

SO CLOSE YOU CAN ALMOST TASTE IT

Words: Sara Yonker // Photos: Rachel Durrent

Dining on the coast can be an up close and personal experience. Armed with a supply of fresh, local seafood from the Gulf of Mexico, this trio of restaurants offers intimate dining in secluded settings for a chance to experience local tastes in new ways.





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GLOW

Down-home cooking meets fine dining inside what was once a ramshackled boathouse overlooking Rockport’s Little Bay.

GLOW, chef and owner Karey Butterworth’s creation after spending a lifetime loving food and working in restaurants, aims to please locals with new twists on old favorites and give seasonal tourists a true South Texas seafood experience.

Pinpointing South Texas’ food identity is difficult, she said. It’s a mix of coastal, Mexican, Caribbean and Southern, with unique tributes to people who settled here.

“You take all those influences and try to come up with a menu that is not too crazy or too eclectic,” she said. “What we’ve produced is simple and straightforward food that is prepared very simply and very lovingly. I guess it’s in my blood. Food was always central in my life. I was always adventurous, trying new things.”

Butterworth’s diverse background helps make her flavors and foods distinctive. She has Texas roots in both Houston and Austin, but lived and worked in the kitchens of New York City and London. She grew up with her father’s foodie influences, so her appetite for complex flavors started when she was young. Her mother is from New Orleans, explaining the Cajun flair to some of the revived family recipes featured on her menu, such as Mom’s Shrimp – a recreation of her mother’s take on creamy shrimp scampi.

While living in London, Butterworth started a catering company and the self-taught cook felt herself influenced by French cooking techniques, which a discerning diner could taste in GLOW’s menu now. When her Texas ties called her home, she ended up living in her vacation home in Rockport, which eventually became her permanent home.

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The longer she stayed in town, the more her idea for a community restaurant evolved, eventually becoming GLOW.



The name, originating from an acronym of her son's initials, aims to convey the experience Butterworth hopes diners have: the warm serenity after a good meal; sunset's welcoming reflection; sounds of laughter after food is served and friendships formed from flowing wine.

"GLOW is just that feeling, that emotion that's encapsulated in the South Texas coast. There is glow from the sun, the glow of fishing lures at night, the sunsets and even the glowing Harbor Bridge," she said. "It's that feeling of being with friends and of old friends reunited."

Inside the small building, the white-washed floors and walls give an airy, minimalist feeling. Industrial-style light fixtures contrast with the 60-year-old banquette benches originally from Chicago.

"I wanted it to look simple and straightforward, like a coastal ranch," she said. "I wanted people to feel like it had all been there a long, long time."

Small, decorative touches add a surprise for visitors, such as a mounted javelina head and 100-year-old reclaimed wood along the bar-area walls. Adorning the bathroom walls are Butterworth's collection of vintage maps from various cities.

The menu has evolved in the three years since the restaurant opened its doors. While in London, Butterworth adapted a European-style focus on local, seasonal produce.

"They don't do that there because it's trendy, they do it because it's always been done that way," she said.

The quality of food improves with fresh ingredients, so she's replicated that emphasis at GLOW. That's why she focuses on buying seafood from Rockport commercial fishermen, who supply her with flounder, grouper and snapper.

She keeps the menu from being solely seafood by ordering from the Broken Arrow Ranch out of Ingram, which ships a supply of more exotic meats overnight, including quail, boar and venison.

"I wanted to be able to offer diners something that they can't get everywhere," she said.

Initially, that was one reason the restaurant didn't offer chicken dishes. When she changed her mind, Butterworth opted for a

for a simple, straightforward fried chicken recipe as homage to Southern cooking.

Not all tastes are so conventional. The restaurant's crab cakes reveal a Vietnamese influence, with sriracha, ginger and jalapenos. Also, there are fish that only dawn the menu if patrons bring them in after a day of fishing. In those cases, the chefs will cook the patron's catch three ways, typically blackened, fried or roasted, and served with a variety of sauces.

"The restaurant is a live entity that is constantly evolving and trying to reflect the people who are in it," she said. "We're intimate. We're seasonal. We're a little boutique on the bay."



- *Recreating some of GLOW's dishes at home is possible with Butterworth's cookbook, "GLOW: Tastes from a Tiny Boathouse."*



ROAST GROUPEL

Serves 4

2 Tablespoons vegetable oil

4 (6-ounce) skinless grouper fillets

1 Tablespoon clarified butter*

Sea salt

Freshly ground black pepper

Half a lemon

Preheat oven to 450° F. Heat oil in a cast iron skillet over high heat. Sprinkle grouper fillet with salt and pepper and place fish in pan, then reduce heat to medium and cook for one minute. Spoon clarified butter over fish, transfer skillet to oven, and roast 5 minutes or until fish is just cooked through. Squeeze lemon over fish and glaze with more butter. Season to taste and serve over puy lentils, risotto or pureed potatoes with wilted greens.

*Clarified butter is butter that's been heated to boiling point and the butter fat that's left behind (the bright yellow oil) is more stable for cooking at high temperatures. You can make clarified butter by cutting up butter into small cubes, gently heating it to the boiling point when it will separate and then scoop or strain off the yellowy oil, discarding the milk solids left behind. It will keep for months in the fridge.

