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SEAFOOD TRENDS

Chefs offer personal touches to New England clam chowder in restaurants

Classic clam chowder is a guest favorite at Water Grill's six locations.

Water Grill, King Tide Fish & Shell, Bell & Anchor, Ocean Prime and The Mooring Seafood Kitchen make variations

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New England clam chowder has long been a fixture on menus in the Northeast, and now it has a following nationwide. The creamy, briny and comforting soup made of clams, potatoes, onions and milk or cream has fans across the country who are making their own variations on the classic, sometimes adding regional ingredients, and sometimes just embellishing with their own creativity.

In the 1980s Sam McClelland fell in love with the quahog chowder at the Famous Homeport Restaurant on the Massachusetts Island of Martha's Vineyard. Quahog is a New England term for large clams.

At the time, McClelland was a sous chef at a small inn nearby, and he managed to procure the recipe from Homeport's chef. He now features it on the menu at The Bell and Anchor in Sag Harbor, N.Y., on Long Island, where he's executive chef.

"Sometimes you have to borrow great recipes and this is one of them," McClelland said.

He still calls the dish Homeport Chowder, and he makes it with large clams from Peconic Bay, where The Bell and Anchor is located, along with bacon that's cured and smoked in-house with local apple wood. The recipe also has a roux, celery, onion, white wine, lemon thyme from McClelland's home garden that his children help pick for him, potatoes and cream. It's garnished with chives.