

FROM
SURE
TO
SUPPER



SEAFOOD RECIPES FROM A
CERTIFIED MASTER CHEF'S KITCHEN



CHEF TOM GRIFFITHS, CMC



Passion, Technique & Soul

FROM SURF TO SUPPER



This book is dedicated to

Captain Frank—

*a great friend and the
greatest fisherman I have ever known.*



FROM
SURF
TO
SUPPER



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ABOUT



CHEF TOM GRIFFITHS, CMC



There are 84 Certified Master Chefs in the United States. I am one of them.

That credential — the highest culinary designation awarded in America — was earned through decades of cooking at the highest professional level.

My journey began the moment I graduated the Culinary Institute of America and walked into Le Cirque in New York City — from the best culinary school in the world to arguably the finest restaurant in North America. I naively applied to be the pastry chef but was instead offered the role of chef poissonnier — the fish cook.

In those days, the kitchen was often an abusive workplace, “*That which doesn’t kill us makes us stronger...*” My station was a 2½ foot square butcher block in the corner of the kitchen — garde manger to my right and the meat butcher to my left — and a refrigerator filled with seafood from all over the world for me to fabricate. It was a perfect role to build a rock solid culinary foundation.

From there it led through five-star hotel kitchens, owning my own global consulting business, Research & Development at Campbell’s and Freshly home meal delivery, instructing at the CIA, and everything in between.

I’ve been blessed that my chef journey has been with ‘best in class’ operations.



But this book didn't begin in a restaurant kitchen.
It began at the shoreline.

I have always been a fisherman at heart. My backyard in NJ is a lake filled with smallmouth bass, pickerel, perch, catfish, carp and sunnies. I've spent extraordinary days fishing with my children, cast lines up and down the East Coast fishing for mackerel in Maine down to Snapper in Florida, checked a bucket-list Alaska fishing trip off the list with the guys, and lately I've been learning to saltwater fish with my wife — who, I will freely admit, is a considerably better angler than I am.

In recent years, I've taken up surf fishing, and that experience — learning patience, reading the wind and water, choosing the correct lure or bait to land a beautiful fish out of the surf — gave me a renewed perspective on the journey of 'surf to supper'. I've been amazed with the skill many of the local anglers had — they catch fish yards from my fishing spot while I have no bites. I also noticed that many fishermen had little idea what to do with their catch once they landed it. The cleaning was rough and wasteful. The cooking rougher still. Magnificent, fresh seafood — the kind professional chefs dream about sourcing — was being squandered with improper cooking, bad recipes or recipes masked with excessive bacon, breading, hot sauces or incorrect spices.



That gap between the surf and the table
is exactly what this book is designed to bridge.

I may still be learning the subtleties of the shoreline, but I bring forty years of professional kitchen experience with me every time I wade into the kitchen. I understand how seafood behaves under heat, which cooking methods are best for which fish, what makes a meal extraordinary, and what destroys it. These recipes are born from that knowledge and experience: delicious, popular and practical cooking preparations that honor the ingredient above everything else.

Seafood is probably the most challenging protein to prepare. Professional Chefs understand that most seafood dishes must be served immediately. When we cook seafood, there is very little room for forgiveness, the final dish is either raw, burnt, or à point — perfectly cooked! My goal with this book is to give you the tools, the technique, and the confidence to consistently arrive at perfect.



THE INSPIRING KITCHEN

What Every Aspiring Cook Should Have

Over the years I've taught culinary classes everywhere from the Culinary Institute of America to cruise ships to community continuing education programs. No matter the audience, the same question comes up every time:

"Chef, what do I actually need in my kitchen?"

The answer is simpler than most people expect, and far less expensive than kitchen retailers would like you to believe. Great cooking is not about having the most equipment. It is about mastering a few essential tools and stocking the right ingredients.



KNIVES: THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOL

I watch people buy large, heavy, expensive knives they eventually abandon to a drawer because they are uncomfortable to use. My advice: find a knife that feels balanced in your hand. **A quality 8 or 10-inch chef's knife and a small paring knife are genuinely all you need to start.** Choosing a knife is like buying a pair of shoes — it should feel great.



There are a variety of metal types and hardness. I prefer carbon steel. It sharpens beautifully, holds a fine edge, and has a responsiveness stainless steel can't quite match — though it requires more attention: keep it dry, hone it before every use. I recommend purchasing a knife that has been forged from a single piece of steel rather than stamped. My experience is that it will last longer and have better balance. Also choose a knife that has the tang fully in the handle. Whatever metal you choose, always run your knife over a sharpening steel before you begin cooking. **A dull knife is dangerous. A sharp knife makes everything easier.** *And never put your knife in the dishwashing machine!*

As your skills grow, you may want to add a heavy cleaver, scissors, and flexible filleting knife for breaking down whole fish, a serrated bread knife, or a boning knife. Santoku knives are a very popular, all-purpose knife. I prefer this knife for precision cuts, vegetables, chicken and seafood. **Start with two. Master those first.**



COOKWARE ESSENTIALS

For the recipes in this book you will use a sauté pan (sautéuse) with sloped sides for quick sautéing, a sautoir with straight sides for pan-frying items like crab cakes, a few sizes of sturdy pots for boiling, simmering and poaching, a cast-iron grill pan or plancha for high-heat searing, a few sizes of sturdy sheet pans for baking and a few sizes of casserole dishes for oven roasting.

These are the same vessels found in every professional kitchen, and for excellent reason — they cover the full range of technique. Many people favor Teflon pans for eggs, crepes, pancakes, etc. as well.



SALT: YOUR MOST POWERFUL SEASONING

Salt is a catalyst for flavor and essential in cooking. I cook with kosher salt. The larger grain helps me to feel exactly how much I'm adding with my fingers, which matters enormously when seasoning something as delicate as fish. For baking and charcuterie, I use a kitchen scale when measuring salt and all ingredients.

I also love finishing dishes with specialty sea salts. Salt carries terroir — a sense of place, just like great wine. A flake of Maldon or truffle salt on a freshly seared scallop is something entirely different from the kosher salt you seasoned it with before cooking. Explore.



PEPPER: MORE NUANCE THAN YOU THINK

Black peppercorns in a good grinder are the baseline — I keep multiple pepper mills with different crack settings for different applications. Cayenne is my go-to for Mediterranean preparations and forcemeats. White pepper, often overlooked in American kitchens, is essential for light-colored sauces and adds a distinctive, earthy warmth to fried seafood — the secret behind the addictive quality of South Korean fried chicken.





SPICE BLENDS

There are a variety of popular spice blends which can define a dish before the fish ever hits the pan. From the Chesapeake Bay standard of Old Bay to the warm, aromatic blends of the Mediterranean and Middle East, these time-honored combinations bring depth, balance, and character to seafood. Each blend has a story — shaped by place, tradition, and the ingredients that grow best by land and sea.



OLD BAY

The Chesapeake Bay standard of celery salt, paprika, and black pepper is the most recognized seafood seasoning in the American kitchen, generally used for cooking shellfish. It is bold, balanced, and brings out the natural sweetness of crab, shrimp, and fish.



CAJUN & CREOLE

Cajun and Creole blends have spice, heat and depth, with smoked paprika, cayenne, garlic, and dried herbs — great for blackened fish, where the spices char against a hot cast iron pan to form a dark, aromatic crust.



ZA'ATAR

A Middle Eastern blend of thyme, sumac, and sesame, works beautifully with grilled fish, its bright acidity cutting through the smoke. Sprinkle over olive oil and let it form a fragrant crust, or mix into yogurt for a vibrant sauce.



RAS EL HANOUT

A North African blend of warm spices like cumin, coriander, cinnamon, and cardamom adds incredible complexity to seafood. It pairs wonderfully with lamb, but also works surprisingly well with swordfish or salmon.



The guiding principle is restraint: spice blends should enhance the natural sweetness and brininess of fresh seafood, not overpower it.

There are several small companies preparing seafood spice blends with ingredients such as toasted fennel seed, lemon zest, ginger and coarse salt ground together to make an elegant rubs that works on almost anything from the sea.

When in doubt, use less than you think you need — you can always add, but you cannot take away.





OILS: CHOOSE WISELY FOR SEAFOOD

For sautéing fish, you need oils with high smoke points and neutral flavor so the fish can speak for itself. My top choices are refined avocado oil, canola oil, and refined grapeseed oil. All handle high heat without masking the fish.

Virgin olive oil has wonderful flavor but burns at lower temperatures. I use it in Mediterranean preparations where its character belongs. Otherwise, neutral oils are the professional's choice.

Butter is irreplaceable for flavor but burns quickly. The professional solution: clarified butter, with the milk solids removed, giving you the richness of butter with a smoke point closer to oil. Ghee is an excellent ready-made alternative. Combining neutral oil with a small knob of whole butter gives you the heat tolerance of oil and the flavor of butter — the best of both.

I often top grilled seafood with a few slices of compound butter—softened butter with chopped herbs, spices or lemon juice added for flavor and mouthfeel.



UNDERSTANDING SEAFOOD COOKERY

Different species demand different techniques. Salmon is versatile — sautéed, poached, cured, smoked, grilled, broiled, all work beautifully. Mussels are almost always steamed. Swordfish loves the grill. Understanding the nature of your ingredient before applying heat is the first principle of cooking it well.

Doneness matters more with seafood than with any other protein. Pull fish from the refrigerator fifteen to twenty minutes before cooking — cold or frozen seafood guarantees uneven cooking. Tuna, salmon, and a handful of other species are best served rare to medium-rare, and when quality is high, this is entirely appropriate. For most other fish, look for flesh that has turned opaque, flakes gently, and still appears glossy. Use a digital thermometer until your eye and hand have learned to read the fish directly. And remember: overcooked fish is a loss which no sauce can recover. Cook it just before you plan to dine, plate it, serve it — seafood waits for no one.





ACCOMPANIMENTS WITH SEAFOOD

Like with cooking techniques, different species go well with different sides. I find that asparagus, mushrooms, green beans, leafy greens like spinach, kale, cabbage, slaws, and bok choy are all ‘friends’ with seafood.

Peppers and onions are great with shellfish, like in paella or fish stews. Rice and potatoes are also great sides — especially fried potatoes (fish and chips).



WHAT TO DRINK WITH SEAFOOD

I prefer lighter, dry white wines such as Pinot Grigio, Chenin Blanc, Sauvignon Blanc, Muscadet or Sancerre with seafood.

Beer goes great with fried fish, raw clams, oysters, etc. Captain Frank enjoyed Cranberry & Vodka — especially while filleting the catch — and Chef Junnie likes G&T with lemon.

That should cover it.





RECIPE 1

NEW ENGLAND CLAM CHOWDER

CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

Clam chowder was one of the very first professional recipes I ever learned to prepare, and it remains one I return to every year. After graduating high school, I spent the entire summer cooking at an inn on Nantucket Island — breakfast and dinner, every single day, surrounded by the Atlantic. Chef Doug taught me the inn's family recipe: salt pork rendered until golden, sweet Spanish onions sweated slowly, a careful white roux, fresh local clams steamed open and hand-chopped, fresh herbs, local potatoes, rich cream folded in at the end. It was a revelation. That recipe set a standard in my mind for what chowder should be that no canned product has ever come close to matching.

The word chowder comes from *chaudière*, the iron pot French and Acadian sailors used to cook their catch at sea. New England's version is cream-based. Manhattan's is tomato. Rhode Island's is somewhere in between — at least that's how they make it down at the Jersey shore. Make this once from scratch and you will never open a can again.

The big question is 'how thick do you like your chowda'? I prefer chowder to be a little lighter, so if you want your spoon to stand up tall in the bowl, add a Tbsp more of AP flour when you make the roux.





NEW ENGLAND CLAM CHOWDER

A Classic Done Right

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 36 g top neck clams
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 quarts water
- 1 cup bottled clam juice
- 5 oz pork fatback, minced fine
- 1 cup Spanish onion, small dice
- 1 cup celery, small dice
- 2 medium Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and medium dice
- 6 oz all-purpose flour
- 1 pint heavy cream
- 1 pint whole milk
- Kosher salt, white pepper, and fresh thyme to finish



CHEF'S TIP

Taste the chowder base before adding the clams. It should be perfectly seasoned at that point. The clam liquor carries its own brininess — adding more salt afterward risks over-seasoning.

You can skim excess fat from the surface if you choose— but fat is flavor!



VARIATION

This base becomes a magnificent seafood chowder with chunks of cod, scallops, or shrimp added in the final few minutes.

METHOD

1. Rinse clams thoroughly under cold water. If sandy, submerge in cold water for 20 minutes to purge. No longer, or the clams may weaken.
2. Place clams, bay leaf, thyme, bottled clam juice and water in a covered pot. Cook at low heat until clams open (about 4 minutes). Spoon the clams into a tray to cool; strain the poaching liquid through cheesecloth or a coffee filter, reserving the liquid. Discard bay leaf and thyme. Pick clams from shells, chop, and reserve.
3. Heat a heavy sauce pot over medium heat. Add fatback and render until lightly golden. Add onion and celery and sweat gently until completely translucent (about 4–5 minutes) — do not allow to brown.
4. Add flour and stir with a wooden spoon to create a white roux. Cook 3–4 minutes, stirring constantly.
5. Add the freshly prepared, strained, clam juice slowly, stirring continuously to prevent lumps. When smooth, add potatoes and simmer until tender and the flour has cooked through (about 25 minutes). Stir occasionally.
6. Add cream and milk. Bring to a gentle simmer — never boil. Season with salt and white pepper. Add reserved clams. Adjust seasoning and serve or rest overnight for deeper flavor.





RECIPE 2

FISH STICKS (FINGERS)
WITH SPICY TARTAR SAUCE



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

I would not eat a frozen fish stick if you paid me. Once you make this recipe — especially with seafood you have caught yourself — you'll understand exactly why. Most frozen products are packed with yeast, whey, sweeteners, and artificial seasonings specifically designed to mask the fact that there is very little actual fish inside. My fish sticks recipe is fish. Just delicious, fresh fish: properly seasoned, freshly breaded, and fried to a golden crunch.

When I was the young *poissonnier* (fish cook) at Le Cirque in Manhattan, Chef Alain Sailhac would occasionally ask me to make fried goujons — fancy fish 'fingers' of flounder — for the family meal. Being fresh out of culinary school, I set up the standard three-tray mise en place for breading: a tray of seasoned, sifted flour, a tray of egg wash and a tray of sifted breadcrumbs in a line. Chef came over, looked at my setup, smiled quietly, and showed me the way: one bowl, one sequence.

Season and flour and the cut strips of fish in one, large bowl. Crack the eggs into the same bowl and blend until all of the fish is coated. Add the breadcrumbs to the same bowl and coat— Done. Faster, cleaner, and better results.

To this day, that is the method I use to fry seafood. The frozen fish stick never stood a chance.





RECIPE 2

FISH STICKS (FINGERS) WITH SPICY TARTAR SAUCE

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS — FISH FINGERS

- 3 lbs fresh fluke, flounder, catfish or bluefish fillets, skinless
- 1 Tbsp kosher salt
- Cracked white pepper to taste (for an Asian flavor, try white pepper)
- 1 ½ cup all-purpose flour, sifted
- 4 eggs, whisked
- 5 cups seasoned breadcrumbs or plain panko
- 2 lemons, quartered
- 2 quarts oil for frying (peanut oil preferred)

INGREDIENTS — SPICY TARTAR SAUCE

- 2 cups mayonnaise (Duke's preferred)
- 3 Tbsp scallion, thinly sliced
- 3 Tbsp sweet relish
- 3 Tbsp capers
- 3 Tbsp onion or shallot, minced
- Sriracha to taste (or your favorite hot sauce)
- Worcestershire sauce to taste (optional)



CHEF'S TIP

White pepper is the defining seasoning here. It has a distinctive, earthy heat different from black pepper and is the authentic choice for fried fish.

Double it and add a touch of five spice for a Southeast Asian interpretation — inspired by the legendary pepper crab of Singapore.



METHOD

1. Clean fillets completely: remove all skin, pin bones, and the bloodline — the grey-red strip along the center. It tastes muddy. Remove it. Pat dry. Cut into 2-inch fingers.
2. Place fish fingers in a bowl. Season with salt and pepper; pour flour over and toss to coat evenly. (I like to do this by hand but you can use a spatula).
3. Pour whisked eggs directly over the floured fish in the same bowl. Coat with a spatula or your hands.
4. Add breadcrumbs directly to the same bowl and toss until each piece is fully covered. Press lightly so crumbs adhere firmly.
5. Transfer the breaded fish 'fingers' to a parchment-lined tray and let rest a few minutes to set the coating. Do not refrigerate or the breading will become soggy.
6. Heat oil to 350°F. I recommend using an oil thermometer to be sure of the temperature or use an electric fryer (or air fryer).
7. Add 5 or 6 pieces of breaded fish at a time. The fish must be fully submerged. Fry until deeply golden brown. Remove the cooked fish with a slotted spoon onto paper towels. Season immediately with a pinch of salt while still hot. Let the oil reheat for 30 seconds before adding the next batch, continue until all of the fish is cooked.
8. For tartar sauce: combine all ingredients, stir well, and refrigerate at least 30 minutes. Serve alongside the fish with lemon wedges.



RECIPE 3

CRAB CAKES



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

A great crab cake is one of the most honest tests of a cook's skill and restraint. The temptation is always to add more — more binder, more seasoning, more filler. Resist it. Crabmeat is very expensive, delicious, sweet, and structurally delicate, and every unnecessary tablespoon of filler is a tablespoon that is not crab.

My recipe uses as few ingredients as possible: just enough egg and mayonnaise to hold everything together, a touch of Dijon and Old Bay for the classic Mid-Atlantic profile, a fine mince of celery and scallion for texture, and Ritz crackers ground fine — their buttery richness is the one ingredient most recipes miss and that most diners can never quite identify.

The goal is a crab cake that barely holds its shape in the pan, develops a deep golden crust on the exterior, and yields a moist, almost crumbly interior of pure crab. Anything firmer than that is a crab-flavored disk, not a crab cake.

Since these crab cakes are delicate, I make them smaller so they are easier to flip in the hot pan.





RECIPE 3

CRAB CAKES

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 3 lbs lump crabmeat (jumbo lump preferred)
- 1 egg, whisked
- 1 cup mayonnaise
- 1 Tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 Tbsp Old Bay seasoning
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp cayenne pepper
- 1 tsp Worcestershire
- 4 Tbsp celery, peeled and minced fine
- 3 Tbsp bacon, cooked and chopped (optional)
- 3 Tbsp scallion, white section only, very thinly sliced
- 2 cups Tbsp Ritz crackers, ground fine
- 5 Tbsp panko breadcrumbs



CHEF'S TIP

Boiling whole live crabs, chilling, and hand-picking the meat produces a noticeably superior crab cake. Worth the effort when the occasion calls for it.

METHOD

1. Whisk together the egg, mayonnaise, mustard, and all seasonings.
2. Add celery, scallion and crabmeat,. Fold gently with a rubber spatula — combine without shredding the lump crab.
3. Blend the Ritz crackers and panko together in a bowl for coating the crab cakes.
4. Heat about 1/4 inch of oil in a straight-sided sautoir pan over medium heat.
5. Take a tbsp of filling and make a small cake shape, dip the cake into the breading firmly. Fry the small test cake and evaluate seasoning and texture. If the mixture feels loose, add a few teaspoons of the breading to firm up the mixture. If too dense, add a tsp of mayo. Adjust before forming the rest. Turn off the heat on the pan of oil until ready to begin frying.
6. Using a small, ice cream scoop, form the crab mixture into 8–9 equal balls on a parchment-lined tray. Flatten slightly — use a ring cutter if you want even, professional-looking cakes.
7. Dip the crab cakes into the breading as you fry to avoid the cakes from being soggy.
8. Heat about 1/4 inch of oil in a straight-sided sautoir pan over medium heat. Pan-fry 3–4 cakes at a time, jiggling gently for even browning. Tilt the pan so oil pools to one side before flipping — this prevents hot oil from splashing. Using a small spatula, place the golden brown crab cakes onto a paper towel lined tray until all of the crab cakes are fried.
9. Serve with spicy tartar sauce and slaw.



RECIPE 4

POACHED FLUKE, WHITE WINE SAUCE (VIN BLANC)

FLUKE • FLOUNDER • SOLE • RED SNAPPER • CATFISH • TROUT



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

For years I struggled to catch fluke from the Long Beach Island surf, working an old striper rod I'd used on the Hudson River. On my 60th birthday I walked into The Fisherman's Headquarters and the young man behind the counter set me up with a 9-foot rod, a proper leader, and a basic high-low rig with gulp. That afternoon I landed 12 fluke. The right equipment changes everything — in fishing and in the kitchen. Bay Side Dave's fluke videos didn't hurt either.

At home, our favorite way to cook fluke is whole, fried in a wok out on the deck. The cheeks are sweet and tender, the skin comes out crackling, and nothing goes to waste. I go back and forth on whether frying, poaching, or sautéing is my favorite preparation — but the real answer is always the same: the freshest possible fish, and the restraint to let it speak for itself.

Not many fishermen wake up craving poached fish. It's an unfashionable method, and yet Poached Sole Vin Blanc is one of the great dishes of French classical cuisine. It earns that reputation.

Cooking it teaches you nearly everything important about delicate flatfish: how to fabricate and prepare them, how to build a fish stock and velouté, how to apply gentle heat with precision, and how to finish a reduction sauce directly in the poaching pan. This recipe traces back to a dish I created as a culinary student at the CIA, for a competition sponsored by the French herbal liqueur Bénédictine D.O.M. —I won a ten speed bike, cash and a fancy lunch in Manhattan! My recipe was sole fillets poached in a shallow bath of white wine, shallots and fish stock, finished with a silky velouté and a whisking of cold butter. Master this and you have mastered the art of cooking delicate fish.





RECIPE 4

POACHED FLUKE, WHITE WINE SAUCE (VIN BLANC)

FLUKE • FLOUNDER • SOLE • RED SNAPPER • CATFISH • TROUT

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- Whole fluke to yield 3 lbs fluke fillets (about 2 per person)

SIMPLE FISH VELOUTÉ (SAUCE)

- Fish bones from the filleting the fish, eyes and gills removed; blood rinsed out with cold water
- 3 Tbsp lightly salted butter, cut into thin slices & room temperature
- ½ cup of sliced shallots
- 3 Tbsp all-purpose flour, sifted
- 1 ea bay leaf and thyme sprig
- 2 qts water

POACHING THE FLUKE

- 4 Tbsp butter, slightly salted
- 2 Tbsp shallots, peeled and minced
- 3 lbs fluke fillets from above
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- ½ tsp black peppercorns, cracked
- 2-3 ea fresh thyme sprigs
- 3 Tbsp dry white wine
- 1 Cup water (or fish stock)
- 2 cups fish velouté
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1 tsp Bénédictine D.O.M (optional)
- 2 Tbsp fresh Italian parsley, chopped (optional)



CHEF'S TIP

Chefs would prepare a fish stock with the fish bones, water and aromatics, then strain and thicken this with roux to prepare the fish velouté. I've combined the steps for convenience.



CHEF'S TIP

Never crowd the pan. Overcrowding drops the temperature and causes the fish to steam rather than sear. Work in confident batches — a loosely tented platter keeps the first batch warm while you finish.

METHOD

1. To prepare the fish velouté, place the butter into a medium sized pot and melt; add the shallots and heat briefly to soften (about 2 minutes) at low heat. Add the flour and whisk to create a smooth roux-it should be blond in color and look like wet sand. Add cold water slowly while whisking out the lumps.
2. Add the fish bones, bay leaf and thyme sprig, simmer for 30 minutes at low heat, strain and season with salt and pepper to taste-reserve.
Note: Be sure to periodically scrape the bottom of the pot to avoid scorching the roux.
3. Remove fillets from the refrigerator 20 minutes before cooking. Room-temperature fish cooks more evenly throughout.
4. Season fillets generously on both sides with salt and cracked pepper.
5. Butter the bottom of the sauté pan, sprinkle the shallots on to the butter and then fold the fillets in half and place onto the shallots. Place two sprigs of fresh thyme over the fillets.
6. Add the white wine and water or fish stock; the liquid should come about ½ way up the side of the pan.
7. Heat the sauté pan over medium-low heat. Cover with the cartouche, (circle of buttered parchment paper) and simmer very slowly for 5-6 minutes. Lift the cartouche and bathe the fillets with a spoon to complete cooking. The cartouche helps to gently cook the top portion of the fish fillets.
8. Gently lift each fillet of fluke out of the pan and into a plate-cover with a tented piece of foil to keep warm. Increase the heat and reduce the poaching liquid by half.
9. Add the fish velouté and cream, simmer for 4-6 minutes to thicken-season to taste. Whisk in Bénédictine D.O.M, optional-strain over the fish and sprinkle fresh herbs over the top; enjoy.



RECIPE 5

SAUTÉED DRY SEA SCALLOPS WITH BROWN BUTTER



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

People constantly tell me their scallops don't taste the same as when I cook them. This recipe follows the meunière method—sautéing in brown butter—and it works equally well for any tender, mild fish fillet. It is very quick, very delicious, and entirely within reach.

I cook exclusively with dry-packed or diver scallops. They cost more. They are worth every penny. You'll recognize them by their slightly ivory or beige color, their irregular natural shape, and — if they're truly fresh — a clean, sweet smell that suggests the sea rather than the dock. Sear them properly in butter and you get a deep caramelized crust, a just-opaque center, and a sweetness that is one of the most satisfying things a home kitchen can produce. It takes minutes.

Most scallops in the supermarket case — fresh or frozen — have been treated with sodium tripolyphosphate, a solution that saturates them with water to inflate their weight and extend shelf life. When you try to sear them, the water evacuates into the pan and the scallop steams or boils rather than browns. The result is pale, rubbery, and faintly chemical-tasting. The chemistry explains why: we sauté at 350–400°F, but water boils at 212°F.

This is a simple yet amazing recipe for cooking scallops. Serve with wilted spinach and rice pilaf, and dinner is on the table in under twenty minutes.





RECIPE 5

SAUTÉED DRY SEA SCALLOPS WITH BROWN BUTTER

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 24 large dry-packed sea scallops, side muscle removed (room temperature)
The amount depends on the size of the scallops
 - 6 oz unsalted butter, room temperature
 - 5 Tbsp all-purpose flour, sifted (optional)
 - ½ tsp kosher salt
 - Freshly ground black pepper
-
- 8 oz unsalted butter, room temperature
 - 1 lemon, quartered
 - 3 Tbsp Italian parsley, finely chopped



CHEF'S TIP:

This recipe works perfectly for fillet of fluke, flounder, catfish etc...



CHEF'S TIP:

The two most common mistakes are wet scallops and a crowded pan. Eliminate both and success is guaranteed.

METHOD

1. Remove the small rectangular side muscle from each scallop — it toughens under heat. Pat each scallop completely dry with paper towels. This step determines everything that follows.
2. Season lightly with salt and pepper. Dredge very lightly in sifted flour and tap off all excess. This is not a breading — it is protection for the delicate scallop and promotes caramelization.
3. Heat a sauté pan over medium heat. Add butter and let it melt, and transition to a golden brown (beurre noisette). You will smell a nutty, toasty aroma — that is your signal.
Be careful not to burn the butter! It is the sauce...
4. Add 5–6 scallops without crowding. Do not move them for 2 minutes! Let the golden crust form. A gentle jiggle of the pan promotes even browning. When a deep golden crust forms, carefully turn with a large spoon or tongs and brown the second side briefly (2 minutes).
5. Transfer to a warm platter, tent loosely with foil to keep warm. Repeat until all of the scallops are cooked.
6. Add the remaining butter and let it melt, foam and lightly brown. Add a squeeze of lemon, stir in parsley, and spoon the brown butter sauce over the scallops. Serve immediately.



RECIPE 6

ROASTED OR GRILLED STRIPED BASS



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION



I've had my share of luck with stripers over the years, but nothing quite matches the exciting chaos of a full feeding frenzy — bass churning the surface, bait flying, the inlet suddenly alive. My most memorable trip was a warm October day with Captain Greg Cudnic. The inlet was crowded so we headed out for tautog instead, until the radio crackled with news that stripers were busting bunker two or three miles offshore. We ran out and fished the surface for hours, landing more than a dozen fish. We tagged several and kept two beautiful bass for the table. I cut striper into steaks and save the head and bones for stock or chowder — nothing goes to waste.



My consulting work takes me to Southeast Asia regularly, and every trip reminds me how differently the rest of the world relates to seafood. The fish is rarely iced — it's caught and eaten the same day, still rigid with freshness. The wet markets are something else entirely: enormous variety, fish of every size, and steaks hand-cut to order with heavy cleavers by people who have been doing it their whole lives. I find myself lingering there longer than anywhere else.



I prefer to season striped bass with kosher salt and black pepper. There are a variety of spice blends designed for seafood with ginger, onion powder, garlic powder, etc... but I find these mask the delicious and delicate flavor of the striped bass.

Fire does something to fish that no other cooking method can replicate. Grilling over wood adds a layer of flavor — smoke, char, a slight crust — that stays out of the way of a good piece of fish while making it taste more like itself. It is also one of the more demanding techniques, less forgiving than a pan and harder to control. Swordfish, tuna, salmon, and striped bass all take to it beautifully, and striper especially rewards the grilling approach of cooking.



RECIPE 6

ROASTED OR GRILLED STRIPED BASS

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 ea striped bass steaks (darnes) or tranch-cut portions, uniform in size and weight
- 6 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup scallions, cut into 2-inch pieces
- 1 Tbsp kosher salt
- 1 tsp black pepper
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced
- Fresh herbs for finishing
- ¼ lb lightly salted butter, room temperature
- Spice blends for seafood (optional)

METHOD

1. Season the striped bass steaks with olive oil, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes. The fish should be at room temperature so it cooks evenly.
2. Place each steak into the oven or directly onto the grill, (or into a grill basket), and let cook for 5 minutes — do not move the fish or it will stick. Gently slide a spatula along the grill to lift the fish and invert. Cook 4 additional minutes and lift onto a serving platter.
3. Rest the fish steaks for 2–3 minutes, then serve with fresh herbs and slices of softened butter generously over the top.



CHEF'S TIP:

The charcoal or wood should be very hot with no flames. Be sure the grill is brushed clean and then wiped with olive oil to avoid sticking. Using a fish grilling basket makes it much easier! Use a long, metal spatula that will hold the entire fish steak to avoid breaking.



TEMPERATURE NOTE:

A probe thermometer is the most reliable tool. 145°F is properly cooked; above 155°F the fish begins to dry and tighten.



RECIPE 7

MISO BLACK COD OR BLACK BASS (TOG)

CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

If you have never eaten black cod — AKA sablefish — prepare for a treat. The fat content of this fish is extraordinary: rich, silky, deeply flavorful, and almost impossible to overcook. The texture actually reminds me of Tautog or Blackfish that we catch in the rocks at LBI. It is the most forgiving fish I know.

The miso preparation that made it globally famous was popularized by Chef Nobu Matsuhisa, and spread through fine dining menus worldwide. The sweet-salty-umami combination of white miso, mirin, honey, and soy sauce penetrates the fatty flesh over a long marinade, and when the fish goes under the broiler, the marinade caramelizes into a deep, lacquered glaze — think the glistening exterior of perfect barbecue ribs, but on a fish.

My experience is to pull it around 130–135°F, because black cod's extraordinary fat content carries heat and continues cooking on the plate. Serve this the moment it comes out of the oven. The glaze is at its most spectacular right then.

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 black cod (sablefish) fillets, 5–6 oz each, skin on
- 1 cup white miso paste
- ½ cup mirin
- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup soy sauce
- 1 tsp black pepper



CHEF'S TIP:

If broiling, position the rack about 6 inches from the element and watch carefully. Miso and honey will go from perfect to burnt in under a minute. Give it your full attention.



SERVING SUGGESTION:

Serve over steamed short-grain rice with thinly sliced scallions. Pickled ginger alongside cuts through the richness beautifully.

METHOD

1. Whisk together miso, mirin, honey, soy sauce and black pepper until completely smooth.
2. Place fillets in a shallow pan or zip-top bag. Cover completely with marinade. Refrigerate 12–24 hours rotating the fillets.
3. Preheat oven to 400°F. Remove fillets— do not rinse. You want a coating, not a puddle.
4. Place on a lightly oiled sheet pan. Roast or broil 8–10 minutes until the surface is dark and lacquered and the fish flakes gently at the thickest point.
5. Target internal temperature: 130–135°F. The fat in black cod carries residual heat — it will finish beautifully on the plate.





RECIPE 8

SHRIMP COCKTAIL

CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

Shrimp cocktail is amazing! It has to be one of the most popular seafood appetizers on restaurant menus. Almost everyone has had the disappointing version: rubbery shrimp from a plastic grocery store tray, watery cocktail sauce from a jar. Most people assume that's simply what shrimp cocktail is supposed to be. It is not. When you poach shrimp yourself in a properly seasoned court bouillon, the difference is startling — sweet and briny, a perfect 'bite' with a tangy cocktail sauce.

The secrets to perfectly poaching shrimp are a flavorful court bouillon, timing and experience: simmer (don't boil) the shrimp only until they curl into a C-shape, not an O, and pull them the moment they get there. A touch of extra vinegar and salt in the bouillon keeps them crunchy and flavorful.

I soak my poached shrimp overnight in chilled court bouillon — a step most home cooks skip and that makes an enormous difference in texture and flavor. Make this once from scratch and the store bought is retired permanently.





RECIPE 8

SHRIMP COCKTAIL

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS — COURT BOUILLON

- 2 lb shrimp, shell-on (16/20 count — tiger shrimp preferred)
- 3 quarts water
- 3 cups cider vinegar
- 6 bay leaves
- 1 carrot, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 stalk celery, thinly sliced
- ½ cup onion, thinly sliced
- 2 lemons, thinly sliced
- 2 tsp kosher salt
- 10 whole black peppercorns



INGREDIENTS — COCKTAIL SAUCE

- 2 cups chili sauce
- 1½ cups ketchup
- 3 Tbsp cider vinegar
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tsp fresh lemon juice
- 3 Tbsp prepared horseradish (make it assertive)
- Hot sauce to taste — Sriracha recommended

METHOD

1. Combine water, vinegar, vegetables, spices, and lemon in a pot. Bring to a simmer and cook 6 minutes. Do not over-simmer or the bouillon turns bitter. Season with salt — it should taste bright and briny, like the best pickle you’ve ever tasted.
2. Add shrimp directly to the court bouillon. Poach at 160°F, stirring gently so they cook evenly, until they curl into a C-shape. Remove each shrimp as it is cooked with a perforated spoon onto a sheet pan to cool.
3. Strain and chill 2 cups of court bouillon. Place shrimp in a bowl, pour cold bouillon over, and refrigerate overnight. This step is the difference between good and exceptional.
4. To peel: loosen the shell along the underside and remove section by section. Leave the tail on for presentation. To devein: make a shallow cut along the back with a paring knife; rinse under cold water if necessary.
5. For cocktail sauce: whisk all ingredients together, adjust seasoning, and refrigerate overnight. The flavors marry and deepen significantly with rest.



CHEF'S TIP:

The overnight rest in court bouillon is not optional if you want restaurant-quality results. The shrimp firm up, brighten, and absorb flavor in ways that simply cannot be replicated in an hour.



SERVING NOTE:

This cocktail sauce is equally excellent with raw clams and oysters on the half shell.





RECIPE 9

SEAFOOD STEW

with Garlic Crostini



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

There are a variety of seafood stew recipes, inspired by the fisherman's catch of the day. Italian Cioppino, Marseille Bouillabaisse, and Seafood Stew from the San Francisco Fisherman's Wharf are some of the most famous.

Poaching shrimp, clams, crabs, cod, mussels, etc. in a delicious seafood broth of onions, fennel, garlic, tomato and spices is simply one of the most delicious and nutritious seafood classics.

The method is fairly simple: fresh seafood catch of the day cut into bite-sized pieces, fragrant garlic and onion slices, tomatoes and dry white wine...the fresh seafood literally becomes the meal. What you are creating is essentially a self-basting sauce — the seafood and shellfish's own briny liquor mingles with wine, olive oil, and garlic to produce a dish which is flavorful, nutritious, and deeply satisfying. The key is fresh seafood, poached at a very low temperature. There is no recovering seafood that has overcooked into a rubber eraser. The broth that pools in the bottom of the bowl is, I would argue, the best part of the whole dish. You need excellent toasted bread to honor it.



RECIPE 9

SEAFOOD STEW

with Garlic Crostini

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 cup Spanish onion, peeled and sliced (leek whites optional)
- ½ cup fennel bulb, thinly sliced
- 4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 lb fresh cod, striped bass, etc., cleaned and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 16 shrimp, 16/20 count, peeled and cleaned
- 16 dry scallops, side muscle removed
- 16 fresh littleneck clams, scrubbed and debearded
- 16 fresh mussels, scrubbed and debearded
- Crab or lobster (optional)
- 1 pint clam juice
- 2 tsp saffron (optional)
- Fresh Italian parsley, roughly chopped
- Kosher salt and cracked black pepper to taste
- Crusty bread — sliced on the bias, drizzled with olive oil and rubbed with fresh garlic after baking
- Garlic aioli (optional)



METHOD

1. Heat a large, wide pot over high heat. Add the olive oil.
2. Add onion, fennel and garlic. Sweat for about 3 minutes until fragrant but not browned.
3. Add the wine and bring to a simmer, allowing it to reduce briefly.
4. Add all seafood at once, beginning with the clams and mussels. Add the clam juice. Add the saffron (optional); Cover immediately and cook over low heat for 3–4 minutes, shaking the pan once or twice.
5. When shells have opened and all seafood is just cooked through, the stew is done. Discard any clams or mussels that remain closed. Season the broth with salt and pepper, scatter with parsley, and serve immediately in deep bowls.
6. Serve with crostini (toasted baguette with olive oil and rubbed with garlic.)



CHEF'S TIP:

Resist lifting the lid repeatedly — you lose the steam that cooks the shellfish. One confident check at three minutes is all that's needed.



VARIATIONS:

Add diced tomatoes and a pinch of saffron for a Provençal style.



RECIPE 10

FISH TACOS



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

Years ago I was in Puerto Vallarta on vacation. There were small restaurant stands carved into the rocky walls at the beach serving a variety of local, grilled seafood on tortillas with freshly prepared salsa.

I've travelled to Mexico many times since and always search out small, local spots to get freshly prepared soft tacos with freshly caught fish, chorizo, chicken or pork.

Try making the tortillas yourself, the meal will be extra special!

The local hot sauces are incredible. This dish is inspired by the amazing local cuisine of Mexico...





RECIPE 10

FISH TACOS

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 fish fillets; striped bass, halibut, perch, etc... uniform in size and weight
- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 1 Tbsp kosher salt
- tt black pepper
- 1 lemon or lime, cut in half

GARNISHES

- 3 cups cole slaw or shredded cabbage
- 2 cup salsa
- 1 cup diced avocado
- Fresh cilantro for finishing
- Sour cream (optional)
- Hot sauce (optional)

TORTILLAS

- 3 cups masa harina
- 1½ cups warm water
- Salt and pepper to taste



METHOD FOR PREPARING TORTILLAS

- 1 Put the masa harina into a bowl, slowly add the warm water, stirring with a wooden spoon to create a smooth paste. Add a little more water if necessary.
- 2 Using a spoon, scoop out even sized balls and flatten with a tortilla press or rolling pin (use plastic wrap on top and bottom to avoid sticking).
- 3 Immediately place on very hot cast iron or Teflon pan and heat about 3 minutes per side.
- 4 Using a spatula, carefully place onto a clean, cloth towel to keep dry.

METHOD FOR COOKING THE SEAFOOD

- 1 Season the fish with salt and pepper, drizzle with olive oil.
- 2 Place on a hot pan to cook—or if you prefer—grill or bake until tender.
- 3 Remove fish with a perforated spatula.
- 4 Place the cooked fish onto warm tortillas. It's fine if the fish breaks.
- 5 Place cabbage, salsa and avocado over the fish and scatter fresh cilantro generously over the top.



TEMPERATURE NOTE: A probe thermometer is the most reliable tool for poaching. **145°F** is properly cooked; above **155°F** the fish begins to dry and tighten.





BONUS RECIPES

FRESH TROUT



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

Cooking a whole, head-on trout is the gold standard for flavor because the bones and skin keep the meat succulent while infusing it with whatever aromatics you place inside the cavity. At the CIA we served whole trout, wrapped with bacon and fried in a blend of lard, Crisco and butter—very crispy and flaky. These days I dream about whole trout fried with bacon but tend to bake the butterflied trout with herbs and breadcrumbs instead. Simply sprinkle the trout with herbs and seasoning and place onto a sheet pan to bake until golden brown.

8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 8 ea trout, butterflied
- 1 cup olive oil
- 4 Tbsp breadcrumbs
- Fresh Italian parsley, roughly chopped
- Kosher salt and cracked black pepper to taste



METHOD:

- 1 Open the whole trout, 'like a book'; using a scissors, trim out the center bones. Season the inside generously with salt and pepper.
- 2 Use a sharp knife to make 3 or 4 shallow, diagonal cuts across the skin on both sides. This prevents the fish from curling and lets the heat penetrate evenly.
- 3 Place the whole trout on to a lightly oiled sheet pan, opened up and skin down.
- 4 Loosely wrap foil around the head and tail to avoid burning.
- 5 Sprinkle breadcrumbs on top and place into a preheated oven at 400 degrees F. Bake for 12 minutes—the fish should be nicely browned.
- 6 Serve immediately with chopped parsley sprinkled on top.



RECIPE BONUS

CRUISE SHIP BROWNIES



CHEF'S INTRODUCTION

For several months each year, my wife Junnie and I work as Chef Instructors aboard a cruise ship, teaching a variety of culinary classes for the guests. We've travelled to ports across the globe and enjoyed amazing culinary experiences at food halls, markets, food trucks and all the spots where the locals eat.

Each evening the cabin steward leaves a few chocolates on the pillow at turndown. I quietly save the chocolates to bake into this brownie recipe for my granddaughter — inspired by Julia Child's wonderful dessert recipes.

BEST-EVER BROWNIES

Adapted from Baking with Julia



8 PORTIONS

INGREDIENTS

- 1¼ cups sifted all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 2 sticks (8 oz) unsalted butter
- 4 oz unsweetened chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 2 oz bittersweet chocolate, coarsely chopped
- 2 cups sugar
- 1 tsp pure vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs



METHOD

- 1 Center a rack in the oven and preheat to 350°F.
- 2 Sift the flour and salt together and set aside.
- 3 Melt the butter and chocolate together in a medium saucepan over low heat, stirring frequently and keeping a watchful eye on the pot to make certain the chocolate doesn't scorch. Alternatively, melt in the top of a double boiler over simmering water. Add 1 cup of the sugar to the mixture and stir for half a minute, then remove from the heat and stir in the vanilla. Pour into a large bowl.
- 4 Put the remaining 1 cup sugar and the eggs into the bowl of a mixer and whisk by hand just to combine. Little by little, pour half of the sugar and eggs into the chocolate mixture, stirring gently but constantly with a rubber spatula so that the eggs don't set from the heat. Fit the whisk attachment and whip the remaining sugar and eggs until thick, pale, and doubled in volume, about 3 minutes. Delicately fold the whipped eggs into the chocolate mixture. When almost completely incorporated, gently fold in the dry ingredients.
- 5 Pour and scrape the batter into an unbuttered 9-inch square pan — a heavy ceramic or glass pan is ideal. Bake 25–28 minutes; the top will turn dark and dry. Check at the 23-minute mark — they're perfect if just barely set and still pretty gooey. Cool in the pan on a rack.



PLATING: I like to eat the brownies as is, but often served them diced in a large glass with ice cream and chocolate sauce as a *Brownie Freeze* when I owned my restaurant — amazing!



A FINAL WORD

Cooking seafood is about restraint and respect. Whether the fish came from a trusted fishmonger or was pulled from the Atlantic surf on a cold morning along the Jersey Shore, the obligation to it is the same: understand what it is, honor what it needs, and step back.

Every recipe in this collection reflects a philosophy I have carried through forty years of professional cooking. The finest food is almost always the simplest. Technique in service of the ingredient — never technique for its own sake — is the highest form of culinary craft. A perfect sear on a dry scallop. A just-cooked shrimp that snaps when you bite it. A chowder that tastes like the sea itself. These things are not complicated. They are disciplined.

I hope these recipes give you not just a set of instructions, but a set of instincts. Learn why the pan must be hot before the scallop goes in. Understand why the poaching liquid must breathe but never boil. Feel the difference between a fish that is à point and one that has gone a minute too far. Those instincts, once developed, belong to you permanently.

This is the first in a series of books I am writing. There is much more to cook, much more to share, and — for me at least — much more to catch.

I also encourage you to explore some of the less celebrated fish available along the East Coast — species that most fishermen throw back without a second thought. Skate and dogfish are routinely dismissed as nuisances, which is a genuine shame. Sautéed skate wings poached and then finished with brown butter and capers has become a beloved staple of French bistros for excellent reason: the wing meat is tender, sweet, and mildly flavored, pulling away from the cartilage in long, elegant strands. When you catch one, treat it the way the French do. I like roasted skate wings with curry...





BLUEFISH — ANOTHER MISUNDERSTOOD CATCH.

Bluefish is another misunderstood catch. It has a strong, oily flavor that puts some people off, but handled correctly it is delicious — bread it, fry it, and it becomes something entirely satisfying.

The key is to remove every trace of the bloodline from the fillet and rinse it well in cold water before cooking. That single step transforms the fish.

*Try cooking bluefish
meunière style — amazing!*





DOGFISH — A SHORE TRADITION WORTH KEEPING.

Dogfish — the small shark common along the Jersey Shore — deserves better than the bait bucket. The moment you land one, cut the head off and bleed the carcass immediately in cold seawater; this removes the ammonia that gives the flesh an off-flavor if left too long.

Once cleaned, dogfish fries beautifully and takes a curry sauce with remarkable elegance. It is, in fact, what much of the world knows as “fish and chips” — sold under more flattering names in the UK and Europe for generations.



*Treat it right,
and it will reward you.*



Cook with confidence.



Cook with curiosity.



Cook with respect.



RESPECT RUNS THE KITCHEN.

