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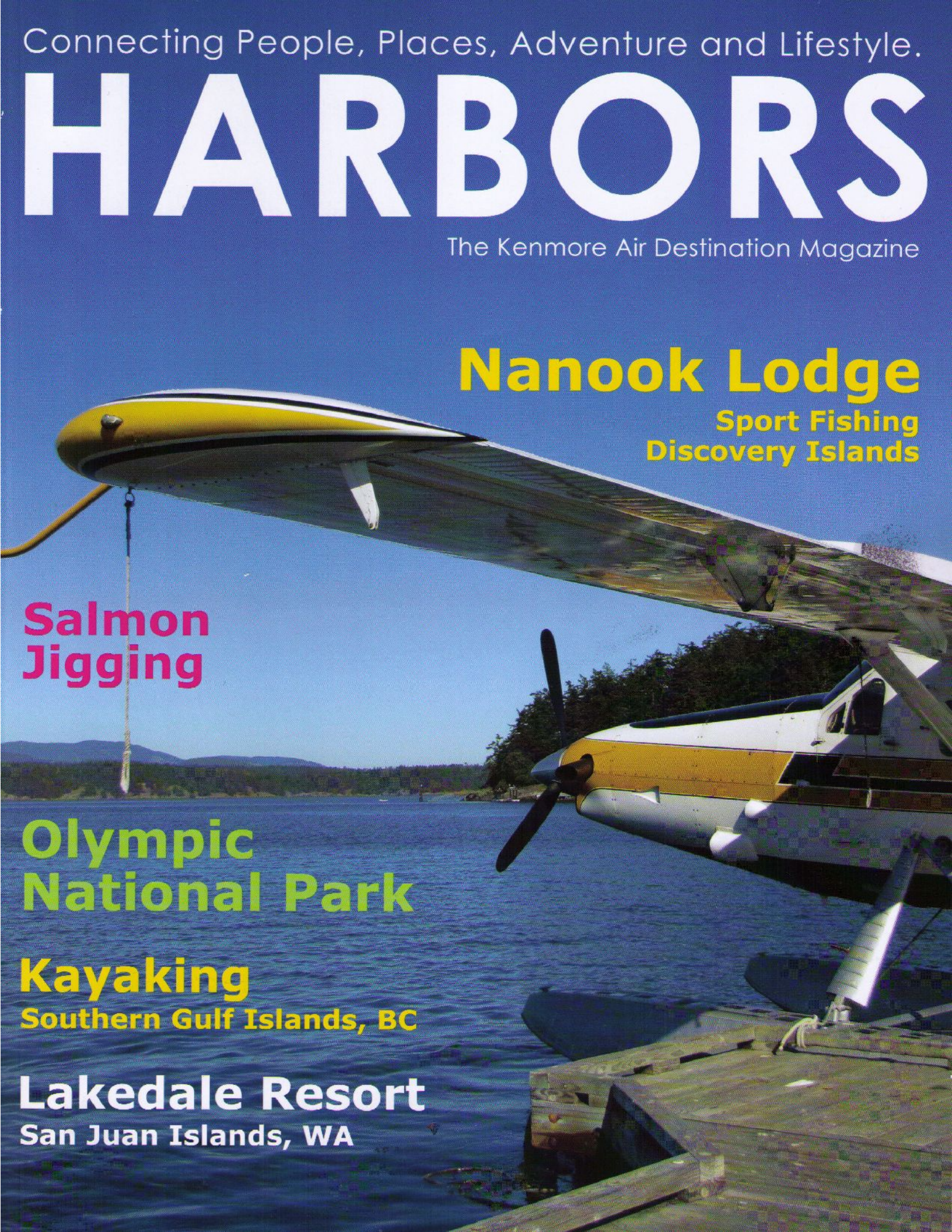
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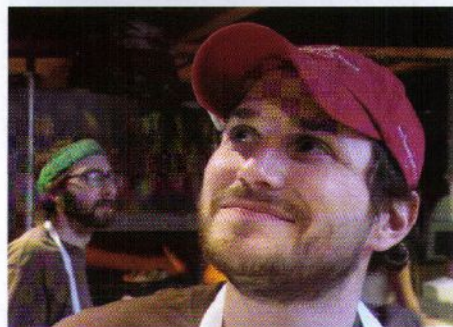


SLU: Neighborhood Happenings

Seattle's South Lake Union Neighborhood, home of Kenmore Air's Seaplane Terminal.

A Serious Man... About Pie

By Allen Cox



▲ Chef Tony Catini, at Serious Pie.

Celebrated chef and Seattle restaurateur Tom Douglas has a keen knack for attracting creative chefs with star potential and letting them prove themselves in his restaurant kitchens. Chef Tony Catini heads up the culinary team at the newest Tom Douglas Restaurant, Serious Pie, in Seattle's South Lake Union district (not to be confused with the original Serious Pie location, which is still in full swing).

Who isn't a pushover for an expertly crafted pizza with unexpected artisan ingredients coexisting as a happy family bubbling away atop a crispy crust in a woodfire oven? Being a true pizzaphile myself, I couldn't resist the opportunity to catch up with Chef Catini to learn if he can actually toss a crust. I ended up learning so much more.

This young chef hails from Chicago where he began his restaurant career at age 14 as a dishwasher in—what else?—a pizza restaurant. Fast forward to Le

Cordon Bleu in Minneapolis, where he learned about much more than pizza. Those classic culinary skills serve him well in the Tom Douglas restaurant kitchens, where, even in a restaurant that specializes in pizzas, the ingredients, quality and culinary technique are key. At points in his restaurant career, Chef Catini has had the benefit of working on both sides of the kitchen door—both in the kitchen and as a server—so he understands what wows diners, and he delivers.

What distinguishes the pizza at Seri-

ous Pie from others? "We have a very unique dough that was developed by and made by bakers," Catini says. "Our head baker, Gwen LeBlanc, developed our dough recipe in an effort to create a breadier, but still crispy pizza dough. It also doesn't hurt to have a beautiful woodfire oven and use the best toppings we can find."

The seasonal menu at Serious Pie favors produce from local farms when available, and Chef Catini makes 90 percent of the charcuterie in-house, ingredients he is extremely proud to use



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on his pizzas. The special-recipe crust, local produce, house-made charcuterie and a woodfire oven made locally in Bellingham are the four elements that make Serious Pie's pies, well, serious.

A well-designed list of seasonal starters and desserts frame the pizza menu to offer a three-course dining experience that competes with the city's best casual dining spots. These include savory treats, such as a composition of local beets, caramelized anchovies and pistachios, and sweets, such as a plate featuring cannoli, passionfruit, satsumas and candied fennel.

When customers are in a hurry for a quick bite or waiting for a table in the dining room, Chef Catini offers a great option for nibblers in his Prosciutto Bar. "At the moment we are doing hand-shaved Prosciutto d'Parma," says Catini. "But we do have plans to eventually use our own prosciuttos. Other than that, you can get small bites that rotate daily from house cured olives to mini-Panini sandwiches. Not to mention beautiful Italian and local wines."

Serious Pie's menu has some artfully imagined and crafted pies – from simple fixins', such as fresh mozzarella and the chef-revered san marzano tomatoes, to sublime toppings found in yellowfoot chanterelles and truffle cheese. But you can't go wrong with the Chef's personal favorite. "Hands down, it's the soft egg pizza with house made guanciale and local arugula," says Catini. "I am rarely awake to eat breakfast, so this is the closest thing I can get to it." For the uninitiated, guanciale is a salt and pepper cured, unsmoked Italian bacon made from pig's jowls; it characteristically has a tender texture and a delightfully strong flavor.

Besides valuing locally sourced, quality ingredients in his kitchen, Chef Catini sums up his food philosophy with one simple principle: "When in doubt, add pork."

When in the South Lake Union district, follow your nose to Serious Pie or find it at 401 Westlake N (at Harrison); (206) 436-0050; <http://tomdouglas.com>.