

## SEASONAL APPEAL

Sandbar's menu keeps pace with seasonal LI ingredients

By ADINA GENN

The ambiance at Sandbar, which opened in 2015 in Cold Spring Harbor, is like an homage to Long Island Sound and its culinary ingredients.

The weathered-oak panel interior, adorned with sea-side paintings, is a nod to the nearby coast, highlighted by blues and beiges. And the menu and wine offerings highlight Long Island's riches from local purveyors wherever possible. For example, depending on the season, the shellfish might be from Fishers Island, or from Sexton Island, right by Robert Moses State Park.

The offerings at Sandbar are abundant. The duck tacos – the duck is from Crescent Duck Farm in Acquebogue – is served with hoisin barbeque sauce, cilantro, pickled daikon and jalapeno. And the striped bass is served with cockle clams, carrots, pickled mustard seeds and a ramp broth.

But it's the chickpea fries – the restaurant serves up 200 orders a week – that seem to have a fan club all its own, judging by the praise on social media. Made from chickpea flour, milk, cream and aromatics and served with sriracha aioli, the dish is thanks to Executive Chef Guy Reuge, of the top-rated restaurant Mirabelle, who hails from Normandy, France, and was raised in the Loire Valley.

"It's a classic dish that is done in the South of France,



Photo by Judy Walker

**Eric Werner, Guy Reuge, and James Olsen created a combination destination and neighborhood spot.**

always served with meat or fish," he said. "I love to take that and make it something different – make it an entire dish. I made it a long time ago at Mirabelle – it was a success. Here it is even more of a trademark."

Sandbar is a combination destination and neighborhood spot. Visitors to Cold Spring Harbor State Park stop in for lunch before or after a hike, couples reserve tables for date night, while locals might order from the bar menu and watch a ball game, said Chef de Cuisine Eric Werner.

A graduate of New England Culinary Institute, Werner has known Reuge for six years, ever since he began working at Mirabelle Restaurant & Tavern in Stony Brook. Reuge ran Mirabelle for 25 years in St. James before partnering with Lessings Inc., and helping develop

menu items for the company's nine restaurants, including Sandbar, where the menu changes with the seasons.

"It's a real collaborative effort, mostly from the chefs' point of view," James Olsen, the restaurant's general manager, who joined the team after stints at 21 Club and Le Bernardin, said. "It takes us two to three weeks to come up with the menu and utilize what's fresh in the market at any given time."

Long Island ingredients have come a long way since Reuge first entered the region's food scene.

"It's changed so much," said Reuge, a member of the James Beard Foundation who received the Chevalier du Merite Agricole in 2001 for his contributions to French agriculture. "The quality of food is so much better. Artisans are growing vegetables and care about the seafood industry. Overall it's a better quality of food."

He was referring to micro-greens and other interesting vegetables from suppliers. And the restaurant also works with local winemakers for select wines. "Our team goes there, and we test," Reuge said.

The customer experience doesn't end when the bill is settled.

A Sandbar hostess calls customers after they've eaten at the restaurant to see if they enjoyed their meal. If needed, Olson follows up to invite them back.

"Talking to customers and getting feedback is very important," he said. Most, he added, "are pleasantly surprised at the call. A few don't want to be bothered. But it's a positive thing to know that we cared enough to call the next day."