

Produce

GROWING YOUR BUSINESS



Winter 2015

Australian fisheries industry

The role of aquaculture
in global food security

World-leading innovations

 Agribusiness

I love a seafood country

From the Kimberley to Sydney and Tasmania, Australia's top seafood restaurants have another ingredient in common: an enviable location

WORDS: LIANI SOLARI

Dorothea Mackellar might just as soon have penned 'I love a seafood country' as the opening line of her famous ode to Australia. Our seafood has a reputation for quality among world markets, with much of it destined for Hong Kong, Vietnam and Japan. For seafood restaurants around Australia, which have direct access to our coveted local produce, it really is a case of location, location, location.

Provenance and proximity

The Boathouse on Blackwattle Bay is just 200m across the water from Sydney Fish Market and 18 years ahead of its time.

"Provenance is the buzzword at the moment, but for The Boathouse it's been all about knowing where the seafood comes from since the restaurant opened in 1997," says Executive Chef Colin Barker.

The restaurant's focus on provenance is linked to its proximity to the fish market. "I know quite a few of the skippers and

I know which fish they target," Barker says. "There's one that chases tuna, mahi mahi and swordfish, so when I see that boat coming into the fish market, I ring my buyer over there and say, 'Make sure you get down to the jetty first and see what's on board!'"

Barker insists on buying fish whole. "When you see a fish in its whole state, it gives you a bird's-eye view of how good it is, but when it's already been filleted and skinned, any sins have been hidden," he says, referencing the connection between provenance and quality.

The Boathouse also prides itself on its extensive oyster menu, which at last count comprised Pacific, angasi and rock oysters from 17 regions. Some are sourced from "artisan" suppliers on the east coast, which facilitates a close relationship between chef and farmer.

"One of my suppliers, when his delivery is due, might put us off for a few weeks

until he's 100 per cent happy with the oysters he's going to sell to us," Barker says. "Some people would get irritated with that, but they're the oysters I want—from the guy who's so proud of his product that he wants to make sure it's perfect."

What a pearler!

The world is his oyster—and doesn't Ben Garratt know it. As Head Chef at Shell restaurant at Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm, 200km north of Broome, Garratt relishes the rare opportunity to work with fresh pearl meat when other restaurants must settle for using the dried or frozen product.

"We're the only restaurant in Australia where you can get pearl meat harvested 40m from the kitchen door," he says.

Pearl meat is the adductor muscle of the sizeable *Pinctada maxima* oyster. The pearls are harvested in the colder months, which is the perfect time for Garratt to showcase this culinary delicacy with an annual eight-course pearl meat degustation (Wednesday to Saturday, 28 August to 20 September 2015). Outside of the harvest season, guests can still enjoy pearl meat in dishes such as barramundi with pearl meat gyoza (Japanese dumplings) poached in miso soup, and savoury 'Pearl Jam' made with pearl meat, herbs and tomatoes.

Garratt's Japanese-inspired menu is a nod to Broome's historical pearl divers and reflects the cooking style he honed in kitchens in Japan before cheffing at Tetsuya's (Sydney) and Nobu (London and Milan). At the same time, Garratt says, "My menu is inspired by the environment up here in the Kimberley, particularly the colours. Pindan is the local red soil, so the degustation dish I call 'Pindan and Pearls' features dehydrated beetroot, seaweed and sashimi of fresh pearl meat."



Casting a wide net

Open since late 2014, Franklin restaurant in Hobart, Tasmania, occupies the ground floor of the Argyle Street building where *The Mercury's* printing presses ran hot. Where editors once picked the eyes out of a potentially news-worthy story, diners are now teasing the flesh from periwinkle shells with toothpicks or 'cutting their teeth' on other unusual or under-utilised seafoods such as sea urchin and kelp.

At the helm of Franklin's seafood-focused menu is Chef David Moyle, who says he "enjoys the connection" of using the island state's lesser-known seafoods, adding, "They're the items we can get of top quality in Tasmania because of how immediately we can receive them. I'm using the advantage we have in Tasmania."

While Tasmanian abalone is a delicacy sought by Asian markets, Moyle ensures Franklin's patrons can enjoy this delicious shellfish, which he wraps in kelp and slow-roasts in the wood-fired oven. The ingredients are truly complementary—below the surface, the wild-caught abalone has spent its life grazing on kelp.

This brings us to the abalone's enemy, the invasive long-spine sea urchin, which is a pest that destroys kelp beds.

While marine scientists hope to see sea urchin on more Australian menus for environmental reasons, Moyle says he is largely motivated by its seasonality and applications: "Long-spine urchin roe is good for its flavour in butter and sauces, while the native short-spine urchin has a cleaner flavour and I can serve it in its raw form."

At Franklin the marine pest is transformed into sea urchin butter in which whole fish, such as flathead, is roasted in the wood-fired oven. To the abalone, at least, it must seem like just desserts. **W**

CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT:

Cygnnet Bay Pearl Farm Chef Ben Garratt's signature Pearl Jam with poached Kimberley mud crab; flathead roasted in sea urchin butter by Chef David Moyle at Hobart's Franklin; Chef Colin Barker sources ingredients at Sydney Fish Market for The Boathouse menu.

CHERRIE EISEMANN/ACOMA

