

Food: Roast Sablefish

It's not surprising that the best seafood restaurant in Canada is in Vancouver. It is surprising that it took a gruff Easterner from the Gaspé to pull it off

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It's always telling to meet a chef in civilian dress. Some, like Mark McEwen of Toronto's North 44o, dress like the diners at their restaurants, in designer duds. Others, like Vancouver chef Robert Clark, look woefully out of place whenever they appear on the other side of the kitchen doors.

Take Clark's recent appearance at a party to kick off the Canadian Culinary Championships in Whistler. Most guests were dressed in the requisite black, as they milled about inspecting \$1,750 bottles of Château d'Yquem and La Tâche on auction at the bar. Clark, with his reddish beard, a Gore-Tex jacket shrouding his broad shoulders, looked more like a fisherman stepping off his boat to stretch his legs. He certainly didn't look like the trendsetting executive chef of C, the high-modern, critically acclaimed seafood restaurant that he opened a decade ago for restaurateur Harry Kambolis. (Together, they also run Nu, a nightclubby spot next door, and the Raincity Grill.)

The clothes don't lie: Clark grew up fly-fishing salmon on the York River in Gaspé, where his father still lives off the land. "Fish was always important to the old man," Clark says. "You never took more than you needed. You always made sure there was enough for next year." Clark knew he would eventually live by the sea, but when he arrived in Vancouver in the 1990s, he was disappointed with the quality of the fish supply; it had been fresher in Toronto, where Clark cut his chef's teeth in a number of the city's top kitchens. "[In Vancouver] it was like trying to shop for designer shoes at Wal-Mart," he recalls. So Clark cut out the middleman, and went straight to the boats. Not only was the seafood better, there was more variety to choose from: Of the 64 creatures commercially fished off the coast of B.C., only a few were being widely consumed locally. Soon, the chef was adding sea cucumber to salads and barnacles to soups.

Clark now functions as a kind of Jeremiah for western fisheries. "It's too late for the East—the cod's gone, girl," he explains. "The West still has a chance." To raise awareness, Clark helped launch Ocean Wise in 2005, an organization that advises restaurants on sustainable seafood choices. "As you get older, you're less interested in trends, and whether the food is piled high on the plate," he explains. "What's important to me now is how the food got to the plate." Which is not to say he has abandoned trends

entirely: When he added wild salmon to his menu 10 years ago, the whole country took note. Today, no fishmonger worth his sea salt would be caught without it.

Robert Clark's Citrus-Scented Roast Sablefish
(www.mckennaphoto.com)



Robert Clark's Citrus-scented Roast Sablefish

With fennel and arugula salad and a citrus emulsion

This dish makes a great appetizer or light lunch served with martinis. You can also use spring-run wild salmon if you reduce the seasoning time to 20 minutes.

- 2 tbsp fine sea salt
- 1 whole lemon
- 1 whole lime
- 3 whole oranges
- 1 whole blood orange
- 1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil
- 1 tsp Dijon mustard
- 2 fennel bulbs
- 1 tbsp seasoned rice wine vinegar
- 4 3-ounce fillets of sablefish
- 1 bunch of arugula leaves
- 5 sprigs of tarragon leaves

1 Preheat oven to 400 F.

2 Wash and zest the lemon, lime and two of the oranges. Stir into sea salt. Season fish with about half the salt mixture for at least 1 hour before cooking.

3 Juice the zested fruit into a small saucepan. Cook over medium heat until juice is reduced to the consistency of thin syrup (about 10 minutes). Whisk in the mustard and olive oil. Season with citrus salt to taste. Reserve.

4 Using a mandolin, slice fennel paper-thin. Toss with rice wine vinegar and let sit for at least 30 minutes.

5 Peel the remaining orange and blood orange and cut into segments. Reserve.

6 Roast sablefish for 10 minutes or until cooked through. (Sablefish is one of the few fish that taste better overcooked.)

7 Mix the tarragon and arugula into the fennel. Toss in the orange segments and divide onto four plates. Top with fillets and drizzle with citrus emulsion.

(Yields four appetizer servings.)