

LONG ISLAND DINING

A Deep-Sea Excursion on a Rooftop Deck



Joanne Starkey

AL FRESCO Picnic-table dining at the Catch Seafood Tavern.

By JOANNE STARKEY
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THE CATCH Seafood Tavern embraces summer with moderately priced seafood, laid-back surroundings and a rooftop dining deck that affords views of Port Jefferson Harbor and the comings and goings of the ferries. The place is a beacon for visitors getting off those ferries; its rooftop deck, with a retractable glass roof trimmed in white fairy lights, can be seen from the approaching boats.

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Marc and Eric Miller, who are brothers, took over the space in May — the last occupant was the short-lived Papa Joe's — but there has been a restaurant on this spot for half a century. Many Long Islanders remember when it was Dockside, which was here throughout the 1990s.

The proprietors of the Catch are experienced restaurateurs, having owned a series of spots on the East Side of Manhattan, including Chianti and City Cafe. Eric

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Oven-roasted Atlantic black sea bass.

partner, is a dominant figure in the front of the house.

The Catch is the definitive rustic fish house, with bare wood tables, leather booths, wood floors and seascapes and other nautical decorations on the walls. There is a string of dining rooms on the first floor, including an enclosed sun porch and a large central dining room. The rooftop space features a deck with tables for two or four and a large glass-enclosed room with custom-made picnic tables and yellow and white market umbrellas.

The staff of upbeat young people was always pleasant but not always sharp. Servers were inconsistent in giving the prices of specials. One night we had to ask for a seafood fork and crab crackers so we could attack the blue claws we ordered.

Warm, flaky biscuits were a treat on both our visits; however, the corn bread was moist and delicious one night, dried out from reheating another.

This is the place to order a shrimp cocktail. It is \$10 and includes six firm jumbos. Also terrific was the flavorful gazpacho crowned with crabmeat. The wedge salad, proliferating on Long Island, is another good deal: The two huge hunks of iceberg lettuce, which could feed a family of four, are covered with abundant crumbled blue cheese and cost only \$6.

It is possible to go wrong at the Catch. One unfortunate diner at my table ordered the clam chowder, which got its thickness from cornstarch rather than cream, and went on to a plate of fried oysters that were dry and overcooked.

His meal was the exception, though. Everything else sampled was right on the mark. The [lobster](#) roll, generous chunks of seafood in a lemon-scallion mayonnaise on a grilled bun, was better than any I've had in Maine. The whole Atlantic black sea bass, set on a bed of julienne vegetables, was snow white and flaky fresh. The cod fillet topped with [tomatoes](#) and black olives was another success. Fans of Maryland crabs can order a half-dozen or a dozen (\$12 or \$24) and bash away with wooden mallets. The meat was sweet and worth the effort. Landlubbers have a half-dozen nonseafood picks, a moist, slow-roasted organic chicken among them.

Unlike most casual spots, the Catch has a pastry chef, and it shows. Lindsey Albanese, a graduate of the Culinary Institute of America and veteran of Union Station in Smithtown and Tellers Chophouse in Islip, turns out delectable tempters (all \$6). There's a chocolate brownie hot fudge sundae with homemade marshmallow; a rich, molten-center chocolate cake; a creamy cheesecake; and a lemon tart, a tall cylinder crowned with meringue. The strawberry shortcake, a large, tender biscuit with berries and lots of house-made whipped cream, is a showstopper. Don't pass up the very summery wedge of honeydew melon crowned with fruit salad, heavy on strawberries and blueberries. It's a perfect way to end a meal at the Catch, a summertime pleasure.

The Catch

Seafood Tavern

111 West Broadway (Route 25A)

Port Jefferson

(631) 642-2824

thecatchtavern.com

Miller, a graduate of the [Culinary Institute of America](#), owns Cavo in Queens and is a partner in the caterer Food & Co. in the Hamptons. Marc Miller, the managing



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VERY GOOD

THE SPACE Bilevel fish house with rustic dining rooms on the main floor and rooftop seating upstairs. The main floor is wheelchair-accessible.

THE CROWD As laid-back as the surroundings; some children.

THE BAR A long, leather-trimmed bar with a distant water view. A leather banquette is paired with high tables and stools. Fairly priced wine list of 34 bottles (\$18 to \$82) and 10 selections by the glass (\$5 to \$12).

THE BILL Same menu for lunch and dinner. Entrees range from \$7 (sandwiches) to \$25. Children's meals, \$8 including a fountain soda. American Express, Visa, MasterCard and Discover are accepted.

WHAT WE LIKE Shrimp cocktail, gazpacho, wedge salad, blue claw crabs, [lobster](#) roll, cod fillet, whole sea bass, organic chicken, all desserts.

IF YOU GO Open from noon to 10 p.m. Sunday through Thursday, till 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Reservations are recommended on weekends.

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