

**WILMINGTON, N.C.** — Dean Neff and Lydia Clopton have opened their first solo venture, Seabird, a seafood restaurant and oyster bar devoted to North Carolina's coast, in the heart of Wilmington's historic downtown near the Riverwalk.

"We're passionate about the foodways and the food community that make Wilmington so special," said Neff, a James Beard Foundation semifinalist for Best Chef Southeast and champion of North Carolina's sustainable fishing, aquaculture and farming practices. Together with former beloved Love, Lydia Bakery & Café owner Lydia Clopton, this husband-and-wife team welcomes the community back into this landmark building after a year-long interior and exterior restoration and redesign.

The duo partnered with Old School Rebuilders, Mauer Architecture, Smith Haynes Studio and landlord James Goodnight to preserve and restore the restaurant's 2600-square-foot space in the building, and create a comfortable and stylish setting for dining all day -- from breakfast, lunch, and brunch to dinner and late-night cocktails. Sea blues, wooden bookshelves, aquatic works of art and vintage lighting create the warm, nautical backdrop for a variety of cozy seating areas, including a U-shaped bar, private dining room, semi-circular booths and a 6-seat interactive Chef's Table where Neff and his team will present creative and affordable off-menu offerings.

In the mornings, Seabird will offer a small grab-and-go breakfast menu including Counter Culture Coffee and Clopton's house-made pastries and biscuits. Adding to the inviting everyday nature of Seabird, Clopton has also curated a bookstore within the bar, which features a selection of her favorite cookbooks, food writing and quarterly magazines.

Seabird is now accepting reservations on Open Table beginning Friday from 5pm to 10pm and on-going, Wednesdays through Mondays. Counter-style breakfast service begins Wednesday from 9am-2pm (Seabird will be closed Tuesdays). Lunch, brunch and late-night cocktail service will begin this Summer.

Seabird's opening menu celebrates the Spring season with Neff's adept coastal cooking. Begin at the gorgeous bar with natural wines, local beer or craft cocktails like the refreshing rhubarb & rum cocktail and a dozen oysters--served raw or broiled. Try local Stone's Bay or Duke's farmed oysters on the half shell with Neff's fresh take on cocktail sauce made with harissa. Oyster lovers will delight to find them fried and baked --with hollandaise and crab, BBQ'd with roasted shrimp, or Rockefeller style with Benton's bacon. Meanwhile, sweet "peel and eat" NC shrimp are served with warm Worcestershire butter. Or splurge for Neff's impressive Seafood Tower of smoked tuna, pickled shrimp, oysters and nasturtium flower mignonette.

At the bar or in the airy dining room, featuring an open kitchen, guests can choose from a selection of small plates that continue to marry comfort with innovation. Begin with Seabird's green salad using first-of-the-season strawberries or slow cooked, smoked Yellowfin Tuna paired with cabbage, mango and toasted peanut-soy vinaigrette. Neff's Catfish Pups and fried spring onions are fried-to-order and the signature Smoked Catfish and Oyster Pie is at once light and rich with parsnips, celery cream and a potato crust.

While it's in season, order Scott and Patty Rader's sauteed Soft Shell Crab served with vibrant green house-made plankton spaghetti, sugar snaps and garlic-leek emulsion. While the Eastern Cioppino with local clams, triggerfish, shrimp, scallops, and Andouille sausage will always have a place on the menu as a classic Seabird dish, with charred bread and garlicky rouille. Neff treats Swordfish to a

unique “schnitzel” preparation, deftly serving it with preserved lemon jam and traditional spaetzle. And while seafood is the star of the show, vegans and carnivores will recognize the same thoughtful attention to ingredients and preparation, as in the Summer Field Pea Salad, served with succotash, foraged mushrooms, and minted eggplant compote, or crisp Wings in Schmaltze with Root Remoulade Slaw, Sorghum Lacquered Pork Ribs and Applewood Smoked Bavette Steak with spring garlic pesto.

To finish, don’t miss the Strawberry Crostada with fresh berries, warm Brownie & Banana Trifle or toothsome Tropical Fruit Pavlova with passionfruit on the opening menu. And in the mornings, whatever Lydia is inspired to bake will be on the menu! Imagine coffee cake, fruit crostadas and made-to-order biscuits – hard to resist with Dean’s fried chicken and pimento cheese, cured fish, or Lydia’s famous Strawberry-Rose Jam.

Seabird represents a culmination of Dean and Lydia’s greater regional food & artisan community. “We’re uniquely fortunate to have so many small-scale seafood sources for exceptional fish and shellfish delivered straight from the boat to our door; there really is no better place to enjoy North Carolina seafood than here in its home on the coast,” explained Neff, who sources oysters from Stone’s Bay and Hold Fast Oyster Co., fish from Steve’s Seafood, and features foraged, farmed and cured items from Burgeoning Farm, Anson Mills, Changin’ Ways and Benton’s, to name a few. Similarly, local artist Janette Hopper and photographer Lindy Schoenborn have contributed to the decor, along with draperies hand-crafted by local seamstress Susan Covington. LeeAnne McQueen of McQueen Pottery in Tennessee hand made the ceramic dishes and signature mugs, and Charleston-based wine consultant Frederick Corriher consulted on the progressive wine list.

#### **About Dean Neff & Lydia Clopton:**

Dean & Lydia honed their skills in some of the South’s most celebrated kitchens before arriving in Wilmington, North Carolina. They duo met while working at Hugh Acheson’s award winning Five & Ten in Athens, GA, then moved to Asheville, NC where Neff served as Chef de Cuisine for John Fleer’s new Rhubarb and Lydia on Katie Button’s opening Nightbell team, while also beginning her own wedding cake business. In 2015, the salt water beckoned them to North Carolina’s coast. Neff opened PinPoint Restaurant in Wilmington in 2015 as co-owner and chef, and Lydia wow’d guests as pastry chef. Southern Living named PinPoint among the “Best New Restaurants in the South.” In 2018, Lydia opened her own café and bakery – Love, Lydia – to rave reviews, before closing amid the pandemic in 2020 to focus on their newborn child and forthcoming restaurant, Seabird. In 2019, Neff earned a James Beard Foundation semifinalist nomination *and* announced plans for Seabird – where together, they honor the seasons and the seaside food culture so unique to Wilmington.

Seabird is located at 1 South Front Street in the heart of downtown, near the Wilmington Riverwalk. Visit [www.SeabirdNC.com](http://www.SeabirdNC.com) and follow @SeabirdNC; 478-501-0651.

###

#### **CONTACT:**

Jennifer Noble Kelly  
919-368-4987  
[Jennifer@JNKPublicRelations.com](mailto:Jennifer@JNKPublicRelations.com)

---

<https://media.visitnc.com/Seabird-Restaurant-Oyster-Bar-Opens-in-Wilmington>