

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



Langoustine tales



RIC SMITH
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It's amazing how just a few years, say 30, can not only alter the balance of world power but also affect the fortunes of hitherto struggling fishermen and the options available on our restaurant menus. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 subsequent events improved the standard of living in Russia so dramatically that they became a key player in setting prices for luxury foods such as king crab. This is only one example as China, India and the UAE are all responsible for a massive surge in demand for luxury items. Whilst seafood has always been expensive in our lifetimes, the last twenty or so years have seen massive changes in the industry as demand for fresh and live has escalated prices. I recall when entire ungraded langoustine catches were collected from the boats, piled high in a van and driven rapidly from the west coast of Scotland to Inverness. Late in the afternoon they were

graded, packed loosely in boxes and sent on the overnight train to London. How things have changed. Now langoustine are packed into honeycombed boxes with their own individual compartments. This packing is carried out in refrigerated areas and the boxes are designed to hold cooling packs. Twenty years ago, before the Live Langoustine Company hit the scene, if the chef could see a few twitching langoustine that was testimony to their freshness and good enough. Those days are gone. As we have improved our handling of all shellfish we have created a global market where we can transport this wonderful food all around the world and deliver it alive. But at what cost to our own restaurants?

Seafood has seen some of the sharpest price hikes in recent years, particularly shellfish. I know of crab fishermen who now lovingly pack their catch in chilled boxes before driving all the way to Heathrow and waving them off to China. These crabs aren't even offered to the UK market because we won't pay as much as the Chinese. This is happening across the board with our shellfish, including lobsters, razor clams, clams, prawns, crabs and langoustine.

So yes, the fishermen are better off but those nations prepared to invest a larger percentage of their incomes on their food are depriving us of shellfish we used to take for granted. There are eminent London fish restaurants who have taken razor clams off menus where they

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have always been a signature dish, simply because of price increases. This is the same with langoustine and many other seafoods which were previously menu staples.

Fortunately, with langoustine there is a very efficient process whereby they can be tailed and frozen in minutes - think of a certain brand of frozen petit pois. Whatever your views on frozen produce I believe that if the process is done properly, the end result remains delicious. At Ritter Fresh we have anticipated this shortage of live produce and our company is supplying top quality frozen langoustine to an enthusiastic and rapidly growing list of customers. Below is a recipe from Jonathan Hardy from The Lighthouse Restaurant illustrating what a practical and versatile ingredient these cheaper options are.

TORCHED LANGOUSTINE, WILD CHILEAN SEA BASS, LANGOUSTINE OIL, AERATED MADRAS, TANDOORI CAULIFLOWER, CORIANDER

The Lighthouse Restaurant
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- 3 langoustines
- 200ml rapeseed oil
- 1 banana shallot
- 1 leek
- 1 large carrot
- 1/2 cauliflower
- 2 tbsp tandoori powder
- 250g butter
- 1 large onion
- 2 red chillies
- 2 garlic cloves
- 1 inch fresh ginger
- 2 tbsp brown sugar
- 2 tbsp cumin
- 1 tbsp ground coriander
- 1 tsp turmeric
- 1 tbsp Garam masala
- 2 limes
- 6 large vine toms
- 2 kaffir lime leaves

- 200ml chicken stock
- 100g mature cheddar
- Handful wild rice
- 200g Chilean bass fillet
- Radish and micro coriander

- ▶ Thoroughly defrost, de-shell and de-vein langoustine.
- ▶ Make the langoustine oil by adding langoustine shells to hot pan with oil then crush. Add a finely diced shallot, leek and carrot and sweat on a gentle heat for 5 minutes. Add 200ml rapeseed oil and simmer for 10-15. Remove from heat and leave to infuse (strain prior to serving dish.)
- ▶ Portion cauliflower into bite size pieces. Add 2 tbsp tandoori powder to 125g of butter and heat gently. Once the butter has melted add cauliflower and roast at 170C for approximately 10-15 minutes basting well with



India inspired: The Lighthouse's langoustine dish

- butter. Set aside to reheat for when ready to serve.
- ▶ For the madras sauce finely slice a large onion (with a good pinch of rock salt) and cook on a low heat for 10 minutes or until they begin to caramelise. Add 2 finely chopped red chillies, 2 minced garlic cloves, 1 inch minced ginger, 2 tbsp brown sugar and cook for a further 1-2 minutes. Add 2 tbsp cumin, 1 tbsp ground coriander, 1 tsp turmeric, 1 tbsp

- Garam masala and juice of 2 limes. Next add around 200-300g vine tomato concasse, 2 kaffir lime leaves, 200 ml homemade chicken stock and simmer for 10-15 minutes. Remove from heat and add 125g of butter and 100g grated cheddar. Blend until smooth, check seasoning and aerate in a foaming gun.
- ▶ For the garnish mandolin breakfast radish and add wild rice to hot oil in a frying pan to

- crisp up.
- ▶ Heat oil in pan and add sea bass skin side down. Cook on a moderate heat; the aim is to ensure the skin becomes golden and crisp and 90% of the cooking should be done skin side down. Flip and add a knob of butter to pan and lower heat. Baste skin with butter until fish is ready.
- ▶ Gently brush langoustine with oil and season. Blowtorch on both sides for a approximately 10 seconds (be careful not to over cook.)
- ▶ When ready to plate start with aerated madras sauce in the middle of the plate. Place bass in the middle, and garnish with torched langoustine and cauliflower. Finish plate with radish, rice and micro coriander.