

PHOTO BY KATHY KEENEY



## HAVE FORK WILL TRAVEL

## Green is Good

*A column about restaurant happenings and food musings, home and away*

BY MARISA MARSEY

**TIME TO RAISE A** “Green-tini” at Croc’s. On August 29, Virginia’s Department of Environmental Quality recognized the popular bistro on 19<sup>th</sup> Street near the Virginia Beach Oceanfront as the first green restaurant in the state under its Virginia Green initiative promoting eco-friendly practices in the tourism industry. While mixing cocktails with organic vodka isn’t on the checklist developed in conjunction with the EPA to earn the distinction (water and energy conservation, grease and glass recycling and bio-degradable take-out ware are), it’s emblematic of how committed restaurateurs Kal and Laura Habr are to protecting the environment.

“They’re leaders,” says Tom Griffin, DEQ’s Outreach Coordinator, who earlier that day also awarded the Virginia Beach Convention Center a plaque for being the state’s first green conference facility. Croc’s proximity to the convention center (you can practically see the restaurant from the facility’s UVB ray-blocking windows) played a part in the Habrs going for the green.

“I was mentioning to Laura what we were doing to achieve that status,” Pam Lingle of the Virginia Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau recalls of a conversation that took

place in July. “She was all over it because she was already all over it.”

The Habrs had been working on an extensive remodeling for more than a year with local architect and interior designer Duff Kliewer of Cox, Kliewer & Company, which is LEED-certified (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and has been incorporating green concepts into projects for a decade. From the beginning Laura (who has a degree in interior design) and Kal (who studied engineering) decided to be pro-environment with both struc-

ture and operations. Kliewer’s recommendations flowed like a natural mountain spring. He suggested low VOC (volatile organic compound) paint, a 100% recyclable dance floor, aluminum chairs over plastic or wood to avoid the need for harsh

cleaning and refinishing products and a recycled modular carpet. “That’s a lot less for the land-fill and it has a great design element,” Kliewer explains. “It gives you a look, and a sustainable look at that.”

He even introduced them to Square One, the world’s first 100 percent certified American rye vodka. Now Croc’s offers organic gin and wines, too (listed on 30 percent post-consumer fiber paper in a 70 percent post-consumer fiber binder), to pair with five pepper tuna and other coastal cuisine menu items or Kal’s Lebanese specialties.

“It used to be horrendously expensive,” Kliewer says of the pollution-preventing plunge. “But not anymore.”

He estimates that today it costs 10-30 percent more up front, but adds green—as in dollars—in the long run through lower utility bills and increased customer loyalty.

“It will help you as a business and it will help your business,” he says. “People are aware of businesses with environmentally-friendly practices.”

In a 2005 survey, for example, Kimpton Hotels and Restaurants found that 16 percent of guests choose their properties because of the company’s environmental policies. Once a tree-hugging fringe, the green movement is now mainstream, and many states are establishing guidelines to help businesses join in.

“Tourism isn’t a chemical plant, but when you start adding it up, the environmental impact is major,” says Griffin of the state’s DEQ, which partners with the Virginia Hospitality and Travel Association and Virginia Tourism Corporation for Virginia Green. Indeed, the restaurant industry accounts for 33 percent of this country’s retail electricity use.

“Sustainability is the hot topic in the industry right now,” affirms Gene Rupnik, chairman of the 2007 International Hotel/Motel & Restaurant Show Board of Directors.

This year’s show will emphasize environmental responsibility.

Laura says that Croc’s staff, many of whom are young and grew up in an ecologically-aware world, has embraced the restaurant’s green efforts.

“I’ve been in the business for five years, and this is not harder,” says server Lauren Brooke, 23, describing the recycling program recently instituted with locally-owned TFC. “This is the way to run a business and I’m really honored to be working here.”

Being gung-ho green is good stewardship of the planet, and Virginia Green will be an important marketing tool for the state. But Kal, watching his young daughters play near the rosemary hedge at his 14-year-old restaurant, sees it on a more personal level, too. “It’s the least I can do,” he says with a nod in their direction. “For them.”

**Croc’s is located at 620 19<sup>th</sup> Street in Virginia Beach. Phone: 428-5444. Online: [www.crocs19thstreetbistro.com](http://www.crocs19thstreetbistro.com).**

**SETTING TRENDS:**  
Croc’s 19th Street Bistro is the first restaurant in Virginia to be recognized as green by the DEQ.