

BY THE SEA

THESE CHEFS PAIR SUSTAINABLE SEAFOOD WITH THE FLAVORS OF COASTAL FRANCE, SPAIN, AND ITALY

by Gabriella Gershenson

These days, few serious chefs have the luxury of being indifferent to where their seafood comes from. “It’s easy to get overwhelmed with the plastic in the sea or the Amazon burning down or climate warming,” says Joe Anthony, chef de cuisine at Gabriel Kreuther in New York City. But a series of small, conscientious changes can make a difference.

In addition to eliminating a variety of single-use disposable items from their kitchen and taking their compost to farms, Anthony and his team are investing in sustainably sourced fish. He works closely with a supplier of locally harvested seafood that functions like an aquatic CSA; members pay up front, then reap the benefits all season. The seafood

is traceable, caught by local licensed fishermen, and never travels by air or further than a 150-mile distance from the port where it was first brought in.

For New York City participants, that port would be Montauk, a coastal community on the East End of Long Island. Because nature dictates what fish will be available each week, there’s always an element of surprise. “We have no idea what we’re getting until the day before, when an email is sent out and it says we’re getting blackfish or monkfish or conch, and then we figure out a dish that is going to go best with that fish,” says Anthony.

Learning to cook with lesser-known fish has been a creative challenge for Anthony. A fish he first encountered through the program was blackfish, “a

beautiful, meaty fish” that can stand up to vibrant flavors. He developed charcoal-grilled blackfish with melted leeks, eggplant, and red pepper sauce, which capitalized on the peak produce at the time (recipe, [plateonline.com](https://www.plateonline.com)). Though the dish has hints of Provençale (ratatouille), Spanish (pisto Manchego), and Sicilian (caponata) influences, Anthony says, “it’s a New York dish—fish from Montauk and the rest from the Union Square Greenmarket.”

The restaurant Peregrine in Boston specializes in the cuisines of the Italian islands of Sardinia and Sicily and influences of Corsica and Catalonia, with a menu that runs the gamut from Italian antipasti to Spanish conservas and French charcuterie. The seafood, however, comes



**Chestnut Emmer Pasta with Chanterelles, Parsley
Foam, and Escargot Bordelaise, Joe Anthony, Gabriel
Kreuther, New York City. RECIPE, plateonline.com.**

mostly from around Cape Cod and the North and South Shores of Massachusetts. Chef/Co-Owner Joshua Lewin has embraced the local bluefish, which is considered a sustainable choice in part because of its healthy stocks; he sources line-caught fish, a method that can minimize bycatch. But, he notes, “not everybody is clamoring to eat it every day.”

Bluefish is typically characterized as oily, but Lewin encourages his servers to use more appealing terms (like “rich”) and recommends bluefish to diners who are fond of other fatty fish, like salmon. “One aspect of sustainability is taking people’s purchasing decision away from something that can be polluting, like salmon, and steering it toward the bluefish,” he notes. His approach to cooking

that oily richness is to look toward Spanish preparations. Among the most popular menu items is a Basque-style bluefish pintxo made from a fried nugget of meat from the tapered end of the tail threaded onto a skewer with basil and focaccia and served with a lemon wedge (recipe, [plateonline.com](#)). For his bluefish fra diavolo, Lewin pairs the fish with chile-spiked samfaina, the Catalanian answer to ratatouille. “When dealing with rich and stronger flavors, we want to make sure we’re giving it a foil,” he says.

At Seattle’s The Whale Wins, co-owned by chef and sustainable seafood champion Renee Erickson, Chef de Cuisine Ash Stockham relies on a beloved French preparation for one seafood dish: an open-faced tartine of shaved celery,



American chefs have long relied on France for their snails: typically cooked, canned Burgundian escargot. Now, that totem of French cuisine is endangered in France (today, Burgundian snails are usually harvested in Central Europe). In recent years, chefs have been catching wind of domestic snails, namely the petit gris and brown varieties, raised sustainably on farms in New York, California, and Washington.

Local petit gris snails appear in a few dishes at New York City’s Gabriel Kreuther, like an escargot fritter that accompanies cedar-smoked trout, and in a chestnut and chanterelle pasta with escargot Bordelaise (recipe, [plateonline.com](#)). “Garlic, parsley, and butter are classic combinations, so how do we expand from that?” says Chef de Cuisine Joe Anthony. “You get earthy tones from snails, and we play with the flavors they want to be with.”

Anthony prefers fresh snails to canned for obvious reasons. “If we are able to get something that is coming from Long Island rather than from a can from Burgundy, that’s what we’re going to choose,” he says. The freshness also comes through in the flavor, which is nuanced, earthy yet vegetal.

At Boston’s Peregrine, Chef/Co-Owner Joshua Lewin has been using farmed snails from California on French snail flatbreads, and has even held a Catalanian-style snail festival, which he likens to a Louisiana crawfish boil, but with snails and aioli for dipping. “They tend to be quite salty and love to be paired with more salty things,” says Lewin. There is a small learning curve when it comes to cleaning fresh snails; if you’ve ever purged shellfish, it’s not that different.



Trout Amandine, \$27, A.J. Walker, Café Cancale, Chicago. RECIPE, p. 71.



Smoked Clam Tartine, \$14, Ash Stockham, The Whale Wins, Seattle. RECIPE, plateonline.com.

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— Ash Stockham

pickled apples, fried shallots, tarragon, and lemon mayo with smoked clams (\$14, recipe, plateonline.com). “Clams are unique because of their filtering properties and their low impact on other species,” says Stockham, who uses Hama Hama clams grown on a fifth-generation farm on Washington’s Olympic Peninsula.

She cooks the clams in a pan with a splash of wine in the wood-fired oven, the centerpiece of the kitchen. Once the clams open, they are shucked, cooled, then smoked over Washington applewood. “It’s like a smoked clam BLT,” says Stockham about the dish, which was in part inspired by her fondness for tartines—“the possibilities are endless for

things that are lovely on good toast”—and a recent work trip to Paris, where one of the memorable snacks was cold seafood with aioli and bread.

At the coastal French restaurant Café Cancale in Chicago, Chef de Cuisine A.J. Walker defines the food he cooks as “French-ish,” noting that “the technique is rooted in French cuisine, but we are not afraid to include influences beyond the bistro.” Case in point, his trout amandine, a New Orleans recipe that is at once French and distinctly American. To prepare it, Walker crusts a fillet in Coquelicot, a proprietary spice blend that includes poppy seeds, mustard seeds, caraway, and lemon. He then crisps it up in a pan and serves it

with brown butter vinaigrette, a garnish of fresh parsley and dill, sliced almonds, crispy radishes, and truffle peach olives, tiny green peaches preserved in a truffle marinade (\$27, recipe, p. 71).

Walker sources his trout from Monterey Fish Market in San Francisco, a long-time supplier for the One-Off Hospitality Group, of which Café Cancale is a part. “The flavor and quality of the fish is second to none,” says Walker. “We have had tables accuse us of serving them salmon because it is fatty enough and rich enough, and is the same color as salmon.” He credits the manner in which the trout are raised, essentially in the wild, living out their life span with high-quality feed and access to clean, cold, fast-moving water that makes for more active, muscular fish. “I think you have to pay attention to how fish is raised now,” says Walker. “Any restaurant worth its weight does.”

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