

Every other month, Ric Smith and Steve Downey of specialist ingredients supplier Ritter Fresh share their sourcing expertise and hand-pick an exclusive recipe to show off the best seasonal produce



Heavenly hake



RIC SMITH
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It seems quite right that the very best of foods should be set aside for special and sacred occasions which is exactly what the Spanish feel, especially when it comes to Christmas feasts. Traditionally the main festive meal is enjoyed on the 24 December before the church service, so often lighter meals are the fashion with hake regularly featuring as the centre piece. It is worth noting that the Spanish know a thing or two about hake. As a nation they consume a staggering 6kg per person per annum, which equates to a third of all Spanish fish consumption, and 50% of all of the hake eaten in Europe. It is a market to target especially if you are a commercial hake fisherman.

There are many fishing methods, all of which are used in pursuit of hake. Line caught is top and the fish are treated with kid gloves to ensure that they arrive at the market shiny, with a silver reflection and commanding a price to match. Gill netted comes second where fish are lifted from the sea individually. Bottom of the list are

Hake news: Cornish skippers are landing the fish



the trawled fish which could easily be sitting at the bottom of the net, under 20 tonnes of other hake.

These line caught fish are all from the Bay of Biscay and around Finisterre. Caught close to shore these are true treasures and all bound for Spain. Many argue that the Basque Country is the birthplace of the finest hake

recipes. Indeed hake with Asturian cider is a fine example given that the Basques also lay claim to the invention of cider.

Sadly in the UK we will never see these Southern fish landed from Spanish and Portuguese ports. We land hake from the northern stocks which are located off the Atlantic coast in France, Ireland and the UK.

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These are not line caught, and indeed many are trawled, so not really what a discerning chef is demanding.

There are however, a few Cornish skippers keen for a bit of this Spanish action. Experience has taught them that if they gill net and handle their fish with the upmost care, there will be a few extra Euros for their catch when it arrives in Spain. Each fish is carefully gutted, washed and then rapidly cooled in iced water. Finally they are carefully boxed, covered with a film to protect their skin and then packed in ice before being auctioned at market. Most will end up in Spain, however Ritter Fresh has secured some supply and will always know when one particular boat is landing to ensure that customers have access to some of the very best fish this country sees.

Below Elliot Lidstone from Bristol's Box-E shows how to deal with one of these superb Cornish hake.

HAKE, SMOKED ENGLISH QUINOA, AUBERGINE PURÉE, CHARRED SPRING ONION BUTTER CREATED BY ELLIOT LIDSTONE

Box-E, Unit 10, Cargo
Wapping Wharf, Bristol
BS1 6WP

Serves 4

- 4 150g portions of hake fillet
- 16 Spring onions
- 2 Aubergines
- 50g Crème fraîche
- 300g Smoked organic English quinoa
- 1/2 Bunch parsley chopped finely
- 1 Lemon
- English rapeseed oil for frying
- 50g Unsalted English butter

Boxing clever: Elliot Lidstone



- ▶ Boil the quinoa until cooked, season to taste and mix with chopped parsley and three or four finely sliced raw spring onions.
- ▶ Char the remaining spring onions on a griddle until they start to blacken, reserve until required
- ▶ Roast the aubergine until the outside is black and the inside is soft. Scoop out the flesh; drain to remove any liquid then blitz, season and fold in the crème fraîche.
- ▶ Cook the hake skin side down in a pan with the oil, flash through the oven. Flip, add butter to the pan, the charred spring onion, lemon juice and parsley then plate.