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MAY 2019

THE DESCENDANTS

A family celebrates five generations in York



CAMDEN CONTEMPORARY

A 1970s Shingle style gets a stunning postmodern remake

plus

Great Diamond Island's
CROWN JEWEL



PUBLIC SPACE

A choice spot at Crown Jewel's colorful bar allows patrons a glimpse into the bustling open kitchen.

Tropical Punch

BUILDER
Mast Construction

ARCHITECT
David Nastasi

INTERIOR DESIGNER
Kate Vail



In the dining room, mahogany tables by Atlantic Hardwoods in Portland are flanked by banana leaf fabric banquettes and custom painted chairs fitted with ostrich leather cushions, from The Chair Market in Brooklyn. The wall sconces, chosen by Wight to anchor the airy space, are by Kelly Wearstler for Visual Comfort. The gold pineapples on the tables have a practical purpose in addition to island charm: They hold Wet-Naps, Wight says, as much of the menu is meant to be eaten by hand.

opposite page Crown Jewel operates seasonally, Memorial Day to Columbus Day. Wight notes that due to limited seating, reservations are “strongly recommended.” Guests planning their visit are encouraged to check the restaurant website for hours, special events, and travel tips.



For Great Diamond Island’s Crown Jewel, Alex Wight thinks pink

WORDS: ALLISON PAIGE PHOTOS: COURTNEY ELIZABETH

Flamingos are funny. With their umbrella-handle beaks and drinking-straw legs perched in perpetual passé, they are like the doomed dodos’ sillier sibling. Growing up Floridian, one is surrounded by the pinkish fowl, from the zoo escapees wilding the suburbs to the plastic dummies poked into neighbors’ lawns.

But it’s interesting, the things you miss. Twenty-five years of living in the snowy North has me feeling nostalgic. All the more reason that Crown Jewel, Great Diamond Island’s newest hot spot of a restaurant, feels like a respite after a long winter—and even a bit like home.

“I wanted to remind people that they were on an island,” says owner Alex Wight. “It was more about creating a space that felt universally tropical and really trying to relay this sense of calm, fun, and vacation.”

From the banana leaf banquettes and tiger lily-bedecked menus to the flock of flamingos that have roosted everywhere from the wallpaper to the drinks, its decor feels festive and transportive—with a color palette that would not be

out of place in Miami and an island vibe that feels more Caribbean than Atlantic.

Wight bought the property in 2017 and continued to run the general store on the premises before opening Crown Jewel in July of last year. Prior to this, Wight oversaw Flanagan’s Table, a monthly dinner series at Flanagan’s Farm in Buxton, one of the two wedding barns owned by her mother, Gail Landry. Before that, she worked in Daniel Boulud’s kitchen at db Bistro Moderne in New York and as a freelance food stylist and recipe tester for national publications.

Wight grew up in Connecticut and moved to Portland as a teen, a transition that was difficult for a high school freshman. “I think I fell in love with Maine, actually, in my 20s, after college, and have always been looking for a way to come back.”

She now lives in Brooklyn, New York, with her husband, Oliver, and young family and has maintained a “dual life,” first to run Flanagan’s Table and now, Crown Jewel. “Flanagan’s Table actually coincided with the birth of our first

child. Crown Jewel culminated with a third,” Wight shares. “And feels in some respects like another child.” Luckily for Wight, she gets to spend the whole of the summer in Maine with her husband and three children. Four, if you count the restaurant.

Housed in a 1903 landmark building, once the site of Fort McKinley’s blacksmith shop, Crown Jewel possesses the same sober red brick exterior as most of Great Diamond’s decommissioned military buildings. But there is nothing buttoned-up about the interior. Indoors, it is relaxed, rosy, and totally at ease. While the bones of the building were solid, the restaurant space, just under 1,500 square feet, required a full renovation to obtain its light-hearted and casual feeling. Wight worked with architect David Nastasi and interior designer Kate Vail of Nastasi Vail Design to create a punchy island vibe.

The interior brick was painted light pink to match its avian mascot, while the exposed beams of the vaulted ceiling, accentuated by white-and-gold pendant globes (from Serena & Lily) make the space feel unexpectedly airy. The hemlock flooring, hand-painted by Olivia Atherton, grounds the space with a vintage diamond motif.

A custom turquoise cement bar is paneled in rattan to complement the rattan stools and underlit, providing a bright seam of light as well as a dose of diner-like nostalgia. The shelves of the built-in bar are backed with coral, producing a cheerful pop of color.

All this style comes with a conscience. Like many islands, Great Diamond has water restrictions, and Wight had this in mind when she chose bamboo flatware and serving pieces from the Japanese company Wasara.

“I’m proud to say that 95 percent of the restaurant’s waste is compostable,” she reports.

The cozy bistro seats 35 and offers three areas—the dining room, chef’s counter, and bar. The space also continues to



**CHRISTENED DON AFTER
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right Crown Jewel's mascot, Don, a 4-foot, 4-inch tall neon flamingo created by David Johansen of Neon Dave in Portland, presides over the bar.

previous spread On the wraparound porch, an umbrella decked with pineapple twinkle-lights offers a shady spot for outdoor gathering.





top, left The menu, the same coral-pink of the back bar, carries over the banana leaf motif and is festooned with tiger lilies. Wight chose design elements with an aim “to make people feel transported.”

top, right A duo of festive cocktails. The crowd favorite, Wight shares, is Crown Jewel’s signature rum punch.



bottom, left Chef Rocky Hunter’s shrimp ceviche.

bottom, right There are several ways to enjoy oysters at Crown Jewel. At left: Grilled oysters with umami butter, yuzu pearls, and pickled mustard seed.

opposite page Even from outside the restaurant, neon flamingo Don shines like a pink beacon. “At night it creates this incredible pink haze in the room,” says Wight. “It’s really funky; the windows appear pink at night. When you’re walking up from the dock, the interior just looks fun.”

operate a handsome, mahogany-countered general store selling wine, sandwiches, ice cream, coffee, Crown Jewel merchandise, and other sundries.

A neon flamingo by David Johansen of Neon Dave, Portland, presides over the bar. Christened Don after Don Featherstone, the late creator of the lawn flamingo, his crown gives him a kingly air that transcends kitsch. A seat beneath his benevolent glow provides a peek into the open kitchen and the bustling surf-shirted chef and crew. Executive chef Rocky Hunter and sous-chef Angela Cochran serve the same menu all day, light and breezy with a focus on seafood and small plates meant for sharing.

Located on Diamond Cove, the restaurant may be reached by water taxi, private boat, or Casco Bay Lines and is a quick two-minute walk from the ferry dock. Wight, whose enthusiasm is contagious, hosts special dinner events throughout the season and encourages her guests to “Come flamingle.” Naturally, there are also plenty of drinks to swizzle (with flamingos balancing in the cocktails) indoors or out on the wraparound porch. She recommends the Crown Jewel Punch, a crowd favorite.

An homage to warmer climes and an easier era, Crown Jewel is destination dining at its best, mere minutes from the mainland with an atmosphere that feels oceans away. With her newest venture, Alex Wight has created what surely must be one of the sunniest spots in the North Atlantic. Now, if only she could warm up the water. ■

