

FOOD & WINE

INSPIRATION SERVED DAILY

EXPERT GUIDE

5 Unusual Fish You Didn't Know You'd Love

BY CHELSEA MORSE | MARCH 26, 2015



When chef Andrea Reusing opens The Durham, her new restaurant in the forthcoming boutique hotel of the same name in Durham, North Carolina, this spring, she'll be highlighting North Carolina seafood—which non-coastal parts of the state don't often see. "We're two hours from the coast," she says, "so we're going to do a lot of seafood that doesn't make it in off the coast normally. The distribution channels are up by I-95, so everything goes to New York. You guys get our soft-shell crabs sometimes before we get them." In preparation for opening, Reusing has been developing relationships with fishermen who'll deliver fresh seafood straight to Durham. Here, she shares five of the fish she's most excited to serve.

1. Spotted/speckled seatrout

Mostly caught hook and line, it's not actually a trout but a member of the noisy drum family and has an early diet of shrimp and other crustaceans before eventually turning on its fellow fish. It's almost like a white salmon, with sweet, firm meat and a fatty belly. Serve it raw—cured with salt, lemon and seaweed—or baked whole, stuffed with toasted bread, butter and herbs.

2. Porgy/scup

Considered overfished in the '90s, the porgy population has since rebounded, increasing by 30 times between 1997 to 2008. Lean, finely textured, mild but with a meatier taste than, say, flounder, porgies are a "fisherman's fish," easily cooked whole in a pan. Dredge the dressed fish in fine cornmeal and pan fry in bacon fat alongside whole scallions.

3. Striped/jumping mullet

In the fall on the Bogue Banks in North Carolina, beach seine nets are pulled by tractors to harvest mullet as they begin moving from saltwater creeks to the ocean to spawn. Mullet are highly prolific, allowing them to remain fairly abundant. Richest in fall and often full of roe, eat mullet like they do down east: hot, smoked and served on crackers with hot sauce.

4. Sheepshead

Also known as the convict fish because of its distinctive silver and black stripes, it's the fish that Sheepshead Bay in Brooklyn is named after, but they are most abundant on Southern shores. Several rows of teeth give it a slightly sheep-like appearance, and powerful jaws make short work of barnacles, shellfish and sea urchins. Fishermen chum the water with crushed oysters as lure. It's one of my favorite fish to eat, with a deep, nutty flavor and big, flaky texture. Sheepshead is a good choice for serving whole, baked with lots of olive oil and aromatics or roasted in a salt crust, since the bones are big and easily avoided.

5. Blowfish tails/puffer fish

They are a rare treat, since we only get them as bycatch from crab pots in summer and fall. They're like a small drumstick in shape, rich and gelatinous. Sauté with garlic and butter in a scampi or fry like the small chicken (of the sea) wings that they are.