

OPENINGS

10 Things to Know About Oak + Rowan, Opening Friday

BY SCOTT KEARNAN | NOVEMBER 9, 2016



On Friday, doors open at Oak + Rowan, one of our most highly anticipated openings of the year. The Fort Point newcomer, which comes from the team behind some acclaimed Newburyport restaurants, is offering a broad-ranging New American menu with star talent in its kitchen and a sleek design up-front. Here's what to know before you head over.

319 A St.; 857-284-7742

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Credit: Joel Benjamin

It's the Boston debut from an established restaurant group.

Oak + Rowan is the latest venture from Nancy Batista-Caswell, whose portfolio has so far included two refined Newburyport restaurants, Ceia Kitchen + Bar, opened in 2010 when she was just 28 years old, and BRINE, opened in 2013. Though the restaurateur launched her Caswell Restaurant Group on the North Shore, she discovered her passion for the biz growing up on the South Shore to Portuguese immigrant parents

who worked in local factories; her mother worked a second jobs in restaurants, and her father wound up taking on a role with a Portuguese wine importer. "I basically grew up in restaurants, sleeping or standing around the kitchen while my mother would work," said Batista-Caswell, who studied culinary management at Johnson & Wales University and cut her teeth under local restaurateur Chris Schlesinger (who launched the now-late East Coast Grill) and the BiNA Hospitality (the group behind jm Curley, among others). "A lot of my family was built around feasting. Dining out wasn't something my parents took lightly," said Batista-Caswell.

Ceia and BRINE have both become destination restaurants that lure city slickers to the suburbs, but Batista-Caswell has been eager to set up shop in Boston and bring a "cozy and thoughtful neighborhood restaurant" to the fast-growing Fort Point/Seaport part of town, where many new openings have veered more toward mass-market chains.



Credit: Joel Benjamin

The look fits the name.

You won't find many oak or rowan trees in an urban area like Fort Point, but Batista-Caswell says she chose the name to signify that her restaurant group was putting down roots in a new city. The design followed. "The space, while lofty and open, also maintains a cozy, safe feeling, which conjures up the idea of being in a tree house as a kid," said Batista-Caswell. She worked with Sousa Design, the same team behind restaurants like Alden & Harlow and Blue Dragon, to transform a 5,000-sq.ft. space on the ground floor of a luxury residential building into a rustic-chic dining room covered in wood, brick and sky-blue banquettes. Large windows let light stream in to the high-ceilinged space, and roll-up garage doors will augment the space's airy qualities.



Credit: Joel Benjamin

There's a 30 Under 30 alum in the kitchen.

Moving over from Ceia and BRINE is executive chef Justin Shoults, one of our most recent 30 Under 30 honorees for his standout menus at those seafood-oriented spots. At Oak + Rowan, Shoults casts the net wider, encompassing land and sea with a New American menu of small and large plates.



Credit: Joel Benjamin

There's an East Coast/West Coast rivalry afoot.

"We love to not only entertain our guests, but also educate them as well," says Shoults. To that end, the menu's oyster starter juxtaposes three East Coast oysters with three West Coast oysters. The former, known for a salty kick and savory finish, are topped with creamed jalapenos and apple, broiled, and served hot. The latter, known for creamy, vegetal flavors, are left raw and topped with a small salad of fennel, apple, and jalapeno mignonette.



Credit: Courtesy of Megan Swann/Oak + Rowan

They get creative with caviar.

"Our idea is to take the costly luxury that caviar is and make it approachable and affordable for the everyday diner," said Shoults. If they don't want to commit to a half or full ounce, guests can opt for a tasting of one or four different styles of caviar with varying accompaniments. Expect to sometimes find "alternative eggs as well," said Shoults, like salmonids, paddlefish, sea urchin and more.



Credit: Courtesy of Katie Noble/Oak + Rowan

Whole butchery is a hit here.

And you'll find it well-represented by the lamb three-ways: braised lamb, roasted lamb and lamb tartar. Expect seasonal accompaniments — right now, that means braised parsnip and flint corn polenta.



Credit: Joel Benjamin

You'll want to "begin" with some beef.

The savory dinner menu is divided into several sections: Begin, for small plates; Soup + Salad; Pasta; Land + Sea; and a Cheese section. Among the highlights from the first section is the beef tartar, "a way for our guests to enjoy prime beef without having to order a whole steak," said Shoults. Finely diced prime beef is paired with a creative "potato salad" of purple potatoes tossed in a caramelized leek vinaigrette and chives. For a creamy tang, Shoults turns buttermilk into a puree and a powder, then adds a few fried fingerling potatoes for crunch.



Credit: Courtesy of Megan Swann/Oak + Rowan

There's a small pasta section.

The pasta plates are mostly designed as mid-course noshes, or for guests who want a nibble at the bar, said Batista-Caswell. Among the creative pasta plates is this squid ink farfalle, augmented by citrus- and herb-marinated pheasant legs and tossed in a salty butter made of sea urchin roe.



Credit: Joel Benjamin

There's a bar *and* a cocktail cart.

You're going to want to pull up a bright blue seat here, and sip on some of bar manager Chris O'Neill's creative libations, named as Roman numerals. The "I," for example is cachaca, sweet vermouth, tomato-sage honey and lemon. You'll also find a cocktail cart that will greet you table side so that bartenders can mix up some of these drinks as you eat and watch.



Credit: Courtesy of Nancy Batista-Caswell/Oak + Ryan

There's a star pastry chef in the kitchen.

Brian Mercury, previously of Harvest, is one of the city's most acclaimed pastry chefs. At Oak + Rowan he'll concoct sweet surprises like the cranberry swirl fro-yo, seen here, house made ice creams and sorbets in unconventional flavors, such as Rosemary Pine Nut and Sweet Potato, and take-home nibbles like cookies that will be sent out with the check for guests to take home.

PLACES MENTIONED



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4.4	4.2	4.2
FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE



CEIA KITCHEN + BAR

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4.4	4.2	4.3
FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE



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