

Q&A



Rainer Schwarz, executive chef and partner at Driftwood Kitchen and The Deck on Laguna Beach

It's thought that the practice of eating fish dates back 40,000 years—which comes as no surprise, given the prominent role it has played in diets throughout history. In coastal cities like Laguna Beach, of course, seafood remains one of the most popular types of cuisine.

“In Southern California, we're more health-conscious, and seafood has become a great alternative to consuming large quantities of beef,” says Rainer Schwarz, executive chef and partner at Driftwood Kitchen and The Deck on Laguna Beach. “Depending on how it's prepared, it's usually light and can be delicious with the simplest preparation. I like fresh fish with lemon or olive oil—if you start with a good product, you don't have to do much to make it taste its best.”

Discover tips from Schwarz here on how to choose the freshest seafood and which dishes to prepare at home.

SEAFOOD SECRETS

CHEF RAINER SCHWARZ OF DRIFTWOOD KITCHEN AND THE DECK ON LAGUNA BEACH REVEALS HIS TIPS FOR SELECTING AND PREPARING FISH AND OTHER OCEANIC DISHES.

By ASHLEY RYAN



Driftwood Kitchen serves up many fresh fish dishes.

ANNE WATSON PHOTOGRAPHY



Grilled Spanish octopus at Driftwood Kitchen

LAGUNA BEACH MAGAZINE: *What are some of your biggest inspirations when it comes to preparing seafood?*

RAINER SCHWARZ: I always let the freshest seafood available inspire and guide me. I want to use just-out-of-the-water seafood that's not packed on ice—it's going to be the best tasting.

LBM: *What techniques do you tend to favor when cooking seafood dishes?*

RS: Let the seafood dictate your technique. Once you gain experience with cooking seafood, you'll know which tastes best grilled, seared, fried, poached, et cetera. For example, I wouldn't recommend poaching a fish with thick skin.

LBM: *What are some of your favorite dishes to make at Driftwood Kitchen or The Deck?*

RS: I always love to prepare fresh Chilean sea bass. It is a delicate white fish with a buttery flesh. We serve it at Driftwood Kitchen, sourced from sustainable certified fishery Glacier 51 [Toothfish] and served with a corn and fava bean succotash, pickled Fresno chile and charred scallion relish. I also love octopus, prepared simply and super tender—like our grilled Spanish octopus, with chickpea puree, tomato-caper vinaigrette and za'atar. It's extremely popular and absolutely delicious (see recipe on page 82).

LBM: *What tips do you have for preparing seafood at home?*

RS: Obviously, buy fresh seafood and focus on



Driftwood Kitchen's lobster carbonara

cooking it properly. It's not a secret that there's nothing worse than an overcooked tuna that is just bone dry, or an undercooked salmon or sea bass that is chewy, like eating rare lamb.

LBM: *What are some of the best types of fish or seafood to use in dishes?*

RS: Seafood pasta is something that any cook can create at home if they use seafood that sears nicely, like a shrimp or baby scallops. This will mix well with the pasta—after all, you don't want a piece of fish just placed on top of pasta. My lobster spaghetti carbonara is a perfect example of a great seafood pasta dish: With a farm-fresh egg, pork guanciale, grated Parmesan-Romano and tarragon, it's a favorite that will stay on the [Driftwood Kitchen] menu indefinitely.

LBM: *Where do you look for seafood locally?*

RS: You can find great seafood at quality places like Santa Monica Seafood, Whole Foods [Market] and Bristol Farms, but I've seen great fish at the local supermarket, if you know what you're looking for. The key is looking for fresh fish; you don't want anything frozen or packed on ice and, more than anything else, it should never smell fishy. ■



CHEF'S CHOICE

LOCAL CULINARY MASTERS SHARE THEIR FAVORITE SEAFOOD DISH IN TOWN.



BEN MARTINEK,
EXECUTIVE SOUS CHEF AT
MONTAGE LAGUNA BEACH

“My favorite Laguna Beach raw fish dish is featured on the Broadway [by Amar Santana] menu. It is the Japanese hamachi sashimi, complemented by a citrus-sesame dressing, avocado sorbet, cilantro and wasabi tobiko. I have had this dish several times now, and have never been let down. The seasoning and acidity balance with the richness of the fish. The ice-cold sorbet is a refreshing touch, and the textures make the dish quite interesting to eat.”

