

Vancouver's Restaurants "Wise" Up

TWO NEW PROGRAMS HELP PROVIDE EDUCATION WHILE AT THE SAME TIME CONTRIBUTE TO THE OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY OF SEAFOOD

By Jane Mundy

Being greeted at the restaurant door of 'C' by representatives of the David Suzuki Foundation (DSF) made me edgy. A guilt-ridden lapsed Catholic by nature or just karma conscious, I knew I shouldn't have bought that farmed salmon fillet from Safeway three years ago or eaten Chilean sea bass—ever. But it was only a fleeting moment of panic because I remembered that most everything served at C has a lineage as long as the House of Windsor.

Executive Chef Robert Clark is so serious about conservation and sustainability that, as well as overseeing kitchen operations for C and its two counterpart restau-

rants Nu and RainCity Grill, he is mainly dedicated to "sourcing products that provide the finest quality and are at the same time responsibly managed at the source." Some may think that Clark borders on the fanatical. He believes in accountability, even to the day that a fish and shellfish was harvested and where it came from, maybe even down to its surname!

It's not enough to know whether or not your fish fillet is wild or farmed, fresh or frozen. For example, wild salmon from Skeena River has been on the menu at C since 2002 when Clark partnered with fishers Fred and Linda Hawkshaw. "Using good fishing practices such as smaller net mesh (fish are caught by the snout rather than gills) allows less than five percent mortality rate and every fish caught will be served," says Clark. And there is zero "bycatch," which means that no other aquatic creature is caught unintentionally.

But as well as having a great nosh, the DSF and the Vancouver Aquarium were at C to talk about two programs—State of the Catch and Ocean Wise (see sidebar). "We need help to move ahead and raise the sustainability standard," explained Clark.

Our dinner at C was proof that the Hawkshaw's wild salmon, served with preserved stony paradise tomatoes, olive gnocchi and arugula, is not only the right choice for wild salmon environmentally, but the sweetest tasting fish I have ever had. As well as wild salmon, all seafood on the menu—from honey mussels to Kagan Bay scallops—has the environmental seal of approval from both organizations.

C has learned over the years that Vancouverites have vision but don't know what to do about it or what to do next. They felt the need for some kind of "consumer seafood watch." Aligning with the DSF is an obvious choice, but how does the Vancouver Aquarium fit into all this?

According to the aquarium, 60-70 percent of all seafood in Vancouver is consumed in restaurants. According to its website, the aquarium's mandate is to "encourage restaurants to provide more sustainable seafood dishes and make it easy for diners to choose restaurants and dishes that have as small an impact on the oceans as possible." In order to qualify, restaurants must remove unsustainable seafood items from their menu and replace them with sustainable alternatives wherever possible. And any restaurant that has at least one seafood item can participate.

C restaurant stepped up to the sustainability plate several months ago and since then, more than 29 res-

ABOUT THE PROGRAMS

Ocean Wise is a conservation program created to help restaurants and their customers make the right environmental choices when it comes to seafood. Participants in the program indicate which seafood dishes are sustainable on their menus with an Ocean Wise symbol that has been guaranteed sustainable by the Vancouver Aquarium.

Ocean Wise was initiated by the Vancouver Aquarium Marine Science Centre. For the past four years, it has supported a similar program with the Monterey Bay Aquarium, encouraging restaurants to provide more sustainable seafood choices—the center will make it easier for the consumer to choose sustainable restaurants and demystify our food choices.

Currently, all the restaurants involved in Ocean Wise are from Vancouver and surrounding areas, with the exception of Nimo Bay Resort. Any restaurants interested in becoming an Ocean Wise restaurant can contact Tara Taylor, Director of Conservation Programs at the Vancouver Aquarium: (604)-659-3596 or email oceanwise@vanaqua.org. For more information, visit the Ocean Wise website at www.oceanwise.canada.org.

State of the Catch is a guide to sustainable B.C. seafood being developed by the David Suzuki Foundation. It will rank 30 viable species of seafood currently fished off the B.C. coast and will be "a resource tool for chefs, restaurateurs, seafood suppliers and other food industry professionals to make informed choices about the sustainability of their product, and to better respond to growing consumer demand for socially and environmentally responsible seafood." More information can be found by viewing *State of the Catch* at www.davidsuzuki.org.



taurants in Vancouver and its surrounds have joined Ocean Wise. Jason Boyce, Ocean Wise Coordinator at the Vancouver Aquarium, reports that, "on top of that, the Pacific Institute for Culinary Arts and Capers Food Market are coming on board [in February 2006]."

The program has so far exceeded expectations. It is a voluntary program and the Vancouver Aquarium doesn't solicit any establishment to join.

"The restaurants contact us on their own volition, then we go through menus at their establishment, review what sustainable options they have, and then they commit to removing one unsustainable item at first, and every six months after that," says Boyce. "I would have to say that most of the restaurants have removed more than one right from the beginning."

Ocean Wise is also supporting the DSF State of the Catch program. Jay Ritchlin, Marine Campaign Strategist for DSE, says, "We have done three things with State of the Catch to work:

- Informed our 40,000 DSF members across Canada on the best and worst catches via our newsletters and by answering requests to our website;

- Developed a group with similar conservation organizations called "Sustainable Seafood Canada," and established agreed-upon methods to evaluate fish stocks throughout the country. Other coalitions involved include the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, Living Oceans Society and Sierra Club of Canada, BC Chapter; and,

- Are now hiring experts in different types of fisheries to evaluate each stock, and to use new methodology.

"In other words, we are in the process of evaluating new fish and re-doing our original evaluations with the new methods," says Ritchlin. "I anticipate a launch of our new products this spring." Consumers can anticipate the Ocean Wise symbol in their favorite restaurants, now and anytime soon. 

Jane Mundy is a freelance writer and editor residing in Vancouver, B.C. She has written for several magazines and publications including The Vancouver Sun, The Globe & Mail, BC Business, EAT, Western Living, as well as for the annual Vancouver Magazine Eating & Drinking Guide.

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