

ENTERTAINING at Home | Fab Summer FASHION | Dining Out on SEAFOOD

CPTV
PROGRAM
GUIDE INSIDE

CONNECTICUT

connecticutmag.com

MAGAZINE

Ice Cream!

Walnut Beach Creamery

25

OF CONNECTICUT'S
SWEETEST HOMEMADE
ICE CREAM SHOPS

PLUS

GELATO, FROZEN CUSTARD,
ICE CREAM NOVELTIES,
AND ITALIAN ICE

YOUR DIET CAN WAIT
TILL FALL



Walnut Beach Creamery, Milford

JUNE 2012

\$3.95

0 6 >



WENDY YOUNG LAURENT L'escalé

By Elise Maclay

In white jeans and a lime-green sweater on her day off, the executive pastry chef at one of Connecticut's most prestigious restaurants has begun telling me the story of her life.

"We were so young," Wendy Young Laurent says. There are stars in her eyes because she is seeing herself seeing Europe for the first time. A week after graduating from the Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park she was living and working in Brussels, Belgium, where the bistros, bakeries, glittering cafés and 3-star Michelin restaurants were a thrilling revelation.

At school she'd been unsure of what she wanted to do and be but by the time she returned from Europe she knew with passion and exactitude. "I wanted to be a pastry chef—not just a pastry chef but the *best* pastry chef it was possible for me to be."

At La Pannetière in Rye, N.Y., with a master pastry chef as her mentor (Jean Noël Julien formerly at Maison Troisgros in Roanne, France) she learned everything she could about pastry, working harder than she had ever worked in her life and loving it.

"I kept trying to outdo myself," she says, "setting goals, achieving them and then raising the bar. I still do that. For me there's no such thing as best. It can always be made better—thinner, flakier, more delectable. I learned so much from Jean Noël, I should have stayed with him longer. But I was ambitious. When Gotham Bar and Grill in New York City offered me a job, I took it."

But she was one chef among many, the only female, and she lived in Greenwich and hated the commute. So when the opportunity to become executive pastry chef at La Crémaillère in Bedford presented itself, she went for it. Here desserts by Wendy Laurent became an item, especially her ice cream, a rich, dense, custardy creation that everyone wanted to buy. Made for the restaurant in small batches, slow-cooked in a double-boiler on top of the stove, the formula was hard to replicate commercially, but a way was found, a company formed and Crème Crémaillère Ice Cream was off and running, selling to restaurants and retail food stores including Fairway, Dean & DeLuca and Balducci's. Success, however, came with conflict, hassles and no time for cooking. Being a chef (not a business executive) had been her life plan and she decided to reclaim it, this time as executive pastry chef at L'escalé, a beautiful restaurant in her hometown of Greenwich.

At L'Escalé, working beside chefs Frederic Kieffer and Henri Donneau, with an appreciative audience in the wings, she's never felt more creative. She says she dreams desserts and wakes up eager to get to the kitchen. Like most artists, Wendy Young Laurent has a distinct culinary "voice," which has nothing to do with flash-in-the-pan gimmicks and

everything to do with reimagining legendary desserts and making them sublime. If referencing tradition sounds limiting, for this pastry chef the classics are like the scales and chords that support soaring operatic performances. Chocolate soufflé is only the starting point for her "Black and White Soufflé," for example, an ethereal confection involving white chocolate and pistachio sauce. For summer she might add a ball of pistachio ice cream.

"I like to reflect the seasons," she says. "Imagine a tart tatin made with juicy local peaches. Cherry clafoutis. Fresh mint julep ice cream. Wild strawberry sorbet."

It's summer, L'escalé's waterside deck is open, and Wendy Laurent is in the kitchen whipping up magnifique desserts. Life is sweet.



in large chunks, overpower the other ingredients.

On the other hand, East Coast razor clams are a treat to look at and to eat. Large, with shells measuring almost six inches long, filled with tender, sweet meat and carefully steamed, they're served on a pool of white-wine-and-butter broth exotically scented with smoked paprika.

Appealing as it is, eating like a locavore is not without constraints, but you don't come to a place like this expecting a mile-long menu and an unlimited supply of everything. Tonight, the kitchen is out of handmade tagliatelle and even lobster rolls. Nimble we switch to leg of pork and pan-roasted fluke and forget about dessert for the moment. The pork is pepper-rubbed and roasted so carefully that even without a lot of fat it remains tender and juicy. It comes in the bright company of caraway-glazed carrots, cabbage and apples, mustard butter and lemony potato purée. Pork seems almost a new food altogether when it's treated this way.

With pan-roasted fluke, chef Wayman takes a different tack (three cheers for his boldness). Turning the clock back to Diamond Jim Brady's day, when no dish could be too rich, he swaddles the delicate fillet of fish in a velvety cloak of outrageously opulent creamed oysters. Luxe can be lovely, we have to say.

Top-quality scallops with a Middle Eastern twist involving sesame seeds, black lentil dal, mint yogurt and mustard greens are too fussy for my taste, but New York strip steak, even with a light molasses-Worcestershire glaze is exactly what a steak lover is likely to have in mind. Just plain good.

By the time we put our dessert order in (procrastinators be warned), Grandma Rose's Chocolate Linzer Torte is sold out. We are left with orange, maple and cinnamon crème brûlée (delightful), chocolate flourless torte (dry as hardtack) and the latest and greatest grab-and-gobble goodie in the U.S.A., according to the Food Channel: bacon & chocolate chip cookies. Oyster Club makes good ones but you'll love them or you'll hate them the way the rest of America does when the chips are down.

Oyster Club
13 Water St.
Mystic (860/415-9266;
oysterclubct.com)

Lunch Wednesday through Friday
noon to 2, Saturday 11 to 2; Sunday
brunch 11 to 2. Dinner every night,
except Tuesday, 5 to 9:30, Friday
and Saturday till 10:30. Major
credit cards. Wheelchair access.
Price range: appetizers \$10 to \$12,
entrées \$18 to \$36, desserts \$6 to \$8.