

# Explore New England

MASSACHUSETTS



PHOTOS BY PETEGORSKY/GIPE

"Still-life with Roemer" by 17th-century Dutch painter Pieter Claez and a ceramic vase from fifth-century Greece are on exhibit at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum.

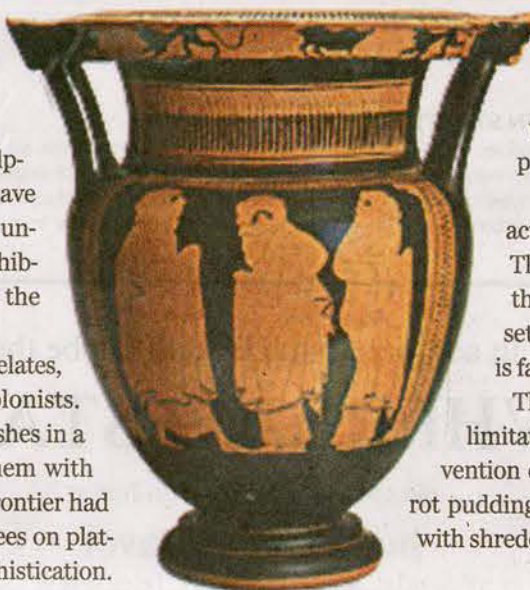
## YOU'RE INVITED TO A 'TABLE FOR TEN'

Working together, Pioneer Valley museums display an appetite for food, history, art

BY PATRICIA HARRIS AND DAVID LYON | GLOBE CORRESPONDENTS

We hate to break it to the Food Network and Slow Food International, but our obsession with all things gastronomic didn't exactly begin with "Iron Chef" and 100-mile dinners. Even as popular culture elevates chefs to the pedestals once reserved for painters and sculptors, the Pioneer Valley institutions of Museums 10 have brilliantly reminded us that there really is nothing new under the sun. "Table for Ten," the coordinated series of exhibits at the museums and cultural centers, investigates the nexus of food, art, history, mores, and manners.

As a display in the Flynt Center at Historic Deerfield relates, food was vital in the social life of even the earliest colonists. Most 17th-century Deerfield settlers cooked stews or hashes in a single pot, served them in common bowls, and ate them with their fingers, a scrap of bread, or a spoon. But even the frontier had gentry who revolutionized dining by serving single entrees on platters. By the 18th century, dinner became a show of sophistication.



Affluent households began serving à la française, that is, in successive courses. And while farmers traditionally ate their big meal at midday, dinner in the fancier Deerfield houses was pushed until 2 or 3 p.m. — because that's the way they did it in Boston.

Of course, what's great about Historic Deerfield is that you can actually see how people lived in those grand houses on The Street. There's a sense of the Flying Dutchman about the dining rooms of three houses, where the tables are set for dinner in Deerfield's Federal-era heyday. The food is faux, but the history is real.

The winter menu at the Williams House points up the limitations of locavore dining in New England before the invention of the freezer. Highlights include marinated fowl, carrot pudding, pickled beets and mushrooms, and cabbage stuffed with shredded meat and breadcrumbs.

MUSEUMS, Page M8



# Food-centric exhibits offer a nicely varied menu

## ► MUSEUMS

Continued from Page M7

The Sheldon House has a September menu of such harvest-season delicacies as stuffed cucumbers, late watermelon, and fried tripe. The Stebbins House table groans beneath the weight of desserts, including lemon curd tarts, marzipan fruits, candied orange rind, and a range of jellies made by boiling and flavoring deer antlers. As the Romans used to say, "De gustibus non est disputandum" (there's no accounting for taste).

The faux food looks convincingly realistic, but staff also prepare a number of the dishes at the Hall Tavern Kitchen (attached to the visitors center) during open hearth cooking demonstrations on Oct. 23 and Oct. 30-31. They're also demonstrat-

ing recipes from the mid-19th-century cookbook, "The American Frugal Housewife," on Nov. 6.

The Emily Dickinson Museum also explores food as an indicator of social standing in a new permanent exhibition, "Art Has a 'Palate': The Dickinsons and Dining," in the Evergreens. The home of Emily's brother Austin and his wife, Susan, (next door to the Dickinson Homestead where Emily lived) was an epicenter of Pioneer Valley intellectual and cultural life in the 1870s and 1880s, and Susan Dickinson was quite the hostess. The dining table — which could expand to seat 14 though custom of the time frowned on more than 12 — is set with the family's gilt-edged French porcelain.

An audio recording draws from a letter from Ned (Susan

and Austin's older son) and memoirs by Susan and daughter Martha to provide insider looks at how the family gathered at the table. The exhibition only gives a fleeting glance of the poet herself, who famously wrote, "Fame is a fickle food / Upon a shifting plate..."

The tables at Historic Deerfield and the Dickinson Museum are decidedly personal, local looks at food. By contrast, "Wine and Spirit: Rituals, Remedies, and Revelry" at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum spans the millennia and much of the world. The oldest object is a Neolithic wine jug from at least 7,000 years ago, but a whimsically magical 3,000-year-old wine vessel from what is now Iran nearly steals the show: It literally stands on its own two feet.

Paintings over the centuries depict a broad range of attitudes about wine, from an anonymous image of Christ turning water to wine at Cana to William Hogarth's bawdy tavern-cum-brothel scene from "The Rake's Progress." A curious classicism runs through the images. Artists who never endured a tailgate party nonetheless reserved their rowdiest imagery not for wine guzzlers, but for beer drinkers.

"Table for Ten" does not neglect children, either. Food is portrayed in a sweet light through "Eric Carle: A Feast for the Eyes" at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art. The children's book author is most famous, of course, for "The Very Hungry Caterpillar," in which the title creature eats its way through increasingly larger meals as a week progresses. Carle followed it up with "Walter the Baker," based on childhood memories of visiting his uncle's bakery, and "Pancakes! Pancakes!," a paean to a



ERIC CARLE MUSEUM

An illustration by Eric Carle is on display at the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art.

dish he loved as a child. The original tissue-paper-collage images — here mounted along with some of Carle's linocut work — make a charming exhibition that works its magic on children and adults alike.

While Carle might have been able to look back to childhood with nostalgia, Maria Magdalena Campos-Pons casts a more critical eye on her past in "Sugar" at the Smith College Museum of Art. The centerpiece of the exhibition is a powerful site-specific installation, "Sugar/Bittersweet." Mounted on African stools, it hinges on a veritable cane field of spears piercing cast-glass forms and columns of raw sugar. The artist, who is of Yoruba ancestry and teaches at the Museum School in Boston, makes the Afro-Cuban diaspora her theme.

Two earlier installations by

### 'Table for Ten'

For a full list of "Table for Ten" exhibitions and events, see [www.museums10.org](http://www.museums10.org)

Campos-Pons provide additional context for "Sugar/Bittersweet" as she explores her family's relationship to the sugar trade. Campos-Pons will be in residence at Smith College Museum of Art, speaking about the making of "Sugar/Bittersweet" on Nov. 11 and presenting a new performance piece on Nov. 12.

Several other events associated with "Table for Ten" are coming up soon, including a lecture by the exhibition curator at the Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, and some Sunday lectures/tastings at Amherst College's

Mead Art Museum. The Mead pairs a curator and a Pioneer Valley chef to tackle a specific theme. African, American, and ancient Mediterranean sessions are on tap.

Even the Amherst College Museum of Natural History gets in on the act, with a twist on epicure Jean Anthelme Brillat-Savarin's famous 1825 quote, "Tell me what you eat and I will tell you what you are." The exhibits profile extinct creatures (a saber-toothed cat, for example) through their fossilized teeth, stomach contents, and even fecal matter.

We bet the kitty wasn't eating stuffed cucumbers or antler Jell-O.

Patricia Harris and David Lyon can be reached at [harris.lyon@verizon.net](mailto:harris.lyon@verizon.net).

## New Hampshire

### Village of Loon



Four season resort features one to four bedroom condos with fully-equipped kitchens; fireplaces. Directly across from Loon Mountain. Enjoy four pools, 12 tennis courts, exercise room, sauna and Jacuzzi.

Rates Starting **\$89** Based On Availability At



VACATION RESORTS INTERNATIONAL  
866-4MYVACATION(866-469-8222)  
[www.8664myvacation.com](http://www.8664myvacation.com) BG

### Pollard Brook



Four-season resort features beautiful views of Loon Mountain. One, two & three bedroom suites with kitchens, fireplaces and sleep sofas. Indoor & outdoor pools, fitness center, game room & activities on-site for all ages.

Rates Starting At **\$115**  
Based On Availability

**InnSeason** POLLARD BROOK  
Resorts The Northeast Experience™

866-4MYVACATION (866-469-8222)  
[www.8664myvacation.com](http://www.8664myvacation.com)

Proudly Managed by  
Vacation Resorts International BG