

taste buds

chef Larry Janes

Fish gets his nod if poached

During the dog days of summer, a visit to any restaurant having poached fish on the menu automatically gets my nod. Let's face it, there aren't many restaurant kitchen staffs that feel comfortable preparing poached fish.

Most fish lend themselves to frying, baking or broiling, but when poaching is mentioned, immediate thoughts of firm-fleshed fish like salmon, trout, grouper or snapper are chosen 99.5 percent of the time.

To poach a fish is to cook it in liquid, usually flavored with vegetables, herbs, seasonings and wine. You can serve poached fish warm or cold, with the chilled version usually making the appetizer or salad routine and the hotter version shoring up the rear as an entree.

Poaching is a time-honored practice. Some critics will go so far as to say that poaching causes some of the flavor of the fish to disappear in the poaching liquid. Personally, I disagree, based solely on the concept that by incorporating herbs, wine and broth, the fish can only become more flavorful through the cooking process.

MASTER CHEFS will tout the fish poacher as the sole means of preparation. This elongated pan, 4-to-8-inches high with a lift-out tray, usually requires two burners on the stove, not to mention the necessity of storage between uses. I don't have enough cabinet space as it is, let alone for a fish poacher. If poaching individual fillets, I use my Farberware dutch oven with tight-fitting lid.

The poaching of a whole fish or large fillets finds me bringing out the oblong enameled roaster. Both work equally well, especially when using a roasting rack to keep the fish off the bottom.

There are only two steps in the poaching practice that would require some amount of culinary skill. The first, preparing the proper poaching liquid, suggests common sense. The use of high-salt bouillions or harsh red wines are discouraged while the use of white wines, light broths and fresh herbs are more commonly accepted.

In addition, chunks of fresh vegetables such as carrots, celery (especially the tops) and capers make flavorful additions. Milder herbs such as parsley, chives, thyme, marjoram and bay leaves are most widely used.

The secret here is making sure the poaching liquid has come to a full rolling boil with the additions before adding the fish.

The second important step is timing. Individual fillets already skinned and boned will need 10-15 minutes of poaching. Whole fish, gutted and scaled, coming in at around three pounds, requires about 20 minutes. Again, the secret is to bring the poaching liquid to a full rolling boil with the vegetables, broth, wine and herbs and then, once the fish is added, cover and lower the temperature to barely a simmer.

USING A firm-fleshed fish such as salmon will allow the preparer to perform the "flake" test. After sufficient cooking, a fork inserted into the fish and pulled will flake when pulled with the fork. Novices should always begin testing the fish earlier because you can always add cooking time but can never take it away.

Poached fish usually is served with a flavored mayonnaise or light cream sauce to accentuate the flavor. A personal favorite calls for mixing one cup of mayonnaise with the juice of a fresh orange.

Try poaching if you are looking for something to cook that not only will make a stunning entree but an equally stunning appetizer or salad.



Brad Vargo of Jack's Seafood Market in Farmington Hills shows off a 14-pound Cape bluefish. (Below) Parrot fish (foreground), Boston mackerel and jumbo shrimp are some of the other offerings.

SHARON LAMICUX
staff photographer

By Janice Brunson
special writer

FOR SEAFOOD lovers, a quick quiz. What's the surest clue to fresh fish? How can you be certain you're paying for Mexican white gulf shrimp and not the less costly Indian tiger variety that looks the same?

Where can you locally buy delectably delicious brill, a popular English flounder? Answers are: Fresh fish smells "oceanic" and the smart buyer always performs an on-the-spot smell test. Fish should be purchased only from a trusted and reliable source. Jack's Seafood Market in Farmington Hills carries brill.

For other questions, in fact, for most any question at all about seafood, try calling Brad Vargo at Jack's. You see, since Jack's opened last August, "Brad's hotline" has inadvertently evolved.

"I must get four, five, six calls a day, usually in the late afternoon, people calling with all sorts of questions about fish and how to prepare it. We give tons of advice. We welcome the calls," said Vargo, an enthusiastic award-winning chef who manages Jack's for Farmington Hills owners Jack Galopin and Mike Adler.

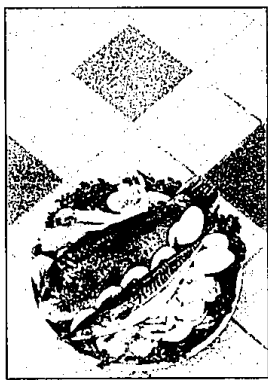
WHEN IT COMES to questions, Vargo likely has an answer. "Seafood has always sort of followed me around." During 18 years as a professional chef, he won culinary awards in 1978 and 1984 for such creations as crab bisque and poached salmon.

If no answer is readily apparent, Vargo will search it out, as in the case of brill, requested by an English customer. "That one took a while," he said with a laugh.

Brill is not the only unusual offering at Jack's. Ever tried parrot fish, a coral swimmer from the Florida Keys that is both delicate and delicious in taste? How about wolffish, a fearsome-looking catfish from the ocean that is excellent broiled, grilled or baked? Or Louisiana redfish, delicious in Cajun cuisine but often unavailable at the market?

Jack's also offers seasonal catches, with daily specials on the catch of the moment. Coming up in July and August — mahi mahi, yellow fin tuna, halibut, Norwegian salmon, pickerel and swordfish. Depending on the variety, prices

Fish lovers' "HOTLINE"



begin at \$3.99 per pound.

Vargo stresses caution in buying seafood. Otherwise, you might get a fishy deal, sole sold as flounder, cod as haddock or trout as brown trout.

Another advice: fish should be used the day of purchase; it freezes nicely if packaged correctly, best buys are seasonal catches, and beware of fish that carries a slightly ammonia-like smell. "It's not spoiled, but it's not fresh either."

For a "one-of-a-kind taste treat," Vargo recommends the soft-shelled blue crab from Maryland, his hottest seller. The soft shell variety has molted its shell, rendering the entire crab edible. "It's a little pricey but if you've never had one, there's nothing else like it in the world."

MARYLAND CRAB cakes are also hot items, prepared by Vargo and pronounced the real thing by a discerning Maryland native who questioned whether a Michigan chef, award-winning or not, could really make a genuine Maryland-tasting cake. The key: "using actual blue crab."

Vargo draws on culinary experience as a former chef for Jacques Seafood in Southfield, Haymaker's in Lake Orion and the Hotel St. Regis and the 1940 Chop House in Detroit to prepare soups and salads of the day at Jack's, including chowders, bisques, gumbos and gaspachos.

All prepared foods are made with an eye to health, such as Jack's Neptune salad of crab and shrimp nuggets, blended with mayonnaise, which is low in cholesterol.

So, now you have an excellent fillet of sturgeon, lake cod or whitefish. What to do? Again, Vargo has a ready answer, presented on alternate Saturday afternoons free of charge when he demonstrates seafood cookery technique, followed by tasting parties.

"I do basic and very intricate recipes," things as basic as grilling seasonal fish to preparing an Americana feast. Garnishes such as the popular Inner Beauty Blue Marlin & Fish Sauce and condiments such as broiling baskets or Smoking Herbs for barbecuing — items Vargo uses in the demonstrations — are available for sale.

Jack's Seafood Market, 32224 W. Twelve Mile Road, Farmington Hills, phone 489-5750. Hours — 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. Monday-Saturday. Call market for dates of demonstrations.

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Favorite spot dedicated to the mushroom

DISHING IT OUT



The Golden Mushroom has been a culinary institution in the Detroit area for 19 years.

Nestled at Southfield's busiest intersection at 10 Mile and Southfield roads, it has survived — and indeed thrived — under the watchful eye of master chef/partner Miles Chelka and executive chef Steven Allen.

One cannot help but be impressed by the restaurant and its trappings: impressive starched table linens, West German floral-pattern china, crystal and silver.

The dining room is arranged to give customers privacy, with booths and tables adequately spaced. Service is attentive but not overbearing. Nearly half the tables are designated non-smoking.

AND THEN there is the food. As its name suggests, the restaurant is

an oasis for mushroom lovers. Several types are available and served as either an appetizer or accompaniment to an entree.

To show its dedication to the edible fungi, the restaurant greets guests with a three-foot statue of this region's granddaddy mushroom, the morel, which guards the less-formal Mushroom Cellar lounge downstairs.

One thing diners are required to do is make a lot of decisions. The process begins with deciding what type of bottled water to have, either spring or sparkling.

The fun starts with complementary hors d'oeuvres. Roasted, pickled sweet peppers with Italian parsley and spices were nicely sour, while the cucumber pieces with salmon mousse, topped with golden caviar, were smooth and tasty.

Two signature appetizers are winners: the pate of the day, on this occasion a venison tenderloin surrounded by venison mousse and pistachios with a layer of shiitake mushrooms; and a variety of wild mushrooms sauteed and served in a

brown sauce hinting of sherry. A 4-ounce serving of Beluga caviar is \$55.

OF THE SOUPS sampled, the house specialty Golden Mushroom and the lobster bisque with large chunks of lobster and velvety sherry-flavored broth were both excellent, although the favorite was the daily special curry crab with sweet crab meat and intense yet not overpowering seasoning.

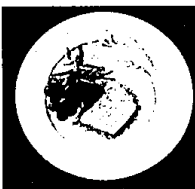
Diners next can choose between a house salad of fresh Boston lettuce, dried cherries, red onions, walnuts, blue cheese and red wine vinaigrette, or a very good Caesar salad. Perhaps the most difficult thing to do at the Golden Mushroom is select a wine to accompany the entrees. The list is mind-boggling both in breadth and price, undoubtedly one of the largest selections of any restaurant.

Prices range from a \$5.50 glass of Kendall-Jackson chardonnay to a \$600 bottle of Chateau Margaux. A handful of special seafood and game dishes were rattled off at

amazing speed by the waitress. These include sauteed soft-shell crabs, sea bass with a citrus sauce, and a slightly salty veal steak with, what else, mushrooms.

AMONG the regular main dishes is a terrific medley of venison tenderloin with sauteed morels in a cognac sauce served medium-rare as ordered, accompanied by spaetzles and fresh asparagus.

Another dish we liked was the seafood festuoni, featuring al dente pasta with plump shrimps, scallops, mussels and crabmeat.



Steven Allen, executive chef (left), and Miles Chelka, chef/partner, display dish of grilled breast of barbara duck and morel mushrooms stuffed with duck mousse. (Above) sole gras terrine.

By Ethel Simmons staff photographer

THE GOLDEN MUSHROOM ★★★★★

18100 W. 10 Mile Road at Southfield Road, Southfield, 559-4230

HOURS: Lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Monday-Friday, Dinner, 5-11 p.m. Monday-

Thursday, 5 p.m. to midnight Friday, 5:30 p.m.

to midnight Saturday; Closed Sunday.

Reservations suggested; a must for Friday-Saturday.

PRICES: Lunch \$8.75-\$19, Dinner \$17.50-\$29.50.

Visa, MasterCard, Diners Club, Discover and Carte

Bianche accepted.

RESTAURANT RATING GUIDE

★ Average
★★ Good
★★★ Very Good
★★★★ Excellent
★★★★★ Superb

