



NOTABLE EDIBLES

A PEERLESS PAIRING AT SMITHTOWN'S H2O

H2O's executive chef, Michael Meehan, and beverage director, Paulo Villela, go together like peas and carrots, err...Shinnecock wild striped bass and Sherwood House merlot.

Culinary worlds collided when the Bohlsen Restaurant Group brought these two accomplished heavy hitters together at their Smithtown location of H2O: Seafood Grill in 2009. Hailing from vastly different backgrounds, the two have made a name for themselves in the art of pairing locally caught seafood with locally produced wines.

Chef Michael Meehan, born to a military family in Texas and raised here on Long Island, is known as a "Master of Seafood," amongst his peers. Like many of us, his childhood "if it's Friday night then it's fish for dinner" dinners consisted of Mrs. Paul's fish sticks. Fortunately for Long Island, Meehan headed west and experienced firsthand the New American food revolution of farm- and wine-inspired cuisine that was happening in California in the 1980s. After a few summers spent on a salmon-processing ship in Alaska's Bering Strait, feeding a crew of 30 "anything but salmon," says Meehan, "I learned to get creative with the bycatch." He was hooked by the notion of serving fresh, seasonal local bounty. "If it was locally grown or fished, it should be on the menu," states the affable and down-to-earth Meehan. Returning to his Long Island home, Meehan has earned well-deserved accolades for his New American cooking style at Mill River Inn (Oyster Bay), Tupelo Honey (Sea Cliff) and Clearwater (Massapequa), Seafood Barge (Southold), 75 Main Street (Southampton), Michael's at Maidstone Beach (East Hampton) and Michael's at the Boardwalk (Riverhead). At H2O, his relationships with local farmers, fishermen and baymen come to life in the fresh, honest, wine-friendly menu.

Bohlsen Restaurant Group's beverage director, Paulo Villela grew up on a small farm in southeastern Brazil. Villela credits his love of wine, however, to his Italian immigrant neighbors. Apparently, the young Villela could enjoy their homemade wine as long as he provided the empty bottle. With a degree in agricultural engineering from the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro and a hankering to learn more about food and wine, Villela moved to New York and broke into the restaurant business. Starting out as a busboy, he worked his way up various restaurant ladders, eventually taking a position at Windows on the World. In short order he became the wine captain and sommelier, inspired by wine gurus Kevin Zraly and Andrea Immer Robinson. A graduate of the Sommelier Society of America, where he still occasionally teaches in his spare time, Villela was the valedictorian of his 1998



graduating class. Villela joined BRG in 2008. "His love and appreciation for wine has fueled a culture at the Bohlsen Restaurant Group where wine knowledge is cool," says BRG co-owner, Michael Bohlsen. All staff partake in weekly mini wine clinics, which "translates to a more well-rounded, seamless dining experience for our guests at the bar and in the dining room."

H2O in Smithtown hosts weekly Wednesday Night Wine Dinners. Throughout the month of July, and into early August, these dinners take on a particularly delicious local theme. For \$40 (\$30 without wine), hungry Long Islanders can feast on a three-course meal, pairing the best local fin and shellfish with the best local wines. When asked which part of the menu is planned first, the food or the wine, Meehan says, "generally the menu is built around the wine." Villela basically states the opposite. Both laugh, an obvious indication of their comfortable working relationship. "We've been around for awhile. We kick ideas back and forth," says Meehan. Villela counters with, "what a pleasure it is to work with such a talented chef who is also so wine sensitive." Their ease with one another is palpable, just like peas and carrots.

—Betsy Davidson

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