

## Reeling them in The Crab Cooker's Bob Roubian is as popular as his Balboa Peninsula Eatery

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**Monday Night at the Crab Cooker by Bradford Salamon**

You might see him any night of the week, sitting at a Formica table at the Crab Cooker restaurant on Balboa Peninsula, breaking bread with customers, talking about life, love, politics, art and music.

You'll see him with his full head of gray hair, one earring, dress shirt and jeans, and figure that he's a regular at the Crab Cooker, a long time Newport Beach resident, very likely an entrepreneur, and perhaps an artist.

Bob Roubian, owner of the Crab Cooker since 1951, is so much a part of the fabric and lore of the restaurant that he is indistinguishable from his customers.

If you're lucky, Roubian will walk over to the piano and play one of his songs about fish. As you listen to, "Who Hears the Fishes When They Cry," played and sung in a jazz/blues mode, you'll realize that he is a man of extraordinary talent, imagination and charisma. If you ask why he writes songs about fish, he'll respond with a question.

"What do fish and music have in common?" Then, he'll tell you that they both have scales.

Roubian, 74, has been a professional musician, composer and recording artist, and has worked with some of the great musicians of the mid 20th century. Jack Teagarden and Johnny Mercer are two that he has known personally.

Roubian is a sculptor - he sculpted the mahogany door at the entrance to the restaurant - among other pieces of marble and alabaster. He is an art collector - the walls of the restaurant are filled with valuable paintings. In the past, he has sold works off the walls to the likes of actors Ray Milland and James Cagney. And he is an avid reader of Oscar Wilde, Walter Whitman and will quote - in a stage actor's voice - from Shakespeare and Baudelaire.

But Roubian's first love is the Crab Cooker. He opened the original market and restaurant, near the present location on Newport Boulevard, 49 years ago. The young entrepreneur continued to play music and perform professionally. But by the late 50's, he decided that he didn't like traveling, and devoted himself full-time to the restaurant. He managed the place, and also worked in the kitchen, waited tables, and developed personal relationships with his customers.

Roubian's attitude toward work has always been to serve people, first, with great quality food and excellent service, and to earn money, second. The restaurant has been in the black, almost since it opened. And every year, it has earned more than in previous years.

The restaurant serves more than 1,500 people a day, and the wait to get in is often an hour and a half to two hours - in an area where parking spots are hard to find. The home-baked bread - 600 loaves are baked every day - is always delicious. The clam chowder is legendary. And the rest of the fare of shrimp, oysters, and whatever is freshest that day, is simply and excellently prepared. Everything is served on paper plates, because, as Roubian says, "Dishwashers often fail, and people get sick from dirty dishes."

Roubian attributes his integrity, attention to details, and positive attitude to his mother, one of his favorite people. "She was a phenomenal lady," he says. "She was brilliant, compassionate and resourceful, and she was a nurse." She was from Sicily, but spent most of her adult life in Pasadena - where Roubian grew up - and died peacefully in her sleep at age 95.

Bob Roubian pays homage to his mother by displaying her photograph in a porthole at the entrance to his restaurant. It is next to a photograph of Einstein who is Roubian's other favorite person.

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