



UGLY FISH

BY CINDA CHAVICH

Whether it's sturgeon, geoduck clams or massive Humboldt squid, chefs are discovering odd and even ugly fish can be extremely tasty. "Our objective is to utilize lesser-known ingredients while introducing guests to new experiences and flavours," says Frank Pabst, executive chef of Vancouver's Blue Water Café, who celebrates unique, sustainable seafood at his annual Unsung Heroes dinner, which features dishes such as stir-fried jellyfish and poached periwinkles. While many popular species are unsustainable choices, many of these unusual fish remain plentiful in the wild, though still rare on menus. Herring and mackerel, for example, are often still sold for bait, while sturgeon, though endangered in the wild, is now being sustainably farmed for caviar and meat. "Sturgeon have many uses — the liver is like foie, the skin is like pork, and though there are no bones, there's marrow," says chef Jefferson Alvarez who uses the certified-organic white sturgeon meat produced by Northern Divine at its land-based farm in B.C. on his \$150, 10-course tasting menu at Vancouver's Secret Location. He cures the meat "like candied salmon," boils, dries and then fries the skin "like chicharron," sears the liver and adds the gelatinous marrow to soup. Other chefs are discovering new ways to serve Pacific squid. At Wolf in the Fog, chef Nick Nutting serves a one-inch thick piece of local Humboldt squid, charred for 45 seconds in smoking grapeseed oil, then thinly sliced and offered alongside a Vietnamese-style slaw of carrot, cucumber and daikon radish. "I want to showcase the awesome seafood that's found in Tofino and elevate it," says Nutting.

ON THE MENU

- WOLF IN THE FOG, Tofino, B.C.:** Charred Humboldt squid is served with grapefruit, sprouts, cilantro and basil (\$14).
- NICLI'S NEXT DOOR, Vancouver:** Crostino is served with salsa verde and white anchovy (\$8).
- EAST THIRTY-SIX, Toronto:** Humboldt squid is presented with togarashi mayo, cilantro, yuzu salt and cucumber (\$10).
- FARMER'S APPRENTICE RESTAURANT, Vancouver:** Mackerel is served with beetroot, blood orange, samphire and pine nuts (\$15).
- LA PENTOLA, Vancouver:** Grilled Humboldt squid is paired with parsley purée and scarlet runner beans (\$17).



DIG DEEP

Geoduck (meaning "dig deep" in the Native American Nisqually language) is popular as sashimi in Japan and in Chinese hot pots. These unusual clams, with their large, protruding siphons, are harvested on Canada's West Coast by divers who use pressurized water to dislodge them from the sandy ocean floor. Now they are being seeded in geoduck farms, "planted" in PVC pipes in tidal flats on Vancouver Island. Pegged to be the world's largest clam, some weigh as much as 8 kg and can have necks up to a metre long.

