Eritrean food. A selection of tender meat and vegetarian stews, long-simmered collards and kale, and a cool lettuce and tomato salad are arranged atop two large injera, the moist, slightly spongy sourdough flat bread that is the national dish of both Eritrea and Ethiopia. In place of utensils, more injera is served on the side for scooping up the stews, which are redolent of cayenne, cumin, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, ginger, and cloves. The restaurant is small, cozy, and simply furnished with Eritrean crafts, and Teklu often works solo, greeting, cooking, and serving guests. Fine dining it’s not, but Asmara delivers one of the most interesting, flavorful, and inexpensive meals to be had in Portland.

SANDWICH TO GO

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.

2013

ACADIAN FARE

Dolly’s Restaurant

17 Route 1, Frenchville. 207-728-7050.
facebook.com/dollysrestaurant

The Saint John Valley has a distinctive culture rooted in its Acadian heritage and its proximity to the Canadian border. Not only do many of the locals speak French, but they also serve the cuisine of their ancestors: ployes (a pancake-like flatbread made with buckwheat), creton (pork spread), and chicken stew. You’ll find all three expertly prepared at Dolly’s. The ployes are made to order and served piping hot. Add a little butter and they go perfectly with that hearty chicken stew, a soulful, rib-sticking blend of chicken, potatoes, and dumplings. Don’t leave without sampling the savory creton, which is rich and wonderfully full of flavor.

LOBSTER ROLL

Eventide Oyster Co.

86 Middle St., Portland. 207-774-8538.
eventideoysterco.com

We’d never dare suggest that a lobster roll like Eventide’s that deviates so far from tradition by using brown butter vinaigrette and a steamed bun could be the best in Maine... right? Suddenly, we aren’t so sure. For the first time, we’re reconsidering the axiom that simpler is better when it comes to Maine’s favorite sandwich. You can also try it with hollandaise or house mayo instead of brown butter vinaigrette.

2014

CRAB ROLL

King Eider’s Pub

2 Elm St., Damariscotta. 207-563-6008.
kingeiderspub.com

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. casco baybutter.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.

2015

AUTHENTIC MEXICAN RESTAURANT

Vazquez Mexican Takeout

38 Main St., Milbridge. 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 guarache, pozole, and mole — to migrant rakers in Washington County's blueberry fields.

FARM STAND

Stutzman's Farm Stand & Bakery

891 Doudy 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 tripel, 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. Klippenstein, 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.

DINER

Palace Diner

18 Franklin St., Biddeford. 207-284-0015.
palacedinerme.com

Maine's oldest dining car (1927) is also its smallest (15 stools), but the Palace is making a big impression under chefs Chad Conley and Greg Mitchell. The pair cooks with familiar breakfast and lunch ingredients — eggs, potatoes, meat — but nothing they serve is standard fare. Every time we try something

— whether the deluxe breakfast sandwich (baked egg, applewood-smoked bacon, melted cheese, and jalapeños on a sandwich-size English muffin), the ethereal lemon-buttermilk pancakes, or the gargantuan tuna melt on challah bread — we swear it's the best iteration of its kind we ever had.

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, chorizo, 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 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.)



WHAT BETTER PLACE TO
LEARN ROCK CLIMBING
THAN AT ACADIA'S
FAMED OTTER CLIFF
WITH ATLANTIC
CLIMBING SCHOOL?

Travel & Play

2008

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.

2009

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.
carterxsxski.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.

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 Riptide (rated 5.11+, very difficult) test even the toughest rock jocks, with tiny holds and overhanging finger cracks.

2010

TRAIL

Maine Island Trail

207-761-8225. mita.org

Truly great ideas have a way of spreading, which is why it's no surprise that twenty-three years after Dave Getchell, Sr., and a small group of Mainers created the Maine Island Trail, the concept has spread to Florida, Minnesota, and Texas. Who wouldn't want to copy a model that allows kayakers, sailors, and weekend warriors access to 180 public and private islands, beaches, and coves in places as stunning and precious as Penobscot and Casco bays?

SECRET TOUR

Bath Iron Works and Maine Maritime Museum

243 Washington St., Bath. 207-443-1316.
mainemaritimemuseum.org

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.

2011

RUSTIC LAKE RETREAT

Hunter Cove Cabins

33 Hunter Cove Rd., Rangeley. 207-864-3383.
huntercove.com

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.

ULTRALIGHT BACKPACK

HyperLite Mountain Gear

North Dam Mill, Biddeford. 1-800-464-9208.
hyperlitemountaingear.com

"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 25.5 ounces, yet easily carries thirty-five pounds of gear. Designed for long-distance hiking, we think it makes a great daypack too.

2012

OCEANFRONT CAMPGROUND

Lamoine State Park

Rte. 184, Lamoine. 207-667-4778.
maine.gov/cgi-bin/online/doc/parksearch/index.pl

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.

SECRET BEACH

South Beach

Long Island.

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.

2013

SURF SHOP

Wheels N Waves

365 Post Rd., Wells. 207-646-5774.
wheelsnwaves.com

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.

SPA TREATMENT

Soakology Foot Soak and Tea

511 Congress St., Portland. 207-879-7625.
soakology.com

Experience head-to-toe relaxation through the calming power of tea at Portland's Soakology. Sample from the tea house'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.

2014

DAY TRIP

Down East Scenic Railroad

245 Main St., Ellsworth. 866-449-7245.
downeastscenicrail.com

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).

WINTER RETREAT

Hidden Valley Nature Center

131 Egypt Rd., Jefferson. 207-389-5150.
midcoastconservancy.org

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

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.
maineforesturts.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 Mahoosucs and the Presidentials, billowing 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.
trolley-museum.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 trolley car for \$150 from the Biddeford and Saco Railroad as the towns were transitioning to buses. The trio restored that car and moved it onto leased farmland, where they rebuilt a section of railway that once connected Kennebunkport to York Beach. Today, the museum, a nonprofit run by devoted trolley geeks, owns some 250 vintage streetcars and railcars from New England and beyond. Restored vehicles are displayed in huge barns, while others await restoration on tracks spread across the 100-acre property. And yes, you can

ride: hop on a car for a scenic, narrated, 20-minute round-trip on 1.5 miles of track.

2017

FESTIVAL

Acadia Night Sky Festival

Sept. 21–24. Acadia National Park.
207-801-2566. acadianightskyfestival.com

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 Seawall 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 passé, 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 1½ 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.



Arts & Culture

2009

WORLD MUSIC

Bowdoin International Music Festival

Bowdoin College, Brunswick. 725-3895.
bowdoinfestival.org

For six weeks each summer the campus of Bowdoin College in Brunswick really does come alive with the sound of music. Since 1964, this acclaimed festival has brought some of the world's most talented young musicians (more than 250 of them last year) to Maine to study and perform with the globe's premier musical maestros. Who also benefits? We do. The festival hosts numerous concerts, master classes, films, and more. It's like a tour of the world's top concert halls without ever having to leave Maine.

LOCAL TV SHOW

207

wcsh6.com

Admittedly, we're a little biased on this one since they've invited us on-air more than a few

times, but Rob Caldwell and Caroline Cornish (who took over for long-time co-anchor Kathleen Shannon a few years ago), of WSCH6 or WLBB2, deserve a shout-out for making 7 P.M. appointment television time. Since September 2003, 207 — modeled on the Today-style magazine approach — has been the best broadcast grab-bag going, a fine mix of musical performances, newsmaker interviews, and cooking demonstrations. Can't catch 207 during the week? Video clips of the stories stay live online for up to six months.

2010

OUTDOOR VENUE

Seaside Pavilion

8 Sixth St., Old Orchard Beach. 207-934-2024.
seasidepavilion.org

Long before Old Orchard Beach became famous for its honky-tonk, it had the Grove. Methodist ministers first chose the natural amphitheater with its tall pines for their camp meetings in 1873. In 1997 the Salvation Army, which bought the location for a dollar in the 1950s, erected a new 1,400-seat, three-season pavilion in precisely the same spot as the

original Grove. Today secular and religious groups put on low-key, affordable performances all summerlong as ocean breezes cool cellos and violas. This July look for Tim Sample, Dave Mallet, and the Shaw Brothers; the August lineup includes the New York Staff Band and Denver and the Mile High Orchestra — both absolutely free!

HANDCRAFTED MUG

Ash Cove Pottery

75 Ash Cove Rd., Harpswell. 207-833-6004.
ashcovepottery.com

Susan Horowitz's pots are humble beauties, but we challenge you to find another mug that sits so contentedly in your hand. Banded in muted shades of sand, blue, and moss, Horowitz's cup feels perfectly balanced with its hint of a waistline, a brim that's not overly thick, and its just-right size. We love the handle's thumb indentation, which soothes like a worry stone.

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.

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.

2012

ENCHANTED EVENING

Blackfly Ball

Machias Valley Grange, Bad Little Falls Park, Machias.
207-669-4117. 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 Auroratoes, 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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](https://www.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 Winne set Tumbling Bones apart from legions of bearded, 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

alisonchase.org

In January, Brooksville-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 Brooksville 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. Director Oates, who's 30, has big plans: to bring the program to every state in the country. He's planning a first-ever American Youth Rock Orchestra event in Chicago next year.

BOOKSTORE

Elements

265 Main St., Biddeford. 207-710-2011.
elementsbkscoffebeer.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/café/bar concept with high style.

2017

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 tippy 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 "Eurekakoostik" mini-festival (July 7-8), featuring Cyr, Portland bluegrass heroes Tricky Britches, songstress Sorcha Cribben-Merrill, and more. (Also, the place has great poutine!)



PORTLAND
ARCHITECTURAL
SALVAGE HAS SEEMINGLY
EVERYTHING. (EVEN THE
KITCHEN SINK!) OUR PICK
FOR BEST RECLAIMED
MATERIALS SHOP IN 2017.

Home & Style

2008

HOMEGROWN MARTHA STEWART

Angela Adams

131 Middle St., Portland. 207-774-3523.
angelaadams.com

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., Vero 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

Sibley’s Birds, Liberty Graphics

58 Main St., Liberty. 207-589-4035.
libertygraphicstshirts.com

Ornithologist David Sibley’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 Sibley 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

Furniturea

75 Market St., Portland. 800-860-8955.
furniturea.com

Furniturea 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.
lotsfortotsne.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 that North Face jacket in the blink of an eye.

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 hued 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.

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.

2016

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, stereos, 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.

2017

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 off 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.)

GREENHOUSE

Moose Crossing Garden Center

3033 Rte. 1, Waldoboro. 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.