

## Red Fish Blue Fish's local fare a tasty catch

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VICTORIA -- Two plastic blue bins are wheeled along a wooden dock. The product is as fresh as the day's salt air.

Kunal Ghose, 35, pops a lid on the first bin before casting a studied eye on the contents.

"This coho looks absolutely impeccable," he pronounces. "That's sushi grade right there."

Indeed, the salmon filets are a brilliant reddish-pink. He pops the lid on the second bin. "That's my halibut," he said. "Fantastic."

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Organic produce arrives in another shipment, as well as some herbs for chai tea, a new item on the menu at Red Fish Blue Fish.

The waterfront takeout eatery is the newest addition to Victoria's Inner Harbour. It is found on the Broughton Street Wharf, tucked behind the red-brick Malahat Building, the former Customs House that is a national historic site.

All the seafood on the menu comes from local fisheries as part of the Ocean Wise conservation program operated by the Vancouver Aquarium.

The restaurant serves cod, oysters, scallops, wild salmon and albacore tuna from local waters. Steve Johansen, the commercial fisherman who brings in much of the catch, is a partner in the restaurant. He trolls for salmon aboard the Black Heart.

On Tuesday, Mr. Ghose wore a T-shirt beneath his apron with the title of the Dr. Seuss children's reader that inspired the restaurant's whimsical name. You won't ever find the likes of Chilean sea bass or other threatened species on the menu for a reason.

"I want my children's children to be able to enjoy fish," he said.

Mr. Ghose's workplace is a kitchen built inside a freight container.

It is 20-feet long and 10-feet wide, spacious enough for a grill, a deep fryer, a dishwasher and two burners along one wall with a pop cooler and two prep tables along the other.

"You can fit about six in here," the chef said, "although there's a bit of butt-rubbing going up and down." With a ceiling height of 9-feet 6-inches, even Yao Ming could work here as a short-order cook should the basketball thing not work out for him.

The Vancouver architect Barbara Houston, a partner in the venture, handled the design, which included cutting portholes to open the interior of the steel crate to the public. The round windows have been marked thusly: 1: Order; 2: Pickup; 3: Recycle.

A garden has been planted on the roof, which is easily viewed from the ramp leading to the wharf from the street. It includes thyme, lavender and a variety of sedums, hardy perennials that require little care.

The soil acts as an insulator, keeping the container cool in summer and warm in winter.

The restaurant was founded with the idea of leaving as little an environmental footprint as possible. Waste is converted into compost, or otherwise recycled.

The container that houses the kitchen had been used to transport a Hummer. The new owners enjoy the irony of "upcycling" - transforming a disposable item into something more useful - a steel box for a gas-guzzler into an eco-friendly restaurant.

The owners had hoped to open in the spring, but negotiations with the city and the harbour commission lasted so long as to have some jokingly call the proposed restaurant Red Tape Blue Chef.

Fish and chips is to Victoria what the croissant is to Paris and the cheese-steak sandwich is to Philadelphia. A city not known for the subtlety of its political discourse can also be hotheaded in debating the best fish 'n. Some swear by Hyland's, or Fish on Fifth, both in Sidney.

Others prefer Barb's Place Floating Restaurant on Fisherman's Wharf. The neighbourhood joints - Willows Galley, Fairfield Fish and Chips, the Haultain Fish & Chips Cafe - have their diehard supporters.

The latest entry in the fish wars takes an epicure's twist on traditional British fare. The only peas on the menu are mushy edamame (green soybeans), while the chowder consists of chipotle, coconut milk and sweet corn in a white-fish confit.

The restaurant reviewer for Monday Magazine pronounced Red Fish Blue Fish "a mandatory pilgrimage spot for foodies."

Mr. Ghose began working in restaurants at age 13, when he was hired as a weekend salad chef at a Sirloiner restaurant in the Steveston neighbourhood of Richmond. He learned to cook at home, where his parents - an Indian father and an English mother of Greek, Scottish and Chilean ancestry - enjoyed a diet of mix-and-match cuisines. Their son has spent more than half his life as a chef and consultant, including several years at Go Fish on False Creek in Vancouver, which inspired this latest restaurant.

Like many restaurateurs, his business ambitions are no less limited than his culinary ones.

He envisions lunchtime deliveries to downtown offices, car-hop service to the nearby parking lot, perhaps even a second location in Victoria. He'll be discussing such matters with business manager Simon Sobolewski, the fourth partner, and April Ollen, Mr. Ghose's wife, who manages the restaurant.

For a newspaperman, the joint has one other thing to recommend it.

They do not use day-old newsprint as packaging for takeout orders. At least at one seafood joint, this morning's news is not this afternoon's fishwrap.

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