



# SAN DIEGO SEAFOOD

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then & now

recipes and stories from a history of fishing

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Contents

Acknowledgements & sponsors . . . . .	X
Project team . . . . .	X
Forward . . . . .	X
Dedication . . . . .	X
Preface . . . . .	X
Choosing and making the most of your local seafood . . . . .	X
The Kumeyaay: Original Stewards of Our Lands and Sea . . . . .	X
Spanish Colonial Cuisine in Alta California . . . . .	X
Chinese Fishing Community in San Diego . . . . .	X
Japanese Fishing Community in San Diego . . . . .	X
Portuguese Fishing Community in San Diego . . . . .	X
Italian Fishing Community in San Diego . . . . .	X
Mexican Fishing Community: Cannery Lives Along the Waterfront . . . . .	X
San Diego's Multicultural Seafood Community . . . . .	X
Contributors . . . . .	X
Index . . . . .	X

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## San Diego Seafood: Then and Now

**Toni G. Atkins**

**California State Senate President pro Tempore Emeritus**

I've been proud to call San Diego my home since 1985. I deeply appreciate the unique and charming neighborhoods, vibrant businesses, and lush, lively parks that make up our region's core, as well as the spectacular beaches and bustling working waterfronts that connect us with the ocean. At the heart of San Diego is its rich maritime heritage including a culture deeply rooted in fishing.

Despite our fishing history and proximity to the ocean, access to our fresh, sustainable local catch hasn't been as easy as it should be. Thanks to the innovation and determination of our community, that has been changing. The fishers have led marketing ventures to get their catch directly to seafood lovers, including launching and running dockside fishers' markets. Our chefs, whether professional or amateur, have been making great strides to get local seafood onto San Diego's menus and dinner tables. Strong local seafood systems, with the jobs, economic boosts, and ocean stewardship that go hand in hand with them, are important to California. It has been my pleasure to assist with these efforts in 2015 when I worked with the San Diego community to develop and introduce the Pacific to Plate Bill. The bill streamlined the launch and operation of fishers markets for all of California – and San Diego's own Tuna Harbor Dockside Market served as a model.

There aren't many cities in the country where seafood lovers and chefs can get to know fishers and their families as they buy their fish, but San Diego is one of them! Conversations about our uniquely varied types of catch, sustainable fishing practices, and favorite preparation and cooking methods have all gone a long way toward strengthening San Diego's seafood system.

That is why I am excited about this cookbook. It connects the diverse bounty of seafood in our waters – from tuna and rockfish to sea urchin and rock crab – and the rich ethnic and cultural tapestry that is our fishing (and seafood) community's past and present. This cookbook will serve as a treasured reminder that we are all part of San Diego's seafood heritage – whether you are a professional or at-home chef, you will discover a bit about San Diego's fishing history as well as fun seafood facts, preparation and storage tips, and recipes that are as diverse as San Diego itself – from fish tacos to vichyssoise, chili to chimichurri, and skewers to sinigang!

*Enjoy!*

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*Dedicated to the commercial fishing communities of San Diego's working waterfront—past, present, and future.*

Dedication

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The idea for this cookbook came about during the COVID-19 pandemic when fishing boats were stranded dockside, laden with catch that had nowhere to go, because restaurants, seafood distributors, and overseas markets were shut down. At the same time, food insecurity skyrocketed because of the food shortages triggered by similar supply chain shutdowns worldwide. If you were a fisherman with the means to catch your own food, or a seafood eater with a direct connection to a fisherman (perhaps via the open-air fishermen's market at Tuna Harbor), then you may have fared well. But most people didn't have those relationships, nor prior knowledge of how to establish them. Many also lacked access to transportation that could get them to the Tuna Harbor waterfront for the Saturday morning markets.

In response to the growing crisis, a few resourceful San Diego fishermen and chefs got together, secured funding, and launched Fish to Families,—a charitable meal program that supported the purchase of fish from San Diego's fishermen, the preparation by chefs into healthy, delicious meals, and the distribution of the meals to people in need with the help of charitable meal organizations. Chefs and kitchen staff were intrigued, excited, and occasionally baffled at how to handle whole fish, especially the unfamiliar species and anatomies they were seeing. Beyond tuna and yellowtail, the culinary teams gathered around and learned together how to break down enormous discus-shaped opah, strangely squashed angel shark, and spiny rockfish. Their enthusiasm and wonder inspired us to help spread this curiosity and excitement and demystify the preparation of our remarkable variety of local catches for professional and at-home chefs alike.

Preface



Photo: Kira Kawano

Tuna Harbor open-air fishermen's market.

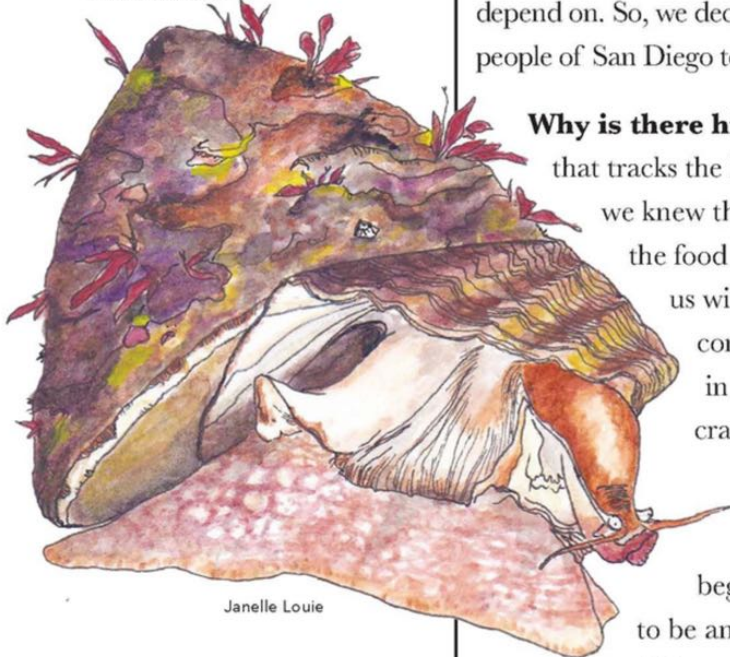


Photo: Fish to Families

Fish to Families fare ready for distribution.

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More than ever, it was clear that a strong local food system—with short paths from ocean to plate—is needed to ensure people stay fed and associated jobs stay supported. In the wake of the pandemic, we see that long supply chains and a lack of connectivity to local resources leave us vulnerable, not only to global health crises but to trade tariffs, and natural or human-caused disasters. Under “normal” conditions, a strong local seafood system also allows us to better appreciate the bounty available here by enabling closer relationships with both our fishing community and the ecosystem they depend on. So, we decided to coordinate a cookbook made by and for the people of San Diego to better connect our seafood and our people.

*Turban Snail*

Janelle Louie

**Why is there history in my cookbook?** Creating a cookbook that tracks the history of fishing in the region was used because we knew that connections with food are more than knowing the food is available and a book of recipes. Food connects us with our cultures, heritages and traditions, and contributes to our sense of place (think Dungeness crab in San Francisco, American lobster in Maine, and crawfish in Louisiana).

Fishing, and ocean harvest more generally, have been an integral part of the history of this region, beginning thousands of years before San Diego came to be and continuing today. Influxes and settlements of different people from varying origins brought with them their cultures, traditions and experiences; fishing methods and innovations; preferred catch and cuisines; and seafood processing and preservation techniques. The outcomes of how this multicultural community has intersected and responded to each other and the environmental, socio-economic and political circumstances of the region—including the dynamics of privilege and power, assimilation and segregation, scarcity and resourcefulness—form the fishing heritage of (what is now) the San Diego region, and San Diego’s current fishing and seafood identity is a product of that.

**Charting our course.** This cookbook presents a history of fishing in the San Diego region through historical passages and, of course, recipes. The

historical accounts are based on published works, local knowledge and testimonies, and traditional knowledge and inference when documentation and personal accounts were lacking. The recipes are original contributions from some of San Diego's professional and at-home chefs and reflect dishes that are traditional and/or inspired by the group that is the focus of the chapter. The story of ocean harvest and fishing history starts with the Kumeyaay, followed by the area's colonial origins (Spanish). Influences of European (Italian and Portuguese) and Asian immigrants (Chinese and Japanese), Mexicans, and finally a broadly multicultural San Diego are covered in rough chronological order, acknowledging that history is messy—discrete groups of people living within tidy timelines don't reflect the complexity of reality. San Diego and the neighborhoods and people within have long been multicultural, especially in communities of color. People affiliated with the groups in this book, and many other groups not mentioned, overlapped and interacted as did their roles in the fishing industry. All of their stories—told and untold—overlap to form the history of fishing in this region.

**This cookbook has two goals.** First, to connect people with San Diego's fishing and seafood history, with all its struggles and successes, because as fishers, chefs, and/or consumers, we are all part of San Diego's fishing story. Second, demystify locally-landed seafood through its presentation in recipes that illustrate the variety and versatility of San Diego's sustainable ocean bounty. From traditional dishes to comfort foods, new spins on old favorites and multi-cultural influences, the recipes are as diverse as the kinds of seafood, and they do justice to one another. With this culinary chronicle in hand, may you be inspired to try new things, appreciate the diversity of land and sea, and experience a deepened awareness and gratitude for the people and the marine ecosystems that underpin our good fortune to eat seafood in San Diego today.



Claudia Makeyev

<sup>1</sup> Fishing for Food Security. 03 Sept 2020. California Sea Grant Newsletter. <https://cascagrants.ucsd.edu/news/fishing-for-food-security>

<sup>2</sup> Fish to Families. 05 October 2020. Surfgrass Productions. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caKOZnUlz\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caKOZnUlz_k)

<sup>3</sup> Connection through Food, Fish and Culture. K. Bui-CMBC. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1nb4b226>

<sup>4</sup> Shelter in Place and Eat Some Fish. 23 March 2020. California Sea Grant Newsletter. <https://cascagrants.ucsd.edu/news/shelter-in-place-and-eat-some-fish>

<sup>5</sup> No Claws for Concern: Buy California Spiny Lobster. 25 Sept 2020. California Sea Grant Newsletter. <https://cascagrants.ucsd.edu/news/no-claws-for-concern-buy-california-spiny-lobster>

<sup>6</sup> The Anthropology of Food and Eating. 2002. Mintz, S., C. Du Bois. Annual Review of Anthropology 31:99-119. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.anthro.32.032702.131011>

# EXCERPTED DRAFT: The Kumeyaay

ORIGINAL STEWARDS OF OUR LANDS & SEA

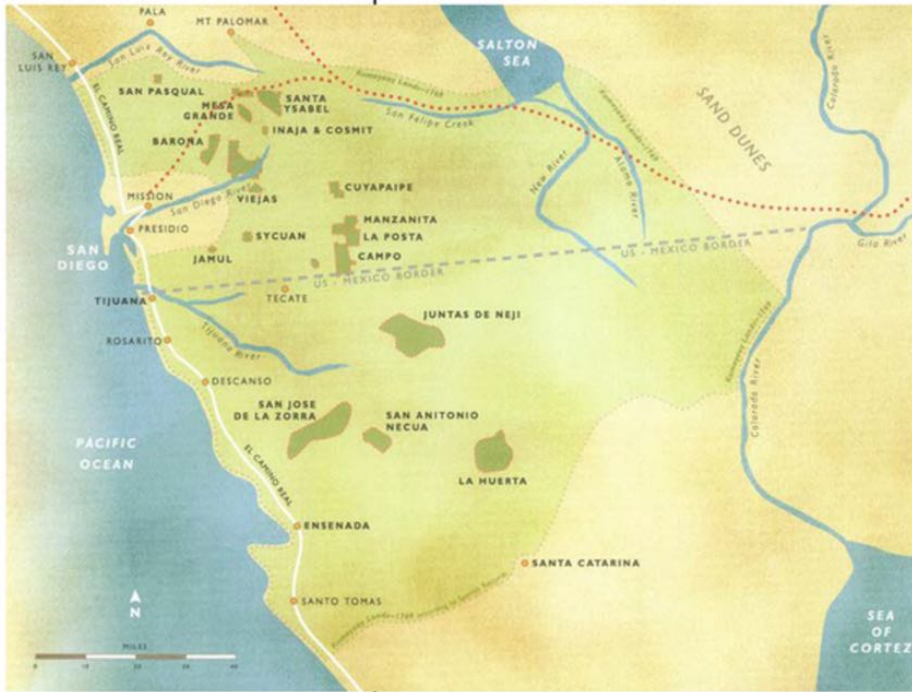


Amadeo Bachar

*California Sheephead*

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Depending on the fish they sought, the Kumeyaay used spears, lines and hooks, dip nets, fish traps and large seines that took several men to manage. According to Kumeyaay elders, some fish they had formerly caught in the bay were between forty and 200 pounds. They caught grunion by hand on the beaches, and used nets and weirs for other small fish.



The coastal homeland of the Kumeyaay people spans the US-Mexico border, including modern day North San Diego County south to the Ensenada region of Baja California Norte.

the 1930s, according to Kumeyaay whose families walked from mountain reservations to dig for shellfish in the mudflats and fish in the bay, while living around the edge, among the reeds.

After contact with the Spanish colonizers in 1769, the lifestyle of the Kumeyaay drastically and quickly changed. Over the course of several hundred years, Kumeyaay were forcefully alienated from their traditional ocean lifestyle.

*Excerpted From "Kumeyaay and the Ocean" by Louis Guassac, and amended by Heather Pinchelli Daly, PhD, Kumeyaay Historian, Iipay Nation of Santa Ysabel.*

A large permanent Kumeyaay community remained on Point Loma, in the marshland edges, until about 1910. The Kumeyaay used the food of the mudflats and reed edge of this portion of San Diego Bay, until it was filled in after 1910 for future development of the Naval Training Center (constructed in 1921). The Kumeyaay used the mudflats, salt marsh, and wet meadow of Mission Bay through



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## Mat kulaahuuy Hiiwaa (La Jolla Fish)

Chefs Heather Ponchetti Daly,  
Eva Trujillo, &  
Alexandria Hunter

### Chef Notes:

If fresh giant kelp (*Macrocystis pyrifera*) is available to you, clean the large blades with saltwater, then wrap around fish for steaming, in place of corn husks. Sumac is a bold red spice with a citrusy acidity, derived from the ground dried berries of various species of sumac. Lemonadeberry (*Rhus integrifolia*), an important cultural resource for Kumeyaay traditional food systems, is a member of the sumac family. While drying and grinding your own lemonade berries is the most authentic option, sumac is also a commercially cultivated spice which you can use to pay homage to traditional indigenous foodways.

Prep time: 30 minutes

Cooking time: 1 hour

Serves: 4-5

1 (4-5 pound) whole fish (consider California sheephead, California halibut, or any rockfish species)

1 cup dill, chopped

1 cup epazote, chopped, or substitute Mexican oregano

1 cup sage leaves, chopped

3 green onions, chopped

2 cups watercress, chopped

8 dried corn husks, or blades of fresh giant kelp (see Chef Notes)

Ground sumac, to taste (see Chef Notes)

Salt & pepper, to taste

1. Set dried corn husks in a bowl of water to soak. Meanwhile, clean, scale, and dry whole fish. Score sides and generously sprinkle the outside and the cavities of the fish with salt, pepper and ground sumac.
2. Lay 4 soaked corn husks on a baking sheet, and place the fish on top.
3. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Combine chopped dill, epazote, sage, green onions and watercress in a mixing bowl, then stuff the cavities of the fish with the combined herbs and greens.
4. Layer remaining soaked corn husks over the fish to steam. Bake at 350°F for one hour, and check for doneness. Meat should easily fall off bones.
5. Once fully cooked, remove corn husks, plate on a serving platter, and present the fish family-style. Serve with Nopales Bean Salad, recipe on page \_\_\_\_.

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EXCERPTED DRAFT:  
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Portuguese  
Fishing Community

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IN SAN DIEGO



*Albacore Tuna*

Armando Bachar

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Captain Manuel G. Rosa (2nd from left upper deck c. 1930s) was one of the pioneers of the tuna fleet in San Diego.

brings out the delicious, fresh tuna flavor. Extra pieces were always made so that there were plenty of leftovers. The remaining pieces were frozen and ready to be cooked, baked, barbequed, stewed, fried, however you wanted to cook the tuna. It would happen that we ate fish almost every day because my mother never wanted the fish to stay frozen too long.

A good Portuguese cook never lets good food go to waste.

*Zeca Rodrigues*



The *Belle of Portugal*, shown here during her Christening ceremony, was built in 1937 at Campbell Shipyard and was the pride of her day. The clippers, largely owned by Portuguese and Italian families, were built larger for long distance fishing with refrigeration and other innovations.

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Fishermen stack the seine net and floats. Tuna seine nets were worth \$50,000 in the 1960s, making mending a worthwhile effort.

*Tuna fishing was always a part of our lives, and thanks to my father's dedication, I have a comfortable life today. He knew how to save and our education was really important to him, even though he had maybe only a third-grade education, as my uncles did. But they were smart men.*

*Linette DaRosa*

*We used to have a good time going to the tuna boats on the Embarcadero and climbing on the nets. As they left port, we all drove down to Shelter Island to honk our horns and wait for the boat to give one more toot before leaving the bay. It was a lot more fun watching them come back in, though!*

*Evelyn Barandiaran*

Purse seiners *Atlantis*, *South Seas*, and *Bold Adventures*, tied up at the Embarcadero. c. 1999.



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## Portuguese Tuna Salad

*Chef Tommy Gomes*

*We had a lot of tuna sandwiches growing up. I went to Catholic school, and on Fridays, when we didn't eat meat, you could smell that tuna fish, inside paper bags with oil spots, all through the classroom.*

*Linette DaRosa*

Prep time: 15 minutes

Serves: 2-4

Freshly steamed 6-8 oz tuna loin (any tuna, or your choice of firm fish), or Portuguese-style Fresh Canned Tuna (see recipe)

¼ cup red wine vinegar (more to taste)

¼ cup diced red onion

1 tablespoon diced yellow bell pepper

1 tablespoon capers

½ teaspoon onion powder

½ teaspoon garlic powder

Salt & pepper, to taste

Olive oil, to taste

1. In a bowl mix together tuna, vinegar, onion, bell pepper, capers and garlic and onion powders.
2. Season with salt and pepper and additional olive oil to taste.
3. Serve with crackers or vegetables, or use for sandwich filling.
4. Store salad in an airtight container in the refrigerator for up to a week.

*This tuna salad was Portuguese or Italian depending on whose boat you were on.*

*The cook always kept a bowl of tuna salad prepared for hungry fishermen. They would grab a roll, hollow out the soft part to save for croutons, stuff the crust with tuna, wrap it in wax paper and put it in their pockets for when they got hungry while working on deck.*

*Tommy Gomes*

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THEN AND NOW: SAN DIEGO'S FISHING COMMUNITY



*Opah*



## San Diego's Multicultural Identity

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San Diego's rich cultural diversity and vibrant multiculturalism are integral to its identity and shape the region's collective culture, traditions, and cuisines. The celebration of cultures past and present is evident in the various ethnic and cultural enclaves across the region, such as Logan Heights (also referred to as Barrio Logan by its residents), National City, Little Italy, Little Portugal, Little Saigon, Chinatown, and Little Baghdad. Many of San Diego's neighborhoods and business districts also celebrate diversity and multiculturalism, including City Heights, Convoy District (pan-Asian), and Hillcrest (LGBTQ+). It's important to recognize that many of the early multicultural communities, such as Barrio Logan and National City in the South Bay and Southeast of San Diego, were formed as a result of racial segregation, and most of the city's nonwhite populations would remain in these communities

throughout the twentieth century. It was these communities that supplied the bulk of San Diego's fishing and canning labor force.

So far, this book has presented a history of fishing in San Diego through the lens of seven relatively well-documented ethnic and cultural groups. But these represent a fraction of the true diversity of this region and a fraction, even, of the diversity involved in fishing. For example, the stories and identities of Filipino,

Vietnamese, Korean, Pacific Islander, and Black communities, despite existing in this region for centuries with roles in fishing and seafood industries, are not well documented in surviving historical publications or personal accounts. Multicultural identities also have developed here, as different cultures encountered one another, learned from each other, and ultimately shared or blended traditions



Fred Greaves

Fresh Vermillion rockfish being sold at one of San Diego's fishermen's markets. Reflective of the biodiversity in the Southern California Bight, there are 56 species of rockfishes commonly found in the waters off of Southern California with vermillion rockfish, starry rockfish, copper rockfish, and bocaccio being among the most common in San Diego nearshore regions.

*Illustration on overleaf.*

**Pacific Opah's unique anatomy makes for five different cuts with very distinct properties—the round muscle under the pectoral fin is often compared to red meat for its texture and flavor, while the loin from the belly is creamy and rich.**

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Local fishing families, like Johnny and Nicole Clawson pictured here, collaboratively run the fishermen's markets in San Diego. These fishermen's markets, where catch is sold directly to the public, have benefits far beyond increasing access to local seafood. The markets are a gathering place where fishing families and seafood lovers build relationships over tables of iced fresh catch and shared stories of fishing, food and family. While called a "market", these are open-air dockside experiences that are part of a thriving, resilient, and transparent food system.

and families. Like the legacy of tuna, these multiethnic and multicultural exchanges have shaped the San Diego's identity.

Today's diversity is maintained less by fishing and seafood industries, and more by the proximity to the border with Mexico, and the lasting presence of military and aerospace institutions which draw a mix of people from different parts of the country and world. The recent arrival and development of other trades, technologies, and institutions have made the region an attractive destination for people around the world seeking employment, education, and entrepreneurial ventures. San Diego's racial and ethnic diversity may be rivaled only by the rich diversity of nearby ocean life leading to harmonious opportunities for our fisheries to satisfy a wide variety of tastes.

## **There's something for everyone**

San Diego sits next to one of the most productive and diverse regions of ocean in the world, the Southern California Bight. Spanning from Point Conception to the U.S.-Mexico Border, the Bight's unique combination of physical, biological, and geographic features, including the confluence of warm and cold ocean currents and varied habitats such as submarine canyons, kelp forests, rocky reefs, sandy shores, and estuaries, contributes to its exceptional biodiversity and productivity.

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## Khao Soi

*Chef Kelli Major*

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Serves: 3–4

1 pound rockfish or sheephead (or substitute with other local white-fleshed species)

2 shallots, peeled and thinly sliced

2 limes, halved and juiced (divided)

2 teaspoon turbinado sugar (divided)

2 ounces fresh ginger, peeled and minced

4–5 garlic cloves, peeled and minced

3–4 tablespoons red curry paste

11 ounces coconut milk

3 cups broth (chicken, vegetable, or fish broth)

2 tablespoons tamari or soy sauce

8–12 ounces baby bok choy, trim and thinly sliced

12 ounces rice noodles

1 Thai chili, thinly sliced

4 tablespoons crispy onions or shallots

4 tablespoons olive oil\*

Salt and pepper, to taste

### Chef Notes:

Taste your noodles at 13 minutes, as they can quickly become overcooked.

1. Add shallot, just half the lime juice, turbinado sugar, and a pinch of salt to a small bowl and toss to combine. Set aside to pickle until plating.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil for the rice noodles.
3. Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add ginger, garlic, and red curry paste, and cook until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes. Add coconut milk, tamari or soy sauce, 3 cups desired broth, 1 teaspoon salt, and a pinch of pepper to the saucepan. Bring broth to a simmer.
4. Add baby bok choy, and reduce heat to low. Add seafood and continue to simmer for another 3-4 minutes.

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5. Once the water in the large pot is boiling, add rice noodles and cook until tender, 13 to 15 minutes. Drain noodles and rinse under cool water to stop the cooking process, and return noodles to the pot.
6. Before serving, add remaining lime juice to the broth. Taste, and add salt as necessary. Divide broth between bowls and add rice noodles, pickled shallot, Thai chile and crispy onions or shallots.

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## Herby Tuna Melt

*Chef Stephanie Parker*

*Tuna salad sandwiches are an awesome way to help reduce waste in your kitchen, if you have leftovers or scraps from a tuna steak grill day. Making your tuna salad base is super easy, very forgiving, and lets you get creative. Sometimes I'll add jalapenos, toasted pepitas or different citrus to spice it up.*

Prep time: 10 minutes

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Serves: 8

1½ pounds albacore tuna (or any other tuna)

2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

½ cup mayonnaise

½ cup full fat Greek yogurt

2 tablespoons Dijon mustard

½ cup cilantro, chopped

½ cup dill, chopped

1 cup celery, chopped

½ cup red onion, chopped

2 lemons, juiced

2 cloves garlic, minced

½ teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon black pepper

16 slices of cheddar cheese

16 slices of sourdough bread

2 tablespoons room temperature butter

1. Brush albacore with extra virgin olive oil and season with salt and pepper.
2. On medium heat, sear tuna on each side for 5-6 minutes, cooking the fish to "medium". Remove from heat, set aside and let cool.
3. In a large mixing bowl, mix together mayonnaise, Greek yogurt, Dijon mustard, cilantro, dill, celery, red onion, lemon juice, garlic and salt and pepper.
4. Once tuna has cooled, shred the fish with two forks. Combine with other ingredients. Mix thoroughly to make tuna salad.
5. Spread butter on the outside of each bread slice.

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6. Add a slice of cheddar cheese to each piece of bread.
7. Spoon approximately 5 ounces of your tuna salad mixture onto one of the slices of bread with cheese. Place the other slice of bread and cheese on top.
8. Grill on a flat top grill (or in a pan) on medium heat for approximately 4 minutes on each side.

#### **Chef Notes:**

To give the melt an enjoyable tanginess, consider cutting the mayo with Greek yogurt. A sharp and melty cheese is also recommended.

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## Halibut A La Meuniere

*Chef Travis Swikard*

Prep time: 15 minutes

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Serves: 4

4 (8-ounce) portions of halibut (preferably thinner cuts)

6 ounces unsalted butter

½ cup all-purpose flour

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 pinch fleur de sel

Sauce Amandine:

¼ cup parsley, chopped

½ cup toasted sliced almonds

¼ cup golden raisins

¼ cup capers, rinsed

1 lemon, juiced

Sides:

1 pound butterball potatoes

1 pound sunchokes

1 clove garlic

1 sprig thyme

⅓ cup finishing oil

To prepare the fish & sauce:

1. In a large, flat pan (preferably cast iron or non-stick), preheat on medium-high heat.
2. Season the fish with salt + pepper. Dip one side of the fish in the flour.
3. Pour the oil in the pan. Place the fish flour-side down and cook for 3 minutes until it begins to brown. Add butter and continue to cook for another minute, basting the foaming butter over the fish.
4. Flip the fish and finish cooking on the other side.

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5. Remove the fish from the pan and place on a plate.
6. In the same pan, allow the butter to brown and add the remaining sauce and amandine ingredients.
7. Pour the sauce over the fish and season with a pinch of fleur de sel.

To prepare the fork-crushed potatoes and sunchokes:

1. Cover the sunchokes and potatoes in water and season with salt.
2. Bring to a boil and reduce to a simmer.
3. Add garlic and thyme and cook until tender.
4. Remove the thyme and strain the water.
5. Place back into the pot and crush the potatoes and sunchokes lightly with the back of a fork.
6. Season with salt, pepper. Finish with olive oil. Serve hot with the fish.