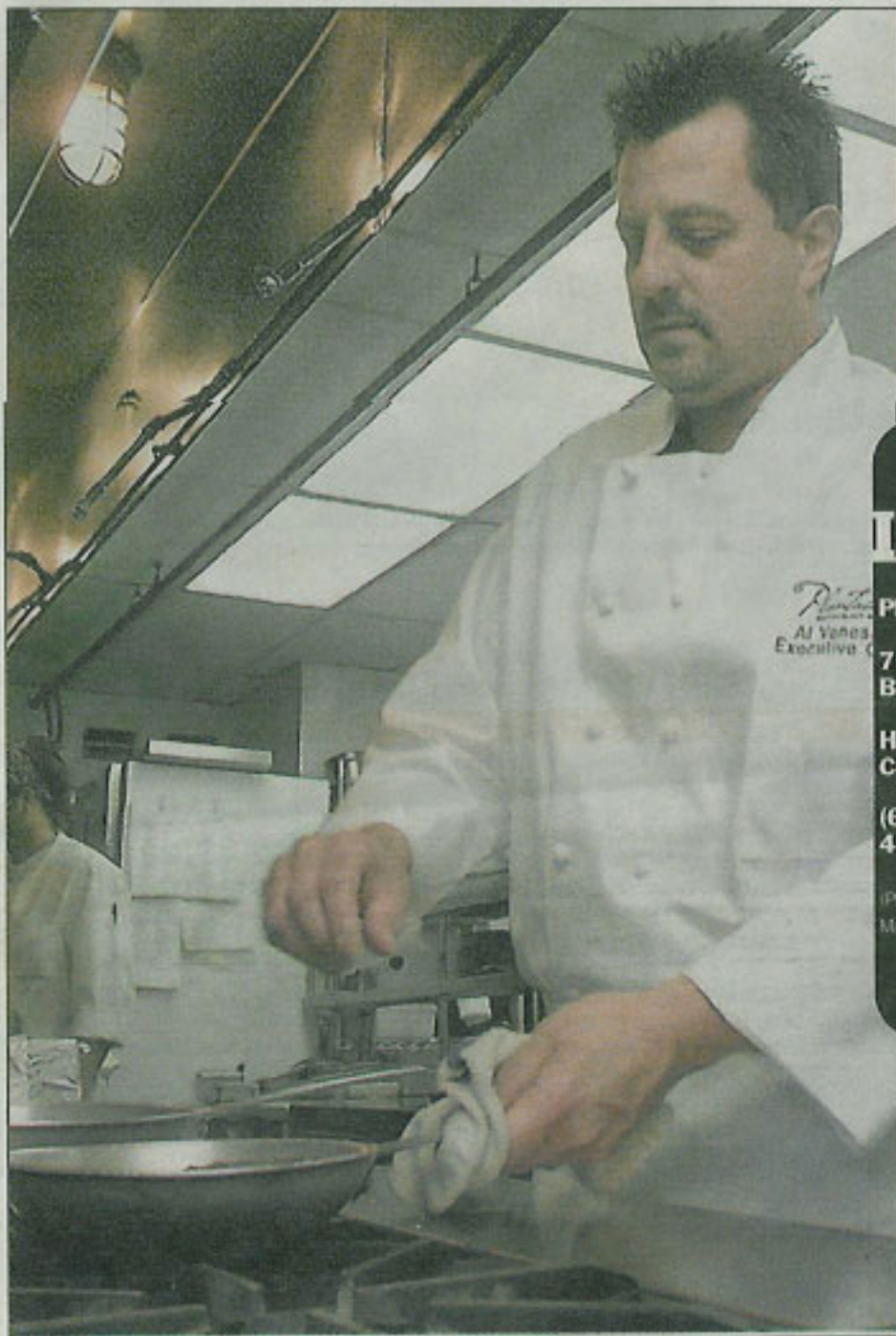


# Main Course

## Growing appetites at Plantation



(Top) Executive Chef/ Owner Allan Vanesko cooks up some salmon at the Plantation. (Bottom right) One of the tuna entrees available at the Plantation. (PHOTOS: ANN MARIE DONATO)

**BY DAVID HEEKIN**  
Correspondent

Returnees to LBI for the '03 summer season looking for one of their old favorite restaurants are in for a shock. The Owl Tree is no more. Time marches on and restaurants change hands. But fear not, stout hearts; you're gonna love its replacement, Plantation.

Allan Vanesko and Marty Grims have brought a touch of the

Caribbean to the Shore. This is not the ganja and grouper, dreadlock and parrothead Caribbean—rather a genteel aura of planters and the good life.

It starts with the décor. The forest greens and oak tones have given way to soft yellows and browns. Even the flatware and dishes are unique. I fear that unique is going to be an overworked word here.

The background music was eclectic, to say the least, from steel drums

to sitars, reggae to ragas, slide guitar to pulsing salsa. Great choices. The drink menu features a careful selection of moderately priced to expensive wines, and their house wines are excellent. Umbrella drinks are available, as are an exquisite range of truly premium rums and tequilas. We're way beyond Bacardi and Cuervo here.

It was hard to pass on the conch fritters, but we settled on an appetizer of baked crab and artichoke gratin with pita chips. It's the perfect size for two to share without feeling gorged, and is served piping hot. Very smooth, and so much more refined than wings or poppers. We also shared a bowl of coconut/crab corn chowder which was—yep—unique. Crab and coconut are just mild enough to blend well with the chowder, neither overwhelming nor compromising the flavor. Really a good soup.

I have to mention the bread here; finger sized loaves of a vaguely Italian/focaccia flavor in a unique (there's that word again) vertical presentation, accompanied by a delicate rosemary olive oil for dipping. Excellent.

Entrée's favor the Caribbean, but add an influence of Italy and a touch of the Pacific Rim. I went with a jerk-rubbed pork chop, close to two inches thick and fork-tender. It had just the right taste of that wonderful Jamaican jerk sauce without crushing the pork flavor or cauterizing my taste buds. The dish was served over mojo, a traditional cold salsa of chopped peppers, fruit, onions, corn and beans. Vanesko adds a touch of mint for a refreshing counterpoint.

Janet's choice was Wasabi Crusted Sea Bass. I see a lot of horseradish crusted dishes around; Vanesko's choice of Wasabi was inspired. Again, he uses just enough to flavor and not so much as to be too hot. This powdered Japanese horseradish was a very pleasant change which made it—yeah—I know... unique. It is accompanied by an Asian stir-fry which was the hit of

the evening with its miso and orange-ginger vinaigrette.

Homemade desserts are getting to be as rare as qualified political appointees these days, but Plantation's desserts are all made in-house. When I first heard of Plantation, I envisioned Tara and Scarlett O'Hara, and in deference to that misread, we split a Georgia Peach Cobbler. Delicious, and in about two minutes, it too was Gone With... nah—I'm not gonna go there. I really regret not trying the Key Lime Pie with Raspberry sauce though. That really sounds like a great combination of savory tartness. Maybe next time, and there will be a next time.

Overall, I was very pleased with this meal and Plantation. It's as expensive as you want to make it, if you want to try \$65 shots of cask rum and one of every course. However much you want to spend though is worth it. So are you. This restaurant is worth treating yourself to. And without using The "U" word, let's just say that there is not another menu like this on the Island.

Full bar, upscale without being snobbish. There's no formal dress code, but you'd feel conspicuous in cutoffs and T-shirt. As I saw on a sign in an Aruba restaurant last week, "Gentlemen are expected though not required, to wear long trousers and a collared shirt." \*



**Info**

**PLANTATION**

7908 Long Beach Blvd.

Harvey Cedars

(609) 494-8191

(PHOTOS: ANN MARIE DONATO)