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Small but mighty

A trip to Nova Scotia's eastern tip reveals hidden culinary gems and Rare Birds

BY CRAIG PINHEY

At the somewhat overlooked eastern tip of mainland Nova Scotia, Guysborough has taken steps to become a culinary destination. DesBarres Manor Inn and the Rare Bird Pub & Eatery and its brewery have played a major part in this new reputation. Although only recently opened under the current owners, the DesBarres Manor is a historic structure. Built in 1837, it was the residence of Justice W.F. DesBarres, the grandson of J.W.F. DesBarres, the founder of Sydney, N.S., and the lieutenant-governor of Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island.

The original W.F. DesBarres bought property all over the Maritimes,

including in Guysborough, making him one of the largest landowners in the colonies. His biggest accomplishment was the Atlantic Neptune, a collection of navigational charts of the region published in the late 1700s (maps from this work are on display in Manor Inn's Parlour Room). The inn features huge beds with luxurious linens, beautiful antiques, free wireless Internet access, attentive service, and fine dining. In good weather you also can enjoy the patio, with its massive gazebo, bright yellow Adirondack chairs, and splendid views of the countryside.

Cuisine is in the capable hands of Chef Aviva Troemel, who some may know from stints at the Inn at Spry Point and Halifax's Il Mercato. Her approach

is to blend East Coast cuisine with classic French Continental fine dining; the results thus far have been delicious. An evening at DesBarres Manor Inn might start with pan-blackened venison with wild-mushroom risotto pancakes and balsamic beurre blanc followed by sage-crusted North Atlantic halibut. The wine list is extensive, leaning heavily toward the New World, especially California. That said, there is a 1998 Château Palmer from Bordeaux as well as an enlightened selection of Riesling.

After dinner you can retire to the parlour room for a drink or walk down to the water for a pint at the Rare Bird, home to the Chedabucto Bay Brewing Company. It's hard to believe you're in a small Nova Scotia town when you see the Rare Bird, an impressive waterfront structure with a 40-seat patio overlooking the bay (if you have a boat, you can park it at the marina while you lunch).

Rare Bird is in another heritage building; completed in 1928, it's a replica of the Jost building that was, at one point in its past, destroyed by fire. Inside, it's no less impressive; it's a spacious pub with a modern, shiny, copper brewery; live-music stage; and seating for 130, including along the bar. There is a waterfront courtyard that can accommodate up to 200 people, as well as a large private room on the second floor that seats 80 for receptions, meetings, and conferences.



Beer selection at the Rare Bird is conservative, with a Hummingbird Light, a Rare Bird pale ale, and Red Hawk, a malty ale with some fruitiness and decent hop bitterness. Interestingly, there was a Guysborough brewery in the mid-1600s that, according to www.rarebirdpub.com, may have been the first commercial brewery in North America.

The Rare Bird is not a quaint little local establishment, although one suspects it must be during quieter periods. It's seasonal, opening from mid-May to mid-October. The owners also have revamped the local golf club, now called Osprey Shores Golf Resort. Just imagine: You can enjoy a beer, a birdie, and a B&B, all in tiny Guysborough. 🏏

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PINHEY'S PICK

Chateau Ksara Reserve du Couvent

Lebanon, \$17.52, NSLC

Lebanon has been in the news a lot this year, but not for its wines. In fact, the country makes some pretty nice ones, such as this delicious red. It's a blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Syrah, and Carignan (a flavourful black grape common to southern France). One might think the grapes would get overripe in the heat, and some no doubt do, but this wine is an excellent example of a warm-climate red. It shows ripe black fruit, with a touch of dried raisiny character and a dash of oak complexity. It has medium body, a smooth mouth feel, and balancing tannins. It's a great match for grilled-lamb skewers and similar Middle Eastern cuisine.



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