

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP:
Redmond Natural
Mineral Rock Salt,
Baline Fleur de Sel
de Camargue,
Sel Gris de
Guérande aux
Herbes, Hawaiian
'Alaea Sea Salt,
M. Gilles Hervy Sel
Marin "Grey Salt"

THE SALT CAVES IN REDMOND UTAH, about 150 miles from the Great Salt Lake, smell sweet and fresh. And deep down in the dynamite-blasted labyrinths, the cool, dry air washes over your skin like gentle tonic. The caves are so clean you can lick the walls; so quiet, it's eerie. Turn out the lights and it's like being at the bottom of an ancient seabed, which is what these caves are. Though it is mined from a five-hundred-foot-thick underground vein, as opposed to being



SEA SALT SAVVY

WRITTEN BY VIRGINIA RAINEY PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKEL COVEY

raked by *paludiers* (salt workers), such as those who toil on the coast of Brittany, Redmond salt, marketed under the name RealSalt® has joined the pantheon of sea salts praised by chefs the world over. Like all good sea salts, it is a revelation in taste. Pure and unadulterated, it evokes the sea, as concentrated by the sun and wind.

Sea salts from all over the world

have an almost magical effect on foods, from sliced garden tomatoes or baked sweet potatoes to foie gras. The brightly flavored grains gently coax flavor from already savory items, and the delicacy of the crunch as soft crystals slowly dissolve on the tongue adds another level of bliss to such simple combinations.

Unless you've been in another

kind of cave as far as trendy food items go, you know that over the past decade, sea salt has risen from its longstanding and revered status among professional chefs to become the darling of American foodies. The finest French *fleur de sel*, a rare white "bloom" of salt that appears atop the more gray salts, sells for around \$15

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Park City

CHENEZ

Fighting the rising tide of comfort foods and value menus, Chenez features the classic French cuisine and pampering service straight out of a 1950s Gourmet magazine. Perhaps it's "back to the future," as the menu evokes those traditional, glittering, almost Proustian memories of coquilles Saint-Jacques, lobster bisque, filet of sole Normande and Grand Marnier soufflés. The names haven't changed—veal Oscar, tournedos Rossini and Monsieur Lapin—and the experience remains exquisite when it's done with care, which is provided by owner Joe Jafarian and Chef Vincent Grass. 710 Lower Main Street, Park City, 435/940-1909. \$\$\$\$

CHEZ BETTY

This spot is an enduring success in the rarified air of Park City dining and a favorite locale for locals due to Chef Jerry Garcia's inventive creations with fine ingredients. Recent favorites include a saffron and scallion risotto with seared filet mignon, wild mushroom gratin in a roast garlic cream and boneless duck breast with raspberry demi-glace. A fine staff and a French countryside setting add to the appeal of this enduring Park City pleasure. 1637 Short Line Road, Park City, 435/649-8181. \$\$\$\$

EASY STREET BRASSERIE AND BAR

Folks with taste and astute investment sense renovated the old Utah Coal and Lumber into a charming, warm and inviting locale for locals and skiers, with several dining areas and a boisterous bar scene downstairs. Lots of wood, brass and cozy nooks encourage tastings from the array of French and American wines in the cellar. Daily specials and a family-style serving option enhance bistro attractions such as frogs' legs, filet mignon au poivre and braised lamb shanks with foie gras mashed potatoes. And why not move in on the escargots ménage à trois, six snails done three ways, another bit of the irreverent wit in evidence at this easy to embrace new and brassy brasserie. 201 Heber Avenue, Park City, 435/658-2500. \$\$\$\$

GRAPPA

A distinctive creation from Bill White, with a daring menu, stylish design and success with both ski tourists and locals. Grappa thrives as a tower of Italianate flavors, with a rustic interior evoking a countryside Tuscan palazzo. Find some of the freshest seafood in town here, including a black bass with leeks, mushrooms and grilled asparagus and plump, perfectly cooked black pepper seared diver scallops. And don't miss the most tender veal chops in the Rocky Mountains, rubbed with green peppercorns and served with a potato pave. Satisfy your sweet tooth with the vanilla bean crème brûlée. 151 Main Street, Park City, 435/645-0636, www.grapparestaurant.com. \$\$\$

Resorts and Canyons

BLUE BOAR INN

A cozy island of alpine influence amidst Midway's mountain setting, the Blue Boar has thrived with excellent dining for lodgers, sportsmen and those with European tastes. Entrées include Norwegian salmon, muscovy duck with blackberries and fresh chanterelles and braised buffalo osso buco. Executive Chef Chris Sheehan balances the hearty entrées with attractive salads, house-cured gravlax and cioppino in saffron broth. Good service amidst the earthy woods, linen, lamps and occasional boar's head of the dining room is augmented by a superb wine list. The restaurant is adjacent to the entrance of Wasatch State Park. 1235 Warm Springs Road, Midway, 888/650-1400. \$\$\$


SNOWBIRD

Perched atop the Cliff Lodge, Chef Todd Gardiner and staff keep The Aerie at a high level of dining excellence. For starters, try the seared diver scallop with black truffle vinaigrette or wild mushroom tartlettes with a roasted red pepper cream. The sweet corn and crab bisque helps renew tired ski legs, while seared ahi tuna with wasabi aioli and pickled ginger vinaigrette or grilled venison chops with spiced sweet potatoes will renew the tastebuds. Save room for Pastry Chef Mickey McPhail's creations such as mango soup and litchi nut Bavarian. Cliff Lodge, Snowbird, Little Cottonwood Canyon, 801/933-2222. \$\$\$

STEIN ERIKSEN LODGE

Chef Zane Holmquist heads a talented crew that knows what to do with the best imported ingredients. Truffle mascarpone enhances butternut squash soup, while Hudson Valley foie gras comes with tellicherry peppercorns and red flame grape compote. Lobster salad pairs well with grilled swordfish and white cheddar and bacon mashed potatoes match up to a grilled filet of Colorado beef. Try Pastry Chef Raymond Lammers' Indonesian spice cake and curry ice cream, Brazil nut custard with Drambuie sauce and refreshing sorbets and ice creams. Sommelier Cara Schwindt generates lively wine pairings for this gold medal fare. Sunday jazz brunch is another rich attraction. Deer Valley, Park City, 435/649-3700. \$\$\$\$

WESTGATE GRILL

This is one of the best values in Park City dining, serving high-end food in a rustically posh setting of flagstones and dark wood. Chef Don McCradic is the guiding hand, with an able young staff assisting in turning out excellent American cuisine with Asian touches. Seafood appetizers are a stylish start, such as zesty crabcakes, seared ahi tuna and meaty mussels in a creamy curry sauce. A classic Caesar and spinach-bacon-blue cheese salad are memorable for being lightly dressed, not drenched, and tender beef entrées are most popular, though pasta with duck confit ragù and superior sea scallops are close behind. Chocolate soufflé is a must. 3000 The Canyons Resort, Park City, 435/940-9444. \$\$-\$\$\$ 

SEA SALT SAVVY

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for sixteen ounces, while gray or pink *sel marin* is about half that price. If that still seems a bit on the luxe side, consider the labor-intensive work of mining or hand-raking concentrated salts from coastal beds. And, the fact that you use only small amounts of this salt as a finishing condiment rather than a cooking ingredient (though it is also prized in bread-making) justifies that higher price tag. Consider also that your regular old table salt is anything but natural, coming to you chemically bleached, refined with anti-caking agents and laden with iodine. All it takes is a simple taste test to illustrate the ocean of difference between that ubiquitous stuff and the more expensive salts. Pour some regular table salt on a plate, and next to that, some sea salt. Lick your fingertip and taste the sea salt. Try the table salt on another finger. If its stark, chemical flavor doesn't convince you that it's time to ditch the old stuff, then try some sea salt as a condiment on grilled meat or fish, sprinkled on a bed of greens such as arugula with a sherry vinegar and walnut oil vinaigrette, or on a soft-cooked egg.

Sea salts come in hues from white to pink to grey and in various grinds. Depending on your taste, the coarse salts can be broken down a bit with a mortar and pestle or in a salt grinder. Many sea salts, such as RealSalt®, are endowed with a wealth of natural minerals too. For more information on Utah's Redmond salt mines, visit www.realsalt.com. For details on the differences between *sel marin* and *fleur de sel*, peruse the shelves and talk to the staff at Liberty Heights Fresh in Salt Lake City or visit www.chefshop.com. 