

THE CHEFS

FISHY FRIENDS

Raphaella Frame-Tolmie spoke to three chefs who support the Southern African Sustainable Seafood Initiative

STEFAN MARAIS

Chef at Societi Bistro in Gardens and The Brasserie in Constantia, Cape Town

As a chef, being a SASSI ambassador means making a commitment to use sustainably sourced fish and seafood, and promoting sustainable seafood practices wherever possible. I have been doing this for years, regardless of my association with SASSI, so it's been great receiving recognition from them for doing what I believe in.

We have been enjoying some fantastic SASSI-friendly yellowtail in the Cape recently, which we have served extensively in both our restaurants. One of my favourite ways to serve yellowtail at the moment is with a simple citrus salad consisting of orange, grapefruit, naartjie, lime, thinly sliced radishes, the first of the new season's asparagus and spring onion with a light citrus vinaigrette. These are simple fresh flavours that stand up to the gamey character of the yellowtail.

Cooking sustainably challenges you to be creative with a rather limited variety of species on the green list, to explore different cooking techniques, as well as different ways to present the same fish. Many of our traditionally more popular line-fish species now fall onto the orange and red lists (largely due to overfishing as a result of their popularity). It can sometimes be a bit of a challenge to convince someone to try a species such as black bream or gurnard on the green list if they are used to eating kingklip.

There is much debate on farmed fish. The type of feed, production system, positioning and ecological effects all need to be taken into account when considering aquaculture. SASSI includes these criteria in its assessment of sustainability. The jury is still out on the health aspects.

Consumers always drive supply. If you ask for it, we chefs will cook it. Talk to the waiter, manager or chef and tell them that you would like to have sustainable seafood options available. If the restaurant already has sustainable options available, let them know that you approve.



WHAT A CATCH: Clockwise from top: Steve Marais, Rudi Liebenberg and Brad Ball

BRAD BALL

Chef and chief operations officer at what will be a new dining concept at the current Peddlars on the Bend venue in Constantia, Cape Town

My favourite SASSI-friendly fish at the moment is gurnard. It holds up really well in my take on zuppa di pesci with saffron, fresh Roma tomatoes, mussels and local squid.

The biggest challenge for the home cook is finding suppliers of sustainable fish. The big retailers are not pulling their weight.

Being a SASSI ambassador means I have a platform to educate. SASSI is very good about informing us about sustainable fish as and when the list changes, as well as liaising with the ambassadors. It is ever-changing. Use the SASSI number (see below) wherever you are, in a store, a restaurant or a market.

RUDI LIEBENBERG

Executive chef at the Mount Nelson Hotel, Cape Town

Being a SASSI ambassador means being responsible and accountable for the choices we make, and educating others, including guests and staff. My favourite SASSI-friendly options at the moment are mussels and snoek. We keep things simple with mussels — just some white wine, garlic and butter with loads of crusty bread. With the snoek, we serve sweet potato fritters.

It can be a challenge avoiding fish not on the green list. Guests don't always make it easy. They demand certain fish from time to time. Others get upset if you serve tuna, but do not realise that there are different species available, some of which are green. Consumers must ask the right questions. Where was the fish caught, how was it caught, when was it caught? We occasionally make a mistake by putting orange-listed fish on the menu. Consumers must know and be educated where the fish comes from and how it was caught. This starts at the fisheries and is passed on to the supplier and to the chef. Sometimes a fish might appear on both the green as well as the orange list. Transparency and honesty must be practised by suppliers. That is why reputable suppliers are so important.

Visit www.wwfsassi.co.za or sms fish names to 079 499 8795 for an instant response as to whether they are green, orange or red on the SASSI list.



ON THE HOP
NICK MULGREW

Innis & Gunn Original Oak-Aged Beer, Innis & Gunn, 330ml bottle, R35

Stand in front of the imported beers in your neighbourhood bottle store and you probably don't know which one to trust. Given that someone has taken the trouble to bring these beers halfway across the world from Estonia or Japan or the Czech Republic, you'd likely assume they'd all be pretty good.

And you'd be wrong. European strong lagers are a case in point: 10% alcohol by volume for R30 a litre sounds like a vibe — until you realise it tastes like a mix of apple juice and 95 unleaded.

That said, some imports are completely justifiable. Rowan Leibbrandt imports barrel-aged beers from Scottish brewery Innis & Gunn, which he says is the "most awarded beer in Scotland".

"So it seemed like a good place to start. My partner and I saw the parallel growth of single malt and interesting beers in South Africa," he says.

The original Innis & Gunn variant is a strong ale — 6.6% alcohol by volume — aged in barrels that used to hold whisky. While whisky-barrel aging doesn't make the beer taste like whisky, it does lend caramel and oak tones. (And, of course, much of the flavour of whisky comes from the barrel its aged in, so it's not that distant a relation.)

The Innis & Gunn Original is full-mouthed and full-flavoured, packed with sweet malt and buoyant bready esters, complemented by oak, vanilla, toffee and touches of minced fruit. It probably should be drunk like a half-decent whisky, because it rewards slow sipping with subtle changes as it builds on nose and palate.

Liebbrandt says they'll eventually bring in the rest of the Innis & Gunn range — potentially including beers aged in cherrywood and rum barrels.



ROELENE PRINSLOO

SWEET ENDINGS

LEMON CURD BRÛLÉE WITH ORANGE & LEMON ZEST CREAM

A citrus kick is the perfect finish to a fish-based dinner. This dessert can be made up to a week before serving and kept in an airtight container in the fridge. By **Andrea Burgener**

- 4 extra-large eggs
- 4 extra-large egg yolks
- 300g caster sugar, plus extra for topping
- 200g unsalted butter
- Juice and zest of 4 lemons
- 250ml (1 cup) fresh cream
- Finely grated zest of 1 orange
- Finely grated zest of 1 (extra) lemon

Beat eggs, yolks and caster sugar together until fluffy. Melt butter in a small, heavy-based saucepan, then remove from heat and stir in lemon juice, zest and egg mixture. Cook on lowest heat, stirring continuously until it starts to thicken, then for a further 5 minutes. Don't worry if it's not super-thick, this will happen when it cools. Pour into small bowls or ramekins and set aside to cool. Just before serving, whip the cream and fold in the orange zest and extra lemon zest. Sprinkle each curd portion with a little caster sugar and brûlée the surface with a blowtorch until speckled dark brown. Cool for a few minutes, then serve with the zesty cream. Makes 1 large brûlée or 8 individual portions — the portions must be small because it's quite intense.

BEST PLACE FOR PLAICE

It's easy to get hooked on the fish and chips at La Marina Foods, and you can trawl the aisles for gourmet delicacies like Spanish ham, writes **Bryan van Niekerk**

Modderfontein is better known for its dynamite than its dorado. But you'll find dorado (and more) at La Marina Foods, owned by dynamo Kirsten Jooste. La Marina's humble beginnings (first at a garage in Blairgowrie and then a hole-in-the-wall in Strijdom Park) evidence a long walk to freezerdom, with state-of-the-art storage and distribution facilities at the Longmeadow North Business Park, its home since 2008.

If you've eaten fresh Scottish salmon or Irish scallops in a Johannesburg restaurant, you've more than likely sampled La Marina's wares. The main business is keeping Johannesburg's chefs supplied with fine seafood (and many other comestibles).

In the middle of the retail area is a café comprising a few tables and chairs, where shoppers can sample the wares before buying or simply have a meal. It's surrounded by counters stocked with whole Spanish hams, fine wines and, in the corner, fresh fish on ice — salmon, sea bass and dorado. Above the counter is an interesting



SAY SUSHI: In Joburg, this is as fresh as it gets

SIMPHEWE NKWALI

opted for the sole and chips (R115) and the seared tuna and chips (R125). The fish was fresh and perfectly cooked. The tuna was seared on the outside and very simply presented, beautifully pink in the middle with a lemon butter sauce on the side.

Don't expect garnish or fancy crockery. Klap a fish and chips before you get lost among the fresh and frozen fish selection and the fancy deli items — a favourite of ours being the white anchovies.

For those able to engage in a midday indulgence, there are oysters with a glass of bubbly (six oysters for R85) or crab legs with wasabi mayo (priced per kg).

There is also a sushi menu. We ordered the 18-piece salmon platter (R150) as a takeaway, which the lucky recipient pronounced excellent and up there with the best she'd had in Johannesburg.

Wine is available by the glass, along with local and imported beers. For dessert, there's Häagen-Dazs ice cream.

After lunch, shopping! There's more than seafood on the shelves: quail, foie gras, caviar, and duck breast and confit. Chocaholics will find the selection of Valrhona chocolates irresistible. If you're going shopping for your next round of MasterChef, time your trip to include lunch.

LA MARINA FOODS
7 Platinum Drive, Longmeadow North Business Park, Modderfontein.
Tel (011) 608-3277
Mon-Fri 8am to 4pm; Sat 8am to noon.

SHUSHING THE SUSHI PURISTS

You can eat it with wasabi, you can eat it with chocolate, you can eat it raw, you can eat it cooked. By **Shanthini Naidoo**

A drop of dark chocolate on tuna sashimi in Belgium was the strangest surprise Japanese sushi expert Masayoshi Kazato has experienced in his travels. But the combination was surprisingly good, and an indication of how sushi has evolved, Kazato said on a recent visit to South Africa.

"I've seen a lot of travesties. The chocolate looked very strange. When I tasted it, it was different but it worked. It is that country's invention and somehow it synced."

It turns out that South Africa's mayonnaise-topped or deep-fried sushi, which would shock purists, is common around the world. And so is ketchup.

"But in Japan, we eat fish the same way we did 200 years ago — mostly raw. I find in countries outside Japan they don't know how to deal with raw fish; so many people cook sushi. But if that is how they want to

eat it, that is OK."

An ambassador appointed by the All Japan Sushi Association, Kazato has conducted sushi seminars in 44 countries.

"The most important factor when making sushi will always be hygiene... even more important than the skill of making sushi. Even if they change the way they prepare sushi in other countries, there must be soy sauce and wasabi, vinegar and sake, to kill bacteria from the raw fish," he said.

"You must try to use Japonica short-grained rice, *awase-zu*. It is sweetish and pasty to hold the sushi together. Also invest in good mirin, sake and soy sauce." The rice is seasoned with rice vinegar, sugar and salt. He uses an old Japanese knife



SIMPHEWE NKWALI

MASTER'S TOUCH: Masayoshi Kazato's sushi is a dish of beauty

fingers, to cleanse the hands before forming the sushi," Kazato says. He uses only two fingers and an open palm, for temperature control, moulding the rice into an oblong shape.

Next, he dabs wasabi onto one side of the slices of fish. He places the fish onto the rice, all the same height and size. He serves it with soy sauce and ornamentally sliced cucumber and carrot.

Kazato says the art of sushi-making is to create beautiful pieces while handling the fish as little as possible. And use whatever fish is found locally, for sustainability and freshness.

that is super sharp. Demonstrating with his favourite fish, tuna, and a local dorado, he slices uniform rectangles for nigiri.

"Use a small bowl of vinegar to dip the