

Oven-roasted Prince Edward Island mussels with white wine, garlic, lemon, olive oil and Parmesan cheese.

LUXDINING



# ISLAND FLAIR

*Locals flock to Ocean 60 for its martinis and succulent seafood*

By Kerry Sullivan  
Photography by Rob Parham

It's no surprise that Ocean 60 owner and executive chef Danny Groshell spends most of his time in the kitchen. His greatest cooking influence, his mother, introduced him to the world of all things culinary at an early age. She cooked elaborate meals herself, hosted themed gatherings, and took the family on trips to Europe, Mexico and South America, where Groshell got his first taste of cultural influences.

His travels and cultural tastes remain with him today at his beachside bistro. The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York, is where he received his formal training in French classical cuisine, but his mom was his real teacher: a master home entertainer, in his words, and an artist. For the last seven years, he has combined those very skills at Ocean 60.

Just a few steps from the heart of Atlantic Beach's Town Center, some consider Ocean 60 the area's best-kept secret. But locals have figured out it's the place to get fresh seafood, hearty dishes and the best martinis in town.

The inside is quaint and comfortable. You don't feel rushed or like just another table. Chef Groshell mingles with patrons at the bar and in the dining room, and waitstaff knows you by name. It looks and feels different. For starters, artist Enrique Mora's masterpieces adorn the walls of the eatery and can be purchased on the spot.

Other local artists are also featured in the restaurant's ever-changing gallery.

On an evening in late October, we were seated at a window table where we witnessed the parade of people out in the streets enjoying the beach life. We dined by candlelight and truly enjoyed the live Latin jazz coming from the Martini Room next door. You can expect to find local and regional jazz greats playing on weekends in the supper-clublike area.

Our server, Josh, knew the menu inside and out and didn't skip a beat when describing creative house cocktails such as blueberry and lemon Fresca, or specialty mojitos like the Costa Rican or the peach mojito. The martini and wine lists are impressive — over 30 martinis in all and in nearly every possible combination. I started with a Bellini — vodka, champagne, peach schnapps and lime juice. Others include sour apple, passion fruit, orange crush, grass skirt, pineapple upside-down cake, or strawberry banana cream. My guest opted for a glass of Firesteed Pinot Noir.

The menu is hard to label, and Groshell likes it that way. It changes with the seasons and combines Cuban family favorites from his wife's heritage and continental cuisine with classical French techniques. He takes flavors from different parts of the world and creates his own fusions and style — each course is a work of art.



Bartender Kat Green serves creative house cocktails and over 30 different martinis.

Vietnamese-inspired pho soup with duck confit, julienned vegetables, jalapenos, edamame and glass noodles in an organic duck consommé.



The regular dinner menu is not long. In addition to the nightly specials, Ocean 60's menu offers a handful of appetizers, salads and entrees. It makes ordering that much more difficult because everything sounds so appetizing. But no selection is set in stone — Groshell is extremely open to substituting, adding on and different preparations.

The specials in October reflected a fall palate. Appetizer specials included Florida blue crab cakes with spicy roasted red pepper aioli; crisp buttermilk fried quail over Boursin grits and chorizo gravy; oven-roasted Prince Edward Island mussels with white wine, garlic, lemon, olive oil and Parmesan cheese; and house cured smoked

salmon with German potato salad Napoleon.

We ordered the mussels. Served piled high on a large plate, it was enough to feed a party of four, but that didn't stop us from leaving only two or three on the plate. Ocean 60's homemade herd foccacia bread was perfect for soaking up the delicious juices at the bottom. The bread selection changes daily and is all made in house, as is the pasta, butter and calypso dust — Ocean 60's signature blackening season.

Groshell personally delivered a couple of bronzed diver scallops, harvested in Maine, with house chorizo dirty risotto and roasted tomato essence. They were gone in a split second and left us wanting more. He then

Bronzed diver scallops, harvested in Maine, with house chorizo dirty risotto and roasted tomato essence.



returned with a bottomless bowl of the soup du jour — a Vietnamese-inspired pho soup with duck confit, julienned vegetables, jalapenos, edamame and glass noodles in an organic duck consommé. It was sweet, yet hot — the perfect combination.

By this time, we were getting full, so we skipped the salad course. We wanted to save room for our entrees. Specialty salads available are the Ocean 60 Caesar, Greek salad, arugula salad, and marinated grilled portabella and fresh mozzarella.

Being a stone's throw from the ocean, we knew we wanted seafood as our main course. Josh informed us of the evening's specials, including fresh red grouper caught earlier in the day. He said we could substitute it for the triggerfish but prepare it the same way — sautéed and served with spaghetti squash ratatouille over sauce Veracruz with a side of Mayport shrimp or scallops. I was sold on the grouper and more of the amazing scallops we sampled earlier in the evening. The fish was so juicy, and each bite tasted better than the last. The squash, which I normally don't favor, was surprisingly delicious, and the scallops were some of

the best I had ever had. Needless to say, there were only a few morsels left on my plate in the end.

Coriander grilled ahi tuna and shrimp served over sweet potato whips, wild mushroom compote and marsala mushroom jus; and grilled organic duck breast with duck confit bread pudding, crumbled herb goat cheese, port wine and blueberry demi glaze were the other two entrée specials from which to choose. The ahi was a given for my guest until Josh described the chili fired grilled rib eye served with yucca wedges drizzled with cilantro vinaigrette and topped with roasted tomato and garlic compote, crumbled herb goat cheese, and aged sherry demi glace. As if that isn't enough to change your mind, Josh then offered to top it off with blue crab meat.

All steaks are Painted Hills Natural Black Angus Beef. Josh was extremely proud of its preparation and promised us we wouldn't find another like it anywhere — and he was right. The piece itself was enormous and cooked to perfection, and the yucca wedges yielded a shade of green thanks to cilantro and lime sauce. We did need a doggie bag for this as we not only couldn't finish

Fresh red grouper sautéed and served with spaghetti squash ratatouille over sauce Veracruz with a side of bronzed diver scallops.



A warm white chocolate brownie with dark chocolate chunks and vanilla ice cream.



it, but also wanted to savor the leftovers another day.

By now, we were stuffed. And as hard as it was to imagine eating dessert, we found room for what turned out to be two of the best-tasting desserts ever served. My guest ordered the vanilla bean-infused cheesecake with macadamia nut and graham cracker crust topped with wild berry compote. It was the equivalent of two or three pieces in size and the best he has ever had (and he's no stranger to cheesecake!).

I am a chocolate fan — not hard to find on most dessert menus. But Ocean 60's offering came with a twist: a warm white chocolate brownie with dark chocolate chunks and vanilla ice cream. You cannot go wrong with white and dark chocolate. Two huge brownies were piled on top of each other next to a hefty scoop of ice cream. It was so good I wanted to eat every last bite, but I had to stop short.

This was the perfect end to an absolutely spectacular meal. We could not have asked for anything more than what we found at Ocean 60 in Atlantic Beach.

*Chef Groshell's mom should be very proud.*



Chef Danny Groshell  
with wife and business  
partner, Mariella.