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DINING

In Six Restaurants, Abundance of Excellence

By [JOANNE STARKEY](#)

IF numbers matter, 2007 will be remembered as a good restaurant year: Six restaurants received a rating of excellent, compared with the typical three to five.

Those that made the grade are an interesting lot: two are spinoffs of established winners, one is a place that closed for a month and completely reinvented itself, another is an 18-year veteran that has gotten better with age and two are on the East End, an increasingly rewarding destination for exciting food.

George Martin the Original,

[Rockville Centre](#)

This 18-year-old mainstay epitomizes the best of the bistro genre. Service rivals that at more expensive spots; the food is reassuring but has enough twists to make it interesting, and the luscious desserts keep diners coming back for more. Start with one of the multi-ingredient salads, and go on to the juicy shell steak covered with fried onions or to the flaky, herb-seared halibut topped with saffron aioli.

George Martin the Original, 65 North Park Avenue, Rockville Centre; (516) 678-7272.
www.georgemartingroup.com. Entrees, \$15 to \$38. [Wines](#) start at \$22 a bottle.

Besito, Roslyn

This is a clone of Besito in Huntington, one of the top restaurants of 2006. The baby brother has the same menu and executive chef as the Huntington restaurant, and its staff members were trained by the experienced servers from the older Besito. The siblings tie for first-place honors as the best Mexican restaurant on the Island.

The guacamole, created at table side to diners' specifications, is a great way to start. Entrees to consider are the tender boneless beef short ribs, the fish in a Veracruzana sauce (tomato with peppers, olives and capers) and spicy shrimp ajillo over a sweet plantain sauce. The best dessert is the churros, warm, long spirals of fried dough rolled in cinnamon and delivered in a white paper bag to every table.

Besito, 1516 Old Northern Boulevard, Roslyn; (516) 484-3001. www.besitomex.com. Entrees, \$17 to \$27. Wines start at \$20.

Wildthyme, Southampton

At this simple, roadside restaurant — which is closing for winter vacation Jan. 1 to Feb. 13 and reopening with a new menu — the fireworks are provided by the food. I loved the sparkling salads, especially the towering Cobb, layered with grilled chicken, avocado, tomato, Roquefort and hard-cooked eggs and topped with romaine. The most memorable entree was a poached pound-and-a-half Maine lobster, split and stuffed with crab and chopped leeks. Its shallow bowl held a tasty white wine reduction that served as a dipping sauce for the lobster. Satiny panna cotta with fresh berries and a raspberry sauce was a perfect finale.

Wildthyme Restaurant and Bar, 129 Noyac Road, Southampton; (631) 204-0007. Entrees, \$22 to \$32. Wines start at \$30.

Annona, Westhampton Beach

Atop a showroom for Rolls-Royces, Ferraris and other luxury cars, Annona serves food that is just as opulent and very ambitious. Breads and rolls are made in the restaurant's wood-burning oven; pastas are homemade, and many of the meats are house cured.

Annona has flown to the top of my list of restaurants I want to return to. I'd head right for the roasted baby octopus salad, which blends grapes and olives with the fresh, tender seafood, fingerling potatoes and puréed yellow lentils. Then I'd order the seared sea scallops with house-cured pancetta, nubbins of asparagus, chanterelle mushrooms and segments of grapefruit, a perfect harmony of textures and flavors.

Annona Restaurant, 112 Riverhead Road, Westhampton Beach; (631) 288-7766. www.annona.com. Entrees, \$26 to \$46. Wines start at \$22.

Cafe Diane, Woodbury

This newcomer with an American accent is the offspring of one of the Island's best restaurants, Trattoria Diane in Roslyn. Both are extraordinary, upscale places.

Appetizers like crab cakes and lobster salad shine at Cafe Diane. So, too, do entrees like the slow-cooked lamb shank in a sauce dotted with cipollini onions, trumpet mushrooms and black olives, and the seared diver scallops with scallion mashed potatoes, chanterelles, Vidalia onions and leeks in a black truffle vinaigrette.

The Woodbury restaurant is also associated with Diane's Desserts, the bakery next door to Trattoria Diane in Roslyn. The three-berry pie stars here, just as it does at the Roslyn restaurant and at the bakery.

Cafe Diane, 7955 Jericho Turnpike, Woodbury Village Shopping Center, Woodbury; (516) 677-5120. Entrees, \$17 to \$34. Wines start at \$30.

Honu Kitchen and Cocktails, Huntington

The hottest restaurant trend of 2007 was the emergence of places featuring small plates, whether tapas, dim sum or American style. Honu Kitchen and Cocktails in Huntington (formerly Blue Honu, a traditional restaurant known for its lively young bar scene), reopened as a spot serving small plates of sophisticated, adult food.

Small-plate restaurants may be popping up everywhere, but none I've visited compare with Honu Kitchen and Cocktails. Among the delicious possibilities are tender quail crowned with frizzled leeks set on cauliflower purée; delicate Chilean sea bass over a mixture of mushrooms, tomatoes and artichoke hearts; sweet lobster chunks on a bed of fire roasted corn; and rosy baby lamb chops in a pea purée. A bag of warm, chewy chocolate chip cookies is gratis and dessert enough for most people.

Honu Kitchen and Cocktails, 363 New York Avenue, Huntington; (631) 421-6900. www.honukitchen.com. Small plates, \$7 to \$16. Wines start at \$25.

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