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VIKI GEUNES

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SEA BASS

A fish from the deep

Wild sea bass is a noble fish: light, delicate and yet full of flavour. Having said that, I shudder when I see the bistros and brasseries serving the farmed version of this fish. The way I see it, the race to the lowest price can only end in one place: a homogenised, bland, inferior product.

This may sound extreme, but I remain convinced that the few true quality products out there must only be served at a certain level. I want to make clear I'm not arguing for exclusivity and against accessibility, but I'm making a genuine, heartfelt plea to better protect our culinary heritage. A fine dining restaurant distinguishes itself with its creativity, yes, but also absolutely by choosing the best product. So, just as industrially farmed vegetables have no place at this level, as a chef you need to be critical about what types of fish you offer and how they are caught. If we keep consuming sea bass at the rate we're going, soon there won't be any left. My message is to be more selective and mindful about what we serve where, ensuring that future generations will still be able to experience wild sea bass. Such a rare product should be treated with the respect it deserves.

Farmed sea bass is nothing like wild sea bass. It might be the same fish in the guest's perception, but people who can really taste know better. Texture, flavour, colour of the meat, the difference is obvious on every single level. Wild sea bass has a firmness that's pretty hard to imitate. The meat is not white so much as translucent, and has a delicate fibrous structure.

In the spring and summer, when the sea bass is at its best, I work with sport fishermen who bring in their fresh-caught fish. They sail out towards England or along the French coast, where they can guarantee an honest and quality catch from their day boats. This direct, personal connection with my fishermen means that I know what I'm serving, and that makes a huge difference to me.



Enjoying a sea bass with friends, with my wife and Gitte and Aaron, there's something inherently festive about it.

A line-caught fish, in the fishing season, immediately catapults me to the south, and I'm tasting olives, aubergine, capers, garlic and sweet peppers. I love to serve sea bass raw, or at most gently smoked—the mouthfeel is unlike anything else. In a menu I combine sea bass with anchovies, tomato and cockles. At home, I like to prepare sea bass in a salt or clay crust, which is the best way to preserve its pure flavour and natural character. I serve it with a Mediterranean ratatouille, or perhaps Asian side dishes: a papaya salad or a tempura of vegetables with steamed rice, nam pla fish sauce, chilli, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaf and coriander: unforgettable. This method is great because you just pop the fish in the oven and can return to the table and your company. Enjoying a sea bass with friends, with my wife and Gitte and Aaron, there's something inherently festive about it. Besides serving the fish this way, the atmosphere, the moment, the conversations are all at least as important.

Gastronomy is more than cooking; it's taking responsibility for the future of our oceans. We're overburdening the sea, and the ecosystem of wild fish is being exhausted fast. When all is said and done, gastronomy means respecting what nature has to offer us and understanding what products merit a certain exclusivity. And sea bass is one of those—no question about it.

Current Knight

Sea bass — carabinero — myoga — wasabi

The spiciness of wasabi and myoga cuts through the richness of our kombujime-aged sea bass. Accented by the lightly peppery shiso flower, the intense sweetness of carabinero and jelly tapioca pearls.





I see cooking at home as an extension of what I do at Zilte. Not by imitating complex dishes, but by embracing that same level of attention. Small gestures, unexpected combinations and careful presentations turn an ordinary weeknight dinner into a special moment.

In this chapter, I share some of the "homestyle" recipes I like to cook myself to make the most of those moments. Dishes that are refined and varied, but at the same time accessible enough to prepare and share at home. Because just like in a restaurant, cooking at home is all about emotions, surprises and the magic of being together.









Oyster au gratin

Oyster
One large oyster per person

Blanche the oyster in the shell for 45 seconds in ample boiling water and then transfer to ice water.
Open the oysters and reserve the liquid and the shell. Rinse the shell clean.

Sabayon of vin jaune
2 egg yolks
30 g vin jaune
10 g oyster liquid
25 g butter, softened
15 g hazelnut oil
5 g sherry vinegar
8 g salt
10 g truffle juice
2 dl lightly beaten cream

Over low heat, beat the egg yolks, the vin jaune and the oyster liquid into a fluffy sabayon until streaks form on the bottom. Add the softened butter and hazelnut oil while stirring constantly.
Season with sherry vinegar, salt and truffle juice.
In an ice bath, stir until cold and then fold in the lightly beaten cream.
Keep refrigerated until use.

Fried shallot and celeriac
2 shallots
20 g celeriac

Preheat the oven to 80 °C.
With a mandolin, slice the shallots very thinly and fry in oil at a temperature of 150 °C until golden brown.
Allow them to dry in the preheated oven at 80 °C until they are very crispy.
Julienne the celeriac and deep-fry at 150 °C until golden brown.
Allow them to dry in the preheated oven at 80 °C until they are very crispy.

Braised chard
100 g chard
20 g butter
5 g garlic, finely sliced
fried shallot (see above)

Wash the chard and slice it into long ribbons (chiffonade). Braise in the butter with the finely sliced garlic.
Just before serving, add the fried shallot.

TO SERVE

3 g fried celeriac (see above) per person
1 hazelnut, grated, per person
3 g Gruyère Réserve AOP per person

Arrange the oyster on the chard in the shell.
Divide the sabayon on top of each oyster, then place under the grill until slightly coloured.
Garnish with the fried celeriac, grated hazelnut and Gruyère Réserve AOP.

