

A FOND FAREWELL

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INA GARTEN BAREFOOT CONTESSA PARTIES!

IDEAS AND RECIPES FOR EASY PARTIES THAT ARE REALLY FUN



PHOTOGRAPHS BY
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I'VE JUST HEARD THE MOST upsetting news. Barefoot Contessa, the specialty food store in East Hampton started by Ina Garten, has closed permanently. More upsetting than that is what's rumored to be opening in its place: Gucci or Starbucks.

I've been going to East Hampton since 1979, when I was just three years old. Back then, "town" consisted of a

few small, local stores, a movie theater, and an ice-cream shop. Completely different from the stress-inducing urban enclave I battled in the winter, the little village showed me how easy, refreshing, and even beautiful life outside the city could be.

And I loved it.

I could ride my bike into town, dash into the News Company stationery shop for birthday cards, run over to the

Village Shoe Store to buy soccer cleats (the owner coached my local team!), grab some candy treats at Penny Lane, and occasionally feast on an ice-cream cone from Sedutto.

And best of all was Barefoot. Located on Newtown Lane in the heart of town, just a few doors down from Sam's Pizza (where I celebrated learning to swim across the pool), Barefoot was a charming world of scintillating aromas and dazzling treats. I'd swing open the front screen door and immediately smell the fresh ground coffee and freshly baked muffins. (To this day, the corn muffins rate as my favorite food in the world. Seriously.) The chocolate ganache and sour-cream coffee cakes would tempt me further. Even the selection of candies and fancy sodas was a feast.

Barefoot was a place I liked to pop into just to look around, just to be comforted by the familiar sights and sounds, the beeping of the cash register, the grinding of the coffee beans, the guests greeting each other eagerly. It was my first stop every summer morning. And even in the fall, as the leaves changed colors and the crisp, cool air whipped through the empty streets, Barefoot would stay open, welcoming me back with its warmth and nourishment.

But as I grew up, trading in my bike for a car, and eventually going away to college and

business school, East Hampton changed, too. It morphed from a tiny, reliable hamlet into a chichi microcosm of Madison Avenue, Tiffany's replacing the News Company, Banana Republic replacing the shoe store, and Ralph Lauren, Coach, and Calypso lining the simple sidewalks. Barefoot was one of the only constants. The real deal, Barefoot was magical. Peaceful. A reminder of the way East Hampton used to be before it was over-run and commercialized.

I know development is a good thing. I have an MBA, after all, and I know the changing landscape of East Hampton town is a positive indicator of increased revenue and fiscal growth. But I really don't care. I want my old town back. I have enough of Madison Avenue in the city. I want my safe haven to stay just the way it was.

I hate that friends now look at me disdainfully when I say I'm going to East Hampton. "Don't you want to get away from the city?" they ask. "Isn't the scene a little too much?" And all I can do is shake my head and say, "It didn't used to be like that." For me, it's home.

Somehow, Barefoot possibly being replaced by Gucci or Starbucks is the final straw. East Hampton as I knew it is gone. Lost. And I can't even drown my sorrows with my favorite comfort food. Because the corn muffins are gone. ♦