

DECOR MAINe

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DECEMBER 2021

the Year in Design

29 STELLAR
PROJECTS OF 2021

A CAPE NEDDICK
HOUSE WITH A
CALIFORNIA SOUL

A BOHEMIAN
BUNGALOW IN
YARMOUTH

A REFINED ALPINE
HOUSE IN BETHEL

AN ULTRAHIP
COMPOUND IN
STEUBEN

A MODERNIST
ISLAND HOME IN
KENNEBUNKPORT

& MORE

PLUS!
THE DM GUIDE TO
PRELUDE IN
THE KENNEBUNKS



Merry & Bright

BUCKLE UP FOR **CHRISTMAS PRELUDE**
IN THE KENNEBUNKS—ONE OF THE COUNTRY'S
MOST ADORED HOLIDAY FESTIVALS

BY ALEXANDRA HALL PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAURYN HOTTINGER

Guests share a round of craft cocktails and specialty brews inspired by the seasons in Batson River's communal and cozy atmosphere. Photo by Heidi Kirn.



THE TWIN TOWNS OF Kennebunkport and Kennebunk are, by and large, known for taking things seriously: their venerable maritime history, stately, impeccable homes, and a world-class boating culture. But every year for the past 40, when the holidays approach, things take on a decidedly less serious tone. Considered one of the premiere Christmas events in the country, Christmas Prelude (known locally simply as Prelude) is when the towns transform into a swirl of eating, shopping, drinking, and merrymaking—a kind of Rockwellian Carnivale-meets-townwide holiday party.

Locals band with visitors from across the globe for its revels. Out come the Santa hats, reindeer antlers, and Christmas sweaters for parades, carols, tree lightings, and various fêtes. This year, it all runs from December 2nd to the 12th, and after Prelude moved largely online last year thanks to the pandemic, the area's businesses are now eager for a (cautious and safe) return to an in-person festival. It's an ideal destination for December's Drive. Read on to learn what owners of local boutiques, galleries, restaurants, and theaters are dreaming up to celebrate.

To start, center yourself at the heart of it all, in Dock Square. That's where Prelude kicks off with a ceremonial lighting of the town Christmas tree—the geographic and symbolic focal point of the entire festival.

"We're the first shop people pass over the bridge into Kennebunkport," says Melanie Shmalo, owner of Dock Square Emporium. "We welcome them with a smile and recommend places to eat or visit." And of course, it's also a place to cross holiday gifts off your list—handmade goat's-milk soap from Noisy Acres Farm in Buxton and maple syrup-scented candles from Kennebunkport's Sea Love Candles. "We love local things that trigger people's relaxation, reflection, and nostalgia—especially during the holidays," says Melanie. And they're perfectly positioned to do so. "We have the good fortune of being located right in the middle of everything during Prelude."

While there, be sure to look for the innovative and beautiful gift books created by another Kennebunkport company, Cider Mill Press. The independent publisher sells

its artful cookbooks, humorous parodies, and classic children's books online and in shops. Dock Square Emporium carries stellar finds like Cider Mill's *New York Times* bestselling edition of *The Night Before Christmas*, *The Christmas Cookie Cookbook*, and *Everything I Learned In Life I Learned From Tom Hanks*. "We develop all the book ideas in-house and hire writers and artists to bring our creations to fruition," says founder John Whalen.

Across the bridge in Kennebunk, drop in for a pint of specially made Prelude ale at Federal Jack's—made on-site at the brew pub—and upscale, winter-friendly, stick-to-your-ribs dishes like lobster pie and chicken marsala. "Prelude is a really cool thing to be a part of," says General Manager Erin Marcotte. "People come in with silly hats and Christmas sweaters, and the whole property is decked out with holiday decor." Meanwhile, the Thursday prior to Prelude, Federal Jack's holds a party, complete with heated outdoor seating, holiday drinks (candy cane martinis, anyone?), and one of the town's best views of the port.

Steps away sits the multifaceted, thoroughly dynamic Maine Art Hill. More of a campus than anything, it's home to a gallery, shows, and studios that showcase the work of regional and Maine artists—not to mention a mesmerizing wind-sculpture garden by Lyman Whitaker. "It's an approachable and educational experience," says Gallery Manager Abby Daggett. Even more so this holiday season: "They'll be transforming the studio into a Bavarian Christmas market," she says. "And offering art in gift-giving sizes and price points." And it'll all be close to the source: The artists themselves will be invited in to discuss their work with visitors over hot cocoa and cookies.

"From the day we opened, I've been calling it 'field and stream meets cozy and intimate with a splash of grand,'" says designer Krista Stokes, describing Batson River Brewing & Distilling. And to be sure, it's just that. Particularly come the holidays, when bartenders pour cocktails and brews inspired by the seasons (don't miss the new craft brews,



Nostalgic details flesh out Batson River's fishing-lodge vibe. Photo by Heidi Kirn.



top Entertaining, decor, and clever gifts share the spotlight at Home Ingredients. above At Lower Village Frameworks, owner Megan Bliss aims to make framing a process that is both creative and personal.



Artists Lisa Blaslin Loder and Holly Ross, coowners of Seaside Gallery & Gifts.



Lower Village connects to Kennebunkport with views of the Clam Shack and Spirit of Massachusetts.



above, middle left Upscale, stick-to-your-ribs dishes and brews top the menu at Federal Jack's. above, right Tartan throws and other rustic touches at Batson River. Photo by Heidi Kirn. bottom, far left Kristen Kuehnle, owner of Fine Print Booksellers, aspires to give every customer a curated reading experience. left Independent publisher Cider Mill Press sells beautifully made books in shops like Dock Square Emporium.





Farm + Table, housed in a big red barn, brims with gifts made by small batch artisans.

ing is a personal and creative process,” says Megan, an artist herself. “I’m trying to bring a fresh and exciting vibe to the industry so people can come in and share that with me.” She frames more than art and pictures; keepsakes and family heirlooms are among her clients’ favorite gifts—graduation hats, pet pawprints in clay, hole-in-one accoutrements, and other personal collections. “People are excited to pick up their pieces because of how personal and meaningful they are.”

In that same group of buildings, Louise W. Hurlbutt of Hurlbutt Designs helps visitors deck their homes in ways big (design services available by appointment) and small (gifts range from fine furniture all the way down to belts trimmed in local Kennebunk landmarks). She credits her design vision to years of living abroad and in Maine. “We pride ourselves on an eclectic look that accentuates living by the sea,” she explains. This December, Louise will share that vision during a Christmas decorating demonstration on the first Saturday of Prelude, and with *Nutcracker*-themed decorations around her showroom’s exterior and *Nutcracker* paintings by a local artist.

Also in that retail complex sits Kennebunk Outfitters, opened by husband-and-wife team Charlie and Robin Buckley in fall of 2020. “We’d been coming to the



or the holiday cocktail menu spotlighting winter warmers). Expect beautiful holiday lights, a roaring fire, and scads of nostalgic touches that compose what Krista dubs its “secret lodge in the Maine woods” quality.

Contrast that woodsy vibe with the ocean-centric experience of nearby Seaside Gallery & Gifts. Coowners Lisa Biasin Loder of LISART and Holly Ross of Fishhouse Designs are each established artists who opened their own shops before this boutique/gallery together, featuring their original works. “We’re constantly being inspired by the ocean in everything we create,” Lisa says. Imagine bright sea hues at every turn, including a collection of hand-crafted holiday gifts: tree ornaments, an original line of Christmas cards, and Kennebunkport bags designed by the duo. “We want people to walk in and sense they’re in a seaside cottage,” explains Holly. “Our gifts are perfect for people who want a little piece of Maine.”

Making custom framing accessible to all is important to Megan Bliss, owner of Lower Village Frameworks. “Fram-



above, middle left House-infused margaritas and Mexican hot chocolate are specialties at Pedro’s. above, middle right Maine Art Hill showcases regional and Maine artists, plus a mesmerizing wind-sculpture garden. Photo by Convinced Photography. right At The Lost Fire, Buenos Aires-born chef-owner Germán Lucarelli re-creates the Argentine steak house. Photo by Martin Epelde.

left Hurlbutt Designs goes all out in its holiday decorations. Photo by Heidi Kirm. top Kennebunk Outfitters stocks all manner of premium outdoor gear—from athleisure and hiking boots to running shoes. above, middle Chez Rosa chef Kyle Robinson’s pride in his charcuterie platters shines in every bite. Photo by Kolby Knight. above Chris Becker Photography is filled with Chris’s works, like *Lobster Car #2*, one of many Mainescapes.

area for 20 years every summer, and the store was born from what we saw—people biking, surfing, fishing, and running outside. It struck us as odd that you had to drive far for premium gear,” says Charlie. Business has been going gangbusters ever since, and this holiday season, they’ll be stocked up with everything from athleisure by Vuori to hiking boots, poles, and running shoes. “We love watching people come in to gear up,” says Charlie. “There’s an overwhelming sense that when people come in, they’re excited for an adventure.”

A stone’s throw away, Kiersten Wilcox also aims to provide a sense of adventure at her gallery, KW Contemporary Art. “I want to bring art that’s unexpected to the area, but that still fits into the history of Maine and its connection to artists,” Kiersten says. She’s planning a bevy of holiday experiences for visitors, beginning with the winter exhibition, *All That Glitters*, a continuation of last year’s Prelude show. “Everything seemed so gloomy with Covid, and people wanted something happy and bright to look forward to,” she recalls. Her response? A space full of metallic and shimmering works. The show will run December 3–January 15, with an opening reception/holiday party on December 4.

The revelry continues a one-minute walk away at Pedro’s. There, the relaxed outdoor seating with life-sized artificial palm trees is dotted with heaters and a firepit—the better to kick back with a (house-infused) margarita and rest up a moment. In continuing the spirit of Prelude, Pedro’s prime directive is fun. “We want everyone to have had such a great time that they can’t wait to come back,” says manager and part-owner Adam Hart. For some that means savoring Pedro’s barbacoa burritos (they’re a labor of love: marinated, grilled, and smoked in-house), or for others, sipping a Mexican hot chocolate—spiked, for those looking for a little extra holiday spirit(s).

Close by is the Morning Walk area of Kennebunk, and the holidays are an ideal time to stroll through it—particularly as it’s home to charming cottage boutiques like *Après Sea*. Owner Stephanie Stellwagen spent countless summers on the shores of Maine before moving here in fall of 2020 and setting up shop. “There’s nothing I love more than an evening with friends and loved ones after a day at the

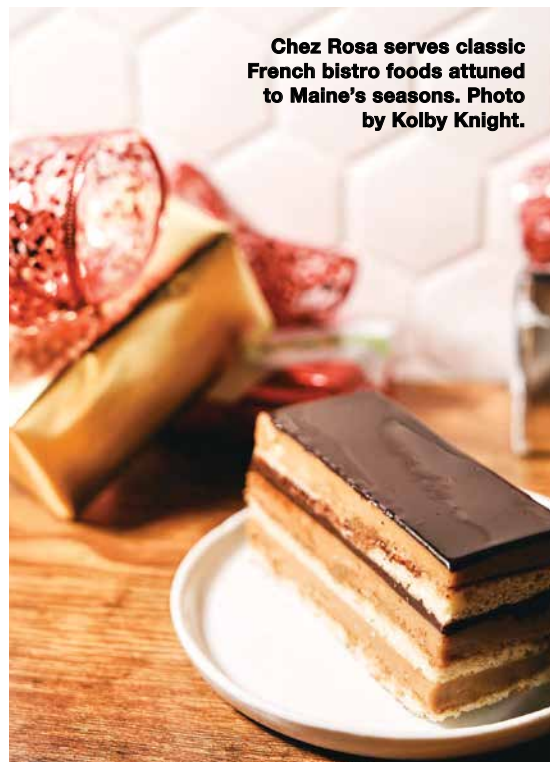
beach,” she shares. And that’s just what she supplies: all the things you want *après sea*—straw hats by Hat Attack, nautical cord bracelets by Asha, and Dudley Stephens fleeces for chilly dockside strolls.

Now, it’s time to swing around and drive back, following the lane off Dock Square and next to Colonial Pharmacy to Local Color. “People come in and say, ‘This is the happiest store I’ve ever been in,’” says manager Cynthia Rhea. Indeed, it’s tough not to smile at the shop’s high-voltage colors and patterns splayed across tableware and textiles by Maine artist Kate Nelligan—graphic designs originating from cut-paper collages and block prints. Just in time for holiday gifting, the store’s stocking plenty of acrylic tumblers and a tea towel featuring the Christmas tree in Dock Square. “Prelude is when the whole town comes together and puts on this giant holiday show,” says Kate.

A few doors over at Sea Love | A Candle Bar and Boutique, owner Stacy Miller is lighting up the season—quite literally. “Everybody loves a good candle, and I’m proud to create a safe and intimate feeling in my home with Sea Love,” she shares. At her boutique, she provides candle-making workshops at which you craft your own custom candle or reed scent diffuser (choosing from among the 100-plus fragrance oils) using non-toxic materials. “We’re looking forward to welcoming visitors during Prelude festivities with hot cocoa and a fire outside,” says Stacy. “And offering pre-made, wrapped gift boxes of

clean home fragrances for easy gift giving.”

One much-needed entry to the neighborhood in recent years: Fine Print Booksellers. “I opened it after I realized there weren’t any bookstores in Kennebunkport,” explains owner Kristen Kuehnle, a retired college professor. “And it’s turned into a place where people discover new books and also have spontaneous group discussions about what they’re reading.” Kristen’s carefully edited shelves are lined with quality fiction, literary nonfiction, local authors, and current best sellers. “I curate it both in the selection and to the individual person,” she says. A hefty group of regular customers has resulted. “I just really want people to read more,” adds Kristen. “Reading brings out the best in people.”



Chez Rosa serves classic French bistro foods attuned to Maine’s seasons. Photo by Kolby Knight.

A few steps away lies gastronomic bliss, in the France-by-way-of-Maine dishes of Chez Rosa. There, spouses Kyle Robinson and Yazmin Saraya Jean serve classic French bistro foods that pay homage to local seasons—and help sustain the environment. “We’re the first ocean-friendly restaurant in Maine,” says Yazmin. Exhibit A: Chef Kyle’s signature dish, cod Wellington, recently became a pollock Wellington when cod became impossible to catch sustainably. Kyle is also cooking up other winter specialties like his splendid charcuterie and fondues, both ideal for family-style gatherings. “We want to offer people honest comfort food from the heart, and hope they feel as though they’ve been welcomed into our home,” says Yazmin.

Speaking of feeling at home, around the corner at Home Ingredients, the focus is on home decor and entertaining. The cheerful space is stashed with lamps, wall art, vases, etched martini and wine glasses, farmhouse platters, and a slew of other New England-made gems. “For the holidays, we really transform the store into a winter market and spotlight festive holiday decor,” says Mark Brunell, who coowns Home Ingredients with Steve Sousa. “We also bring in lots from the Nora Fleming collection, plenty of hostess gifts, and make sure to have all different price points. So, it doesn’t matter if you’re shopping for a small cottage or a million-dollar home.”

Staying on Ocean Avenue and driving about three minutes, you’ll happen upon Chris Becker Photography. Chris, a fine-art, nature, and documentarian-style photographer, has witnessed 15 years of Preludes and even photographed several of them. And just as with the stunning naturalist work you’ll find in his gallery, he tends to highlight the details. “I love sharing what I know and the beauty of Kennebunkport with people,” he says. “And I welcome them in with simple things, like a musician out front, a firepit, and cocoa or hot toddies.”

A 10-minute drive away, you’ll come upon Cape Porpoise, where a Christmas tree fashioned out of stacked lobster traps announces your arrival at the coastal village. Here, you’ll also find Farm + Table, housed in a big red barn brimming with treats and gifts from small-batch artisans, all sourced by owners Liz and Bruce Andrews. “I don’t want

to sell what everyone else does,” says Liz. “We want to tell the stories of the makers, craftspeople, and local farmers.” That means you’ll discover all kinds of unusual treasures: cutting boards carved from fallen local woods, fir tree-scented candles by Farm + Sea, local honeys and sea salt soaps—all huge hits at Christmas.

Down the road, completely different flavors reign—those hailing from Argentina. The Lost Fire, helmed by Buenos Aires-born chef-owner Germán Lucarelli, re-creates the Argentine steak house. “It’s a place with an open kitchen to engage everyone, to relax in, with wonderful food,” he says. The house special? The mixed grill, a *mélange* of sausages, sweetbreads, and other meats to be shared by the whole table. For the holidays, the kitchen’s whipping up eggnog gelatos and traditional croissant bread pudding, and the staff are readying the holiday decorations. “Argentina is about getting together and sharing a meal, and so are the holidays,” says Germán. “This is the place for both.”

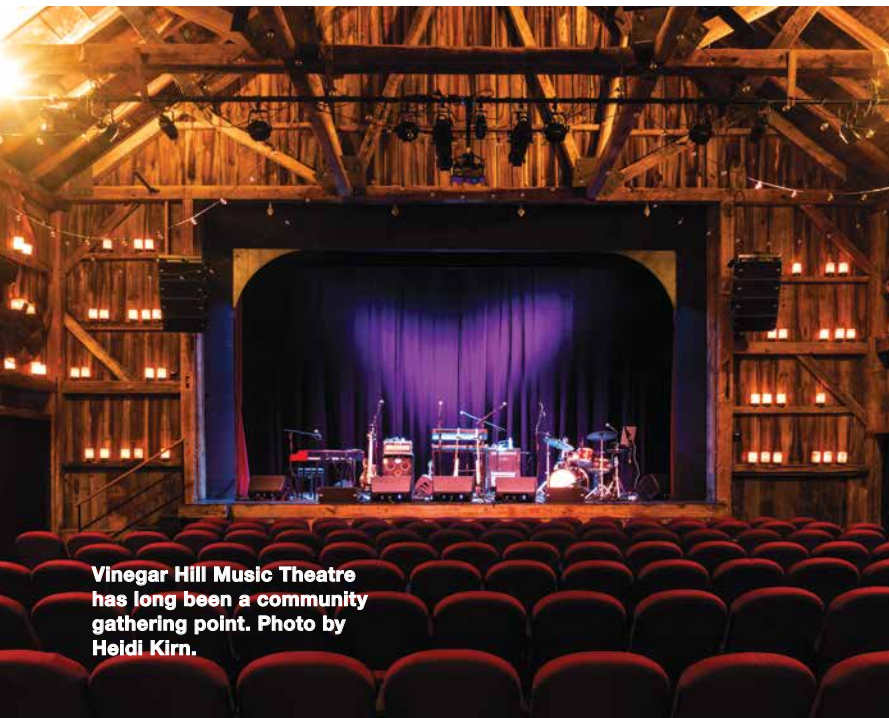
Year-round, there’s always something cozy and intimate about Earth at Hidden Pond—a magic spell cast by the room’s twinkling chandelier made from a preserved apple tree, perhaps? But in wintertime, the fireplace is crackling and the coziness is dialed up even higher. It doesn’t hurt that executive chef Joe Schafer also now turns to heartier dishes. “I love to braise things,” he says. He’s offering a special Prelude menu, plus a three- or four-course *prix fixe* menu. But, he adds, “You don’t

have to get dressed up to come here, but you can. Either way, you’re going to have beautiful food, and a time that’s merry.”

Drive about 10 minutes down Goose Rocks Road and you’ll come to the slate-black barn housing Vinegar Hill Music Theatre. Always a community gathering point for its high-level productions, the historic theater’s Prelude plans are manifold. This year, they’ll once again hold Santa Paws Fest (to benefit Lucky Pup Rescue, a nonprofit helping local dogs). “For safety’s sake, this year it will be a hybrid format,” says Managing Director Sarah Dearing. “With crafts for kids that are take-home instead of on-site.” They’re also bringing in a special holiday show by Well-Strung, the nationally lauded group that blends classical



Earth at Hidden Pond’s twinkling chandelier, fashioned from a preserved apple tree. Photo by Heidi Kirm.



Vinegar Hill Music Theatre has long been a community gathering point. Photo by Heidi Kirm.



Fine furniture crafted at the showroom-cum-workshop of Huston & Company. Photo by Meredith Perdue.



Guests create custom candles at Sea Love | A Candle Bar and Boutique. Photo by Stacy Miller.



above, middle left Maine artist Kate Nelligan's graphic designs originate from cut-paper collages and block prints. above, middle right At KW Contemporary Art, owner Kiersten Wilcox provides an adventure of the senses. bottom, far right Stephanie Stellwagen at her shop, Après Sea. Photo by Tiffany Mizzell Photography. right The Fifth Om integrates innovative technology into its holistic skin care and wellness mix.



above Kennebunk Toy Co. carries just about any gift a kid could want this holiday season. right Dock Square Emporium stocks local creations meant to induce relaxation and nostalgia.



and modern music. (Shows are on December 10th and 11th.)

Tradition of a different sort takes place a few minutes' drive away, at Huston & Company, a combination showroom and workshop of the family-run, custom fine-furniture maker. "People love touring and watching our master craftsmen create pieces that become heirlooms," says Saer Huston. Meanwhile, if smaller purchases top your gift list, the showroom has an ever-changing stock of cutting boards, throw pillows, and other home accessories. And just witnessing the ethos of the place in person is half the fun. "My dad started the business close to 33 years ago," says Saer. "And we've seen that fine furniture tends to be the gift that keeps on giving."

About a 10-minute drive from Dock Square on Main Street, Kennebunk Toy Co. is celebrating its 25-year anniversary. And they're doing it with a bang: "We've expanded our science area immensely," says owner Kelly Ratoff. The place is jam-packed with every kind of gift a kid—or teen—could want: paper lanterns, custom-made Hula-Hoops, board games, science and STEM experiments, World's Softest socks, books, dolls and stuffed animals, dress-up clothes, and bedroom play tents. "My manager, JoAnn McGee, and I work really hard to help people pick something that makes the gift giver a rock star," says Kelly. Best of all, they offer free gift wrapping.

And finally, just around the corner is a place to bliss out a bit and grab a few gifts while you're at it. The Fifth Om is a holistic skin-care and wellness studio where owner Michele Bundy dovetails healing therapies with innovative technology in facials, massage, herbal foot soaks, and far-infrared sauna therapy. "It's intimate and peaceful here," she says. "People come in after running around and de-stress with a Himalayan salt massage, say, or just to use the sauna. And then they get gift baskets of all-natural products or gift certificates while they're relaxing."

After experiencing the highlights of what Prelude offers, that sounds like just the kind of restoration you'll need to help you push on through the rest of the holiday season. ■

seaside celebration

These local boutiques, spas, eateries, and galleries have the holidays dialed up to 11.

1 APRÈS SEA

2 Morning Walk • Cottage N°3
KENNEBUNK
apresseamaine.com
@apresseamaine

2 BATSON RIVER BREWING & DISTILLING

12 Western Avenue
KENNEBUNK
batsonriver.com
@BATSONRIVERMAINE

3 CHEZ ROSA

2 Ocean Avenue • Dock Square
KENNEBUNKPORT
chezrosabistro.com
@CHEZROSABISTRO

4 CHRIS BECKER PHOTO GALLERY

127 Ocean Avenue
KENNEBUNKPORT
chrisbeckerphoto.com
@CHRISBECKERPHOTO

5 CIDER MILL PRESS BOOK PUBLISHERS

12 Spring Street
KENNEBUNKPORT
cidermillpress.com
@CIDERMILLPRESS

6 DOCK SQUARE EMPORIUM

50 Dock Square
KENNEBUNKPORT
Facebook & Instagram
@docksquareemporium

7 EARTH AT HIDDEN POND

354 Goose Rocks Road
KENNEBUNKPORT
earthathiddenpond.com
@earthathiddenpond

8 FARM + TABLE

8 Langsford Road
KENNEBUNKPORT
farmtablekennebunkport.com
@farmtablekennebunkport

9 FEDERAL JACK'S

8 Western Avenue
KENNEBUNK
federaljacks.com
@federaljacks

10 FINE PRINT BOOKSELLERS

Port Walk • Dock Square
KENNEBUNKPORT
fineprintbooksellers.com
FB: Fine Print Booksellers

11 HOME INGREDIENTS

19 Ocean Avenue
KENNEBUNKPORT
shophomeingredients.com
@home.ingredients

12 HURLBUTT DESIGNS

51 Western Avenue
KENNEBUNK
hurlbuttdesigns.com
@hurlbuttdesigns

13 HUSTON & COMPANY

226 Log Cabin Road
KENNEBUNKPORT
hustonandcompany.com
@hustonandcompany

14 KENNEBUNK OUTFITTERS

51 Western Avenue
KENNEBUNK
kennebunkoutfitters.com
@kennebunkoutfitters

15 KENNEBUNK TOY CO.

14 Main Street
KENNEBUNK
kennebunktoyco.com
@kennebunktoy

16 KW CONTEMPORARY ART

184 Port Road
KENNEBUNK
kwcontemporaryart.com
@kwcontemporaryart

17 LOCAL COLOR | KATE NELLIGAN DESIGN

30 Dock Square
KENNEBUNKPORT
shoplocalcolor.com
@shoplocalcolor

18 LOWER VILLAGE FRAMEWORKS

53 Western Avenue
KENNEBUNK
lowervillageframeworks.com
@lower_village_frameworks

19 MAINE ART HILL

14 Western Avenue
KENNEBUNK
maine-art.com
@mainearthill

20 PEDRO'S

181 Port Road
KENNEBUNK
pedrosmaine.com

21 SEA LOVE

2 Ocean Avenue
KENNEBUNKPORT
seatlovehome.com
@seatlovehome

22 THE FIFTH OM

5 Nasons Court • 2nd Floor
KENNEBUNK
thefifthom.com
@thefifthom

23 SEASIDE GALLERY & GIFTS

21 Western Avenue
Lower Village
KENNEBUNK
seasidegalleryandgifts.com
@seasidegalleryandgifts

24 THE LOST FIRE

62 Mills Road
KENNEBUNKPORT
thelostfire.com
@thelostfire

25 VINEGAR HILL MUSIC THEATRE

53 Old Post Road
ARUNDEL
vinegarhillmusictheatre.com
@vinegarhillmusictheatre

