

mabuhay

February 2018

THE RISE OF SAIGON

Delicious pho, stunning
architecture and an ambitious
new generation energize
Vietnam's capital city



Camiguin's basket weaving
tradition gets a makeover

What makes Vancouver a world
leader in sustainable seafood?

The three enclaves fueling
Beijing's current art scene

CONTRIBUTORS



KHANH VU BAO | vubaokhanh.com
Going Global, page 44

Khanh Vu Bao is based in Ho Chi Minh City. "One of my favorite assignments was shooting on a fishing boat. It was raining heavily and I struggled with my light stand and a slippery floor, but that's the kind of thing I like," he reveals. He suggests that visitors to Vietnam's capital go beyond the glitzy malls to see the real city. "You need a bit of an explorer's heart," he says.



AMBER GIBSON | ambergibson.com
Sustaining our seas, page 57

Writer Amber Gibson recommends that visitors to Vancouver have breakfast at Beaucoup Bakery & Café: "Their croissants are the best and I'm obsessed with their salted chocolate rosemary cookies." Next on her bucket list is Taiwan. "I haven't been back in more than a decade," she says. "I really want to return and explore the country as an adult and journalist."



DANA FILEK-GIBSON | twitter.com/dfgvietnam
Going Global, page 44

Dana Filek-Gibson is a freelance writer who once penned a piece on chicken beauty contests in Vietnam. "Phillip [Nguyen] and I both moved here around the same time so our perspectives on the city are similar," Dana says about this month's cover feature subject. "He has a great appreciation for how much it's grown, and he's embraced the city's upbeat energy in his own life."



REMBRANDT FLORES | instagram.com/rembrandt
5 minutes with..., page 14

Rembrandt Flores is the founder of Entertainment Fusion Group, an entertainment marketing and communications agency in Los Angeles. For this issue, he interviewed Filipino-American actor Nico Santos. "My favorite part of my job is working with celebrities, musicians and athletes. I love surrounding myself with creative and successful people," Rembrandt says.



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SUSTAINING OUR SEAS



In Vancouver – a Canadian coastal city blessed with abundant natural resources and an eco-conscious demographic that wants to keep it that way – sustainable seafood reigns supreme

By Amber Gibson Photography Taylor Burk



THE FIRST THING I NOTICE WHEN I STEP INSIDE THE FISH COUNTER

in Vancouver's Riley Park neighborhood is that it doesn't smell like fish – not one whiff of the unmistakable odor that permeates the average grocery store's seafood section. This, I find out, is a point of pride for owner Mike McDermid. "Fish does not smell like fish unless it's going bad," he says with a wry, scruffy smile.

That's not to say that The Fish Counter – which doubles up as a market and to-go eatery – is entirely sterile. Sizzling fish and chips straight from the fryer and steaming hot seafood chowder tempt me from the hot counter – ideal comfort food on a tempestuous winter day. McDermid seems to know every customer who walks through the door, warmly greeting each guest with his twinkling eyes and a willingness to answer any questions they may have. The space is small but neatly organized, and chef Robert Clark – McDermid's partner – expertly breaks down an entire salmon behind the counter as we chat.



THIS SPREAD
Scenes from The Fish Counter, a market and to-go eatery owned by Mike McDermid (pictured)

If sustainable seafood matters to you – and it really should – The Fish Counter ticks all the right boxes. McDermid only purchases the freshest local seafood from fishermen and farmers that he's built personal relationships with over the years. He also ensures that the dozen or so sustainable seafood options available daily at The Fish Counter – including species like spot prawns, oysters and ling cod – are abundant, resilient and harvested in a way that does not damage the marine ecosystem.

IT'S NO SURPRISE THAT VANCOUVER IS the epicenter of a global sustainable

seafood movement. The official tourism website boasts that it has the smallest carbon footprint of any major North American city, and it's also rated second in the United States and Canada in the Green City Index, which compares cities based on their overall environmental performance. Furthermore, environmental organization Greenpeace was founded here in 1971, and the Vancouver Aquarium has been educating the public on ocean conservation since 1956.

As a relatively young city, Vancouver still has abundant natural resources and a sophisticated foodie population with disposable incomes to dine out and support sustainable sourcing. The city attracts people from diverse geographic and cultural backgrounds, but an appreciation and enjoyment of its surrounding natural environment seems to be a core value for Vancouverites. On top of this, a robust First Nations (the predominant indigenous peoples of



THIS PAGE, FROM TOP
Jenice Yu, a fishmonger and the owner of seafood company Fresh Ideas Start Here (FISH); the interior of FISH

McDermid is also a marine biologist, conservationist and sustainable seafood expert who's on a mission to bring high-quality, affordable and sustainable seafood into Vancouver's kitchens, particularly for the health-conscious and environmentally aware young professional families in The Fish Counter's surrounding neighborhood. Previously, McDermid worked with the Vancouver Aquarium for a decade championing the Ocean Wise program – an operation founded in 2005 that has really put Vancouver on the map in terms of sustainability efforts.



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An appreciation and enjoyment of its surrounding natural environment seems to be a core value for Vancouverites

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Canada) culture is deeply interwoven into the city's spirit, and that includes a profound respect for nature and connection to the earth and sea.

"I think Vancouver and British Columbia attract people who are looking for access to nature," McDermid says. "A lot of good things are happening in the Bay Area and Seattle [in the US], but I think the resources and the wilderness are still more abundant and relatively untouched here." Indeed, it's this delicate balance of nature and city that makes Vancouver unique in its success at fostering a culture where buying sustainable is more the norm than the exception.

Other than calling the shots at The Fish Counter, which he founded in 2013,

INSPIRED BY THE MONTEREY BAY Aquarium's Seafood Watch Program, Ocean Wise comprises a number of initiatives, including shoreline clean-up, marine mammal rescue, research and education. However, it's the Ocean Wise seafood labeling program that is the most impactful, with thousands of restaurant and hotel partners across Canada.

Ocean Wise evaluates each species based upon three important factors – the specific variety of seafood, harvest method and location of harvest. It's a complex analysis, but ultimately Ocean Wise will either recommend or not

recommend eating a certain type of fish. Restaurants serving the former get an Ocean Wise stamp next to the respective dish on their menu, and the same goes for seafood at the grocery store. For some consumers, the straightforward red light/green light recommendation is enough. But for those with a deeper interest, Ocean Wise summarizes and explains its findings in detail via the Ocean Wise app.

But while Ocean Wise has been a hit in Vancouver's restaurant circles, it's proven slightly more challenging to get supermarkets, grocery stores and other stockists to buy in. "Ocean Wise was resonating really well with chefs and consumers, but retailers were still objecting, claiming it was too expensive, hard to find the right product and that consumers didn't care," McDermid says. "Our goal with [starting] The Fish Counter was to change the idea of what a seafood market is and to do things completely sustainably and be a viable business."

For McDermid, that means purchasing seasonal seafood with the Ocean Wise logo directly from small local fishermen that he knows are operating in an environmentally responsible manner. And once the seafood makes it through The Fish Counter's doors, it's a race to your plate. The fish is cut fresh in the morning and everything is sold to customers on the same day. Any leftovers get cooked in bouillabaisse or ground up to make halibut dumplings or fish and shrimp cakes the very next day.

"Seafood is the most complicated of all of our food systems and the least tangible for the average person," McDermid explains when asked about the challenges the movement faces. "Many

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Many people have grown a carrot, but most have not gone out commercial fishing. It is important for people to understand how their seafood was farmed in order to make better choices

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people have grown a carrot, but most have not gone out commercial fishing. Fisheries are a relative unknown and most people couldn't tell you how the fish made it to their plate. It is important for people to understand how their seafood was caught or farmed and what this means to the environment in order for them to make better choices."

THIS PAGE
A colorful bowl of poké being prepared at Fresh Ideas Start Here (FISH)

ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, UNLIKE SOME places where environmentalism is a highly politicized issue, in Vancouver everyone seems to want the same thing. "We're all committed to healthy oceans," says powerhouse fishmonger Jenice Yu, who's back at work merely a week after giving





**FRESH FROM
THE SEA**

**Ocean Wise-accredited
restaurants in Vancouver,
along with dishes to sample**



Miku Restaurant
Sample the flame-seared aburi salmon sushi made with wild sockeye salmon. There's also the Deluxe Miku Waterfront Platter that boasts an assortment of Ocean Wise seafood. mikurestaurant.com

Globe@YVR
Try the delicious bouillabaisse that's made with salmon, ling cod, clams, potatoes, fennel and peppers in a saffron sambuca broth. fairmont.com/vancouver-airport-richmond/dining/globeyvr

Nightingale
This casual spot serves modern and seasonal Canadian fare in a lively space. For an Ocean Wise option, go for the grilled hamachi collar garnished with watermelon radish, lemon and sea salt. hawknightingale.com

Market by Jean-Georges
This joint uses some of the freshest seasonal ingredients from all across Canada. Our recommendation? The Haida Gwaii sablefish that's served with a zingy Malaysian chili sauce. marketkitchen.com



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We're all committed to healthy oceans. From chefs and the government to fishermen and seafood purveyors, it's a joint effort
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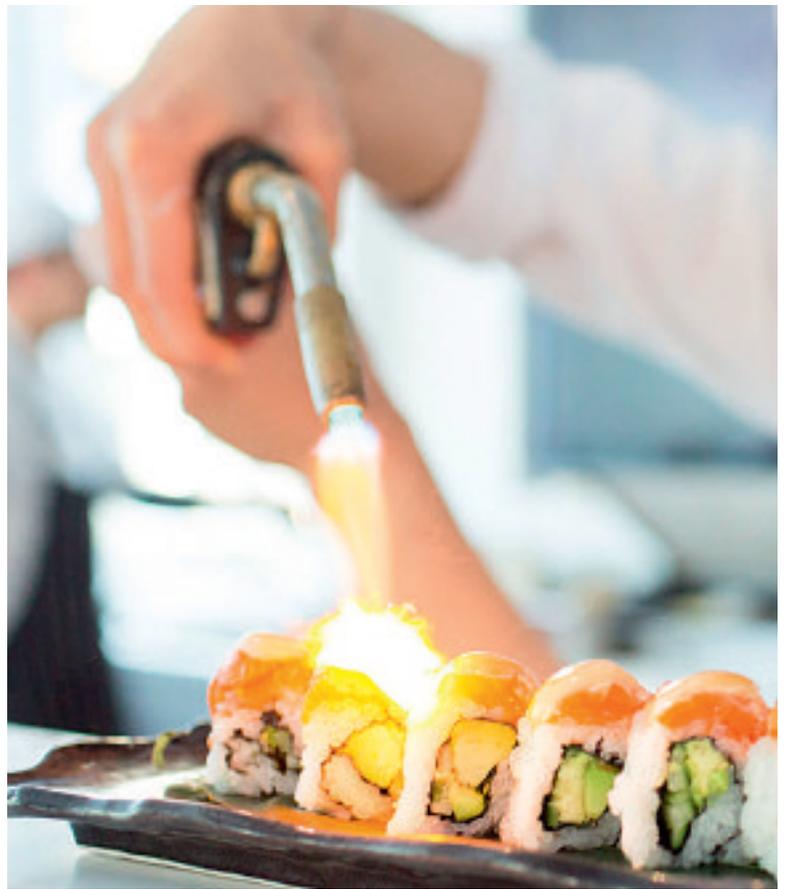
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Ned Bell, the first executive chef of Ocean Wise

birth to her baby boy. “From the government, to chefs, to fishermen and to seafood purveyors, it's a joint effort.”

Yu's company, Fresh Ideas Start Here (FISH), supplies seafood to some of Vancouver's best restaurants including Hawksworth, Bacchus, Maenam and Royal Dinette. Their packer boat travels up and down the coast collecting fish from fishermen directly from their vessels. “We always try to avoid drag fishing boats and drag fisheries as it is not sustainable, so we mainly work with boats that use the practices of long-lining, gillnetting and seining,” Yu adds.

Growing up in the fish-processing business, Yu remembers watching the best local uni and fish being sent straight to Japan as a young girl, rather than being sold to local consumers. Now she's giving Vancouverites a chance to enjoy sashimi-grade fish caught locally and sustainably. “All the smoked fish we sell is smoked by us with no preservatives and additives,” Yu tells me. “We are also the only shop in Vancouver that sells fresh sea urchin trays that aren't treated with chemicals.”

In addition to supplying seafood to purveyors in the city, Yu has a couple of retail locations of her own in Kitsilano and



Burnaby, so seafood lovers can get their take-home fix. A new poké counter offers the freshest and most affordable bowls in town, and party platters for lox and bagels, uni pasta and bouillabaisse are convenient entertaining options.

"I think Vancouver is willing to prioritize [sustainability] because we love our mountains and our oceans and understand we must protect them," Yu says. "To preserve our natural habitat, we must also preserve our ecosystem, and that means not depleting the ocean of any species and only fishing in areas that are abundant."

Both McDermid and Yu credit local programs like SeaChoice, Ocean Wise and Marine Stewardship Council for educating the public and creating sustainability standards that are easy for consumers to understand. "Because of the complex nature of fisheries and aquaculture globally, no one program would have the capacity to achieve a more sustainable future on its own," McDermid explains. "It takes different organizations working at different levels to have an appreciable impact."

Marine Stewardship Council certifies sustainable fisheries with a logo and stamp of approval, mostly working with larger scale globally traded fisheries. However, these fisheries often do not reach the stringent benchmarks for Ocean Wise. Meanwhile, SeaChoice started by working with large retailers in Canada to label seafood, but has since turned its

efforts to advocacy as a sustainable seafood watchdog, seeking improvements in labeling regulations. "Ultimately the approaches vary, but the end goal is the same," McDermid says.

NED BELL, OCEAN WISE'S FIRST

executive chef who prepares food at two dining outlets at the Vancouver Aquarium, agrees with Yu's assessment of the need to globally adopt sustainable seafood practices. "Oceans are the lungs of our planet," Bell stresses. "We have a responsibility to live as conscious consumers. No matter where you are, your experience affects or is effected by the health of the world's oceans."

Bell left the Four Seasons Vancouver last year to take up his post at Ocean Wise. Last October, he published his first cookbook – *Lure: Healthy, Sustainable Seafood Recipes from the West Coast*. His goal with this book is to push his sustainability agenda, encourage more people to cook seafood at home and try new fish, shellfish and many more of the ocean's diverse edible plants, like types of seaweed (in fact, his book contains a recipe for kelp brownies that is especially enticing).

THIS PAGE, FROM LEFT
Takayuki Omi; Rawbar
seared sushi at
Fairmont Pacific Rim



THIS PAGE
Frank Pabst, the
executive chef of
Blue Water Café

WHEN IT COMES TO EATING

sustainable seafood at Vancouver's plethora of great restaurants, Ocean Wise makes it easy with its straightforward classification system – and it doesn't have to be a sacrifice either. At Fairmont Pacific Rim's Lobby Lounge, sushi chef Takayuki Omi offers more than 20 different kinds of fish on a 100% Ocean Wise sushi menu. While this means that you won't find bluefin tuna or unagi on the menu – since there are no Ocean Wise options for either species – his black garlic kabayaki sablefish is a great substitute for unagi fans with its high fat content and rich taste.

Meanwhile, Blue Water Café in Yaletown was a founding member of the Ocean Wise program in 2005. Executive chef Frank Pabst joined "without hesitation" in the initial group of 16 restaurants, along with Toptable Group's other three concepts Araxi, CinCin and West. "I don't find it limiting at all," Pabst says of implementing Ocean Wise standards at the restaurant. "We always check with our friends at the Vancouver Aquarium and Ocean Wise before introducing new seafood to our menu, and the Ocean Wise team is invaluable to chefs as they carry out research on behalf of the restaurant community to help us make ocean-savvy choices."

Unlike the saying, there *aren't* plenty more fish in the sea – not unless we take care of the ones we have now. In Vancouver, sustainable seafood purveyors have managed to find a way to blend consumer demand and caring for the environment into a delicious recipe for success. "I want this to be the best quality fish you've ever had in your life," McDermid says of his offerings at The Fish Counter. "At the end of the day, quality trumps sustainability, and it's the only way to get people to buy in completely."



This month's eats

Each February at Blue Water Café, executive chef Frank Pabst serves an "Unsung Heroes" menu to spotlight delicious, sustainable and under-utilized species of fish. Standout dishes to try are the carp roe taramosalata on a squid ink tapioca cracker; herring with red beets, green apple, pistachio and buttermilk ranch dressing; jellyfish salad with cabbage, carrots, peanuts and nuoc cham dressing; gooseneck barnacles with Hollandaise sauce; giant red sea cucumber with pig's trotter and black Himalayan rice; and whelk with spinach and anise shallot butter. bluewatercafe.net

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