

Beach:

MODERN LUXURY

June 2015

RESORTIST

LOCAL CHARACTER

ALMOND BROTHERS

Having first met as children, **Jason Weiner** and **Eric Lemonides**, co-owners of East End favorite **Almond**—plus three NYC outposts—are celebrating their Bridgehampton bistro's 15th summer season and finding that, happily, they still play well together.

By JAMES SERVIN | Photography by RICK WENNER

Almond restaurant proprietors Jason Weiner and Eric Lemonides first schmoozed with each other at the age of 6, when both attended a holiday buffet thrown by Weiner's father's business partner in Park Slope, Brooklyn.

"Even then, Eric could fill a room with his personality," recalls Weiner, Almond's executive chef, of Lemonides, who works the front of the house, greeting every guest. Lemonides' first impression of Weiner: "He was really good at sharing."

Forty-one years later, Lemonides and Weiner are still going strong.

Their charming and popular Bridgehampton bistro, with its century-old tin ceiling and whimsical zebra-print wallpaper, serves up locally sourced fare such as sweet potatoes from Amber Waves, silver queen white corn harvested from Pike Farm (Weiner will flavor roasted corn with shaved truffles and grated Parmigiano-Reggiano), russet potatoes from Open Minded Organics' farmstand on Scuttle Hole Road, artisanal bread baked at The Blue Duck Bakery Cafe or the day's catch from Dock to Dish, a community-based fishery.

"In growing season," says Weiner, "we get 95 percent of our food from within a 4-mile radius. On my way into the restaurant, I'm watching leeks being pulled out of the ground that will end up on someone's plate later that evening."

Customer favorites like escargot with Pernod, steak frites, steamed black mussels with shallots and pan-roasted sea bass mix with more exotic fare like marinated octopus and

goat egg roll. "I love peasant-y as a culinary sensibility—things that don't take themselves too seriously," says Weiner.

The childhood pals decided to go into business together in 2001, after working separately at several high-profile gigs: Lemonides was general manager at Della Femina in East Hampton, and Weiner helped open San Francisco's seafood mecca, Aqua, in 1991. Pooling Lemonides' savings and Weiner's bar mitzvah money, they opened Almond on the Montauk Highway, dedicating the place to Weiner's wife, artist Almond Zigmund

("She's the daughter of two hippies," Weiner says, explaining how his wife got her first name), and then moved the business to Main Street five years ago. "It's the grown-up version of our restaurant," says Lemonides.

The last decade has seen their ventures successfully expand into Manhattan, with an Almond bringing sustenance to the Flatiron district in 2008, followed by the opening of L&W Oyster Bar in 2012 and then another Almond, this one in Tribeca, in 2014. Lemonides' life partner, Lee Felty, is the director of operations at the NYC restaurants.

"One of the things we have down is putting out that communal vibe of bon ami that we envisioned when we opened the first restaurant," says Weiner, who, Lemonides attests, is still good at sharing: "Sharing is what we do for a living. You're going to be hard-pressed to find a great restaurateur who isn't turning people on to what they've got on their plate."

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BISTRO BUDDIES
Jason Weiner (left)
and Eric Lemonides
at their Almond
restaurant in
Bridgehampton