

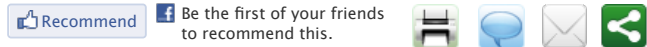
## Chef's Secrets: Mooncussers Tavern opens in Harwich

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**Cape Codder**

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CAPE COD — Most recently, it was Circadia, an upscale restaurant at 86 Sisson Road in Harwich Port, but old timers remember it as The Country Inn. Now, thanks to Patrick Wiseman, a 38-year veteran of the hospitality business, and his son, Damon, the revitalized property has a friendly, neighborhood ambience again.

The Mooncussers Tavern has been refurbished from top to bottom and sparkles. Chef Shawn Custer spent weeks scrubbing the kitchen until it met his standards from his days at Wequassett. Bar manager Damon refinished the beautiful wide-board floors (circa 1830), added French doors that may one day lead to outdoor dining on a stone patio. He redid the U-shaped bar and added new lighting and a new bay window making it a simple, pleasant place to be, uncluttered and refreshing.

The effect is clean and light, which is exactly how Chef Custer describes the food. Tables sport white tablecloths protected with glass and candles. The gold walls and wood beams add coziness and warmth. The many fireplaces will add the real thing come winter, as the tavern will be open all year.

The tavern seats 47 and another nine at the bar. Other areas of the inn can be opened as needed or for private functions. With an entertainment license and separate raw bar, (\$1.50 to \$1.75 per item) the place will be hopping.

The menu offers tapas, or Spanish appetizers meant to be shared as well as an eclectic mix of dishes including seasonal specials. Prices run from \$8 for pan-seared scallops served with paprika-apple butter to the Seafarer's lobster roll for \$14. (The Chatham Seafarer is run by the same family.) Wine is offered from \$6.50 to \$10 per glass, craft beer is on draught and there is a martini menu

### Meet chef Shawn Custer

How did you become a chef?

I washed dishes in a restaurant when I was 15. After I graduated from high school, I went to an apprenticeship program in the culinary school at Colorado Mountain College.

What do you like about being a chef?

I love to eat. I grew up in the kitchen in a ranch/farm community. I watched my mother and grandparents cook. We had family dinners and great food. The vegetables came out of my grandparents' garden. They were great cooks and got me into it. Cooking is about enjoying good food.

How did you end up on the Cape?

I'm from Colorado. I heard about an interview at 28 Atlantic with Bill Brodsky. It was the job opportunity on the other side of the world that drew me here. Later, I heard about the position here from the sous chef at 28 Atlantic.

How would you describe the menu?

It's simple but has sophisticated flavors with a Spanish and French influence. We lean toward tapas. It's almost like a tasting. You order several small plates and share. We have a good mix of lighter dishes like shrimp, sauteed al ajillo (\$8) and oven-roasted mushrooms (\$5) and grilled artichoke (\$7).

Everything is home made: sauces, salad dressing, marinades. The seafood is local. Only the bread is out sourced. We're open for dinner now and hope to be open for breakfast soon.

What's the most popular item?

The duck-infused burger (\$15) It's the best burger on Cape Cod. It's a way to get more flavor and it's incredibly juicy. We serve it with fresh aioli mayonnaise spread on an onion roll with tomato, lettuce, red onion and topped with a fried egg. You have a choice of three kinds of hand cut fries. Bernaise, sea salt, or white truffle parmesan fries.

What ingredient couldn't you cook without?

Fat of any kind. Butter, olive oil, duck fat. If it's used right it really sets off a dish. For example pan seared scallops. I throw in a dab of butter and sprig of thyme at the end and it makes them delicious, much better.

What's your favorite food?

Beef. A nice perfectly cooked piece of meat is my favorite food. My stepfather owns a free-range cattle ranch. I get the best meat when I go back home. My personal favorite in the restaurant is the beef carpaccio (\$9). I marinate the beef tenderloin then cook it with clarified butter to caramelize it. When it's cool, I freeze it. Then, shave it to order. It's served on a fresh baguette with shaved parmesan and confit garlic aioli.

Do you have a favorite restaurant?

Blackfish in Truro. The first time I ate there the food blew me away. I had the best grits I've ever eaten in my life and pork belly. I was sold. Grits are very popular now.

If you go:

Moocussers Tavern, at the Harwich Port Seafarer, 86 Sisson Road is open daily from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. Kitchen closes at 10 p.m. Telephone 508-430-1230.

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