

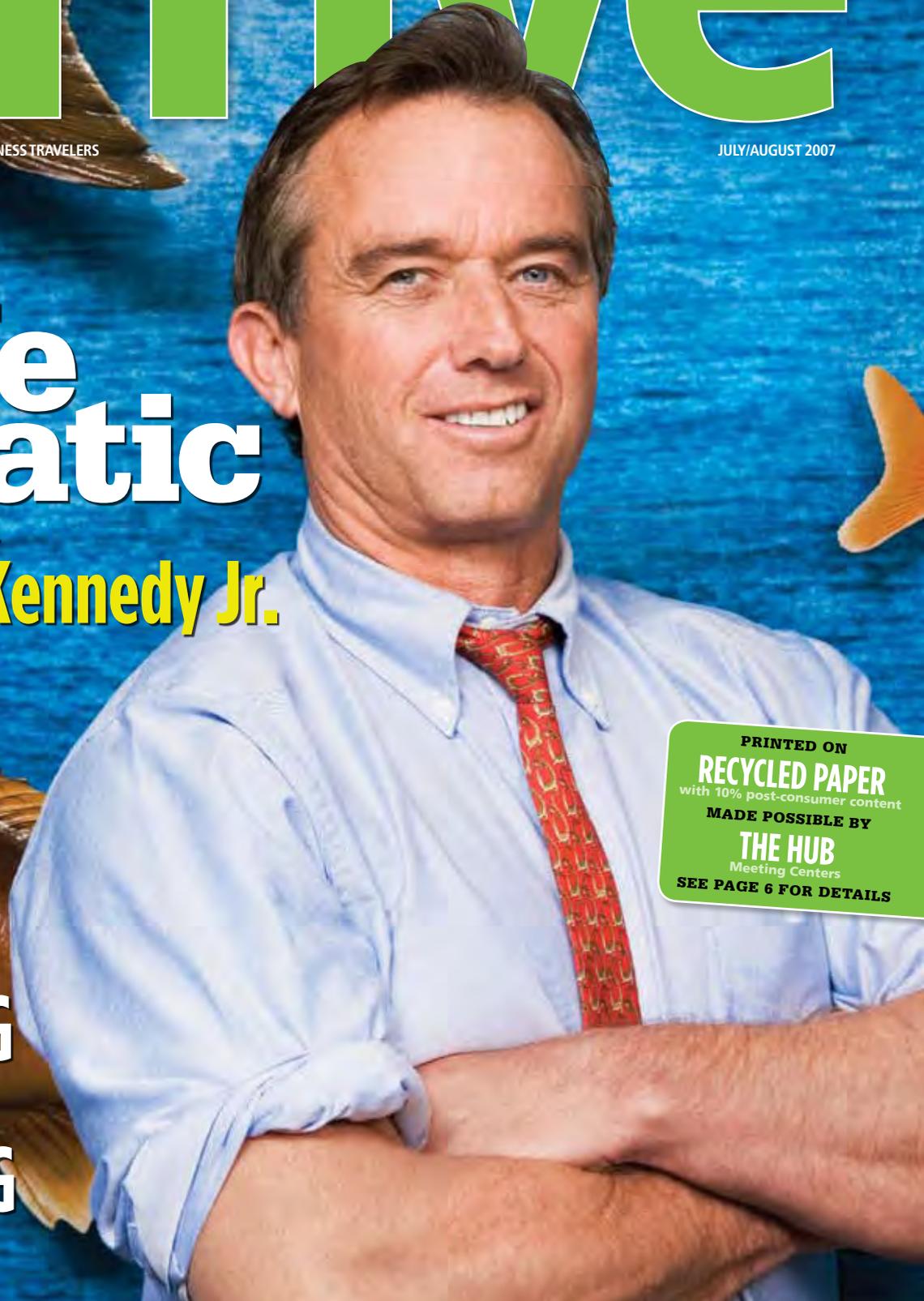
# arrive

THE MAGAZINE FOR NORTHEAST BUSINESS TRAVELERS

JULY/AUGUST 2007

## The Life Aquatic

with

**Robert F. Kennedy Jr.****SUSTAINABLE  
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# Making Waves

 **As the organics movement moves to the mainstream, a stewardship trend nets a whole new kettle of healthy fish** | BY ELIZABETH JOHNSON

**A**fter years of roasting chicken, grilling steak and broiling lamb, I recently declared a fish mandate. Sure, the benefit of eating lean was part of it. But there was an underlying reason. I had come to realize that despite my hard-core home kitchen experience, I wasn't comfortable cooking fish.

I started poking around my local fish shops to experiment, and I found that there wasn't a lot of difference among the varieties offered. Flounder. Scrod. Tuna. Salmon.

And of course, swordfish. And Chilean sea bass.

And that struck me as odd.

Even if you're not that into food, you must have heard by now that those two species are dangerously overfished.

So, I asked, why stock them? Nearly every fishmonger answered: That's what the customers want.

And that, also, struck me as odd.

I wondered if these are the same customers who buy organic, pasture-raised chicken from their local farmer. Are they the same ones who clean their homes with Mrs. Meyer's green products? Stock their fridges with organic milk and local produce?

Because if they are, they sound a lot like me. But how can the green movement apply to land and not to sea?

"It's a new idea," says Andrew Brown, chef of the White Dog Cafe in Philadelphia, which is known for spreading the word about socially conscious eating by serving delicious food. "I didn't know about this until five or six years ago, and I started at the White Dog 10 years ago."



Left: Chef Andrew Brown in the kitchen at White Dog Cafe in Philadelphia. Top: Wild-caught local striped bass, clams, mussels and chorizo in a tomato saffron broth, local yellow potatoes, sweet peas, chard and toasted bread with a spring onion aioli. Bottom: Troll-caught, spiced, roasted mahi mahi filet with citrus shrimp and avocado salsa, Caribbean long-cooked green-okra puree and chili dusted local sweet potatoes.



Top: Chef Barton Seaver recently opened Hook, a new 5,000-square-foot restaurant in Georgetown, where he offers a slew of sustainable seafood dishes, such as black fin tuna confit with roasted cauliflower, currant and black olive oil; tuna with risotto (left); and crudo—or raw fish.

Five or six years ago is about the time I started hearing about sustainable seafood, too. I mean, I already knew about dolphins getting caught in tuna nets. But I began to become more aware of overfishing and destructive practices because of a group called Seafood Choices Alliance.

The group was trying to spread the word about “environmentally responsible seafood.” Its members—chefs like Rick Moonen (then at Oceana in Manhattan, now at RM Seafood in Las Vegas) and restaurant owners like Nora Pouillon of Restaurant Nora and Asia Nora in Washington, D.C.—were speaking up for swordfish.

But since then, navigating the murky waters of seafood has become much more complicated. Should we be concerned about mercury? Is it the fishes’ habitats that should take top priority? Their numbers? Do we need to have a better understanding that fish are seasonal, too?

All of it, says Barton Seaver, a chef in Washington, D.C., known for cooking sustainably.

“The oceans continue to be seen as an endless resource,” says Seaver. “It’s hard to get people to agree that there are limitations on this. There are reciprocal actions to what we do to the ocean.”

### SAVORY SUSTAINABILITY

So how do you get people to get behind yet another environmental issue without turning them off?

“I believe in talking about the solution,” Seaver says. “You don’t start out by telling everyone we’re screwed—it doesn’t get you anywhere.”

What might get people started thinking about it is a hot new restaurant. Like Hook, which Seaver recently opened in Georgetown, with 5,000 square feet of modern, clean lines decorated with walnut furniture from Italy and splashes of white leather and chrome.

It’s a showcase for Seaver’s sustainable seafood dishes, like black fin tuna confit with roasted cauliflower, currant and black olive oil, or his Chesapeake smoked tomato bouillabaisse with orange-Pernod aioli. Or the variety of crudo—or raw fish—he offers: smoked Pacific yellowfin tuna with olive oil, chervil and grapefruit; hamachi with lemon-cucumber consommé; striped bass with yellow watermelon and mint.

Seaver says he doesn’t bog down his menu with rhetoric about sustainability; he just serves what is right and knows that people will order it.

“It allows people to try some things they may not have heard of,” he says. “And people do trust us and are coming for an experience.”

It’s better, in his opinion, that people aren’t offered a “better” substitute for the fish they’re used to eating. Then they’ll just try to order their old favorite again. Instead, if they try something new, they’ve

For more information go to:

Seafood Choices Alliance  
[seafoodchoices.com](http://seafoodchoices.com)

Monterey Bay Aquarium  
 Seafood Watch Program  
[mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp](http://mbayaq.org/cr/seafoodwatch.asp)

Marine Stewardship Council  
[msc.org](http://msc.org)

expanded their horizons and spread the burden of overfishing over a larger net. Next thing you know, you might start seeing a greater variety at the fish shop.

#### STEWARDSHIP FOR ALL SEASONS

Restaurants like Hook introduce diners to breeds of fish, but it's the fish shops that keep them popular. So when a big player takes a stand, customers get educated. Whole Foods Market, for example, did not sell Chilean sea bass in any of its stores for seven years, says David Pilat, the national seafood coordinator. The company reintroduced it recently after finding a small fishery in the South Georgian Islands near Antarctica that is certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, a non-profit organization that promotes responsible fishing.

Chilean sea bass is the one fish that many chefs—even those who aren't social activists—won't serve. Take Jeff Raider, the chef at Valley Restaurant at the Garrison in Garrison, N.Y. He works with a farmer to select the produce they grow on the grounds of the restaurant and orders Hudson Valley meats and eggs from neighboring farms. He used to work at the Sea Grill in Manhattan's Rockefeller Center, and he is very deft at cooking fish. But he'll never serve Chilean sea bass or swordfish.

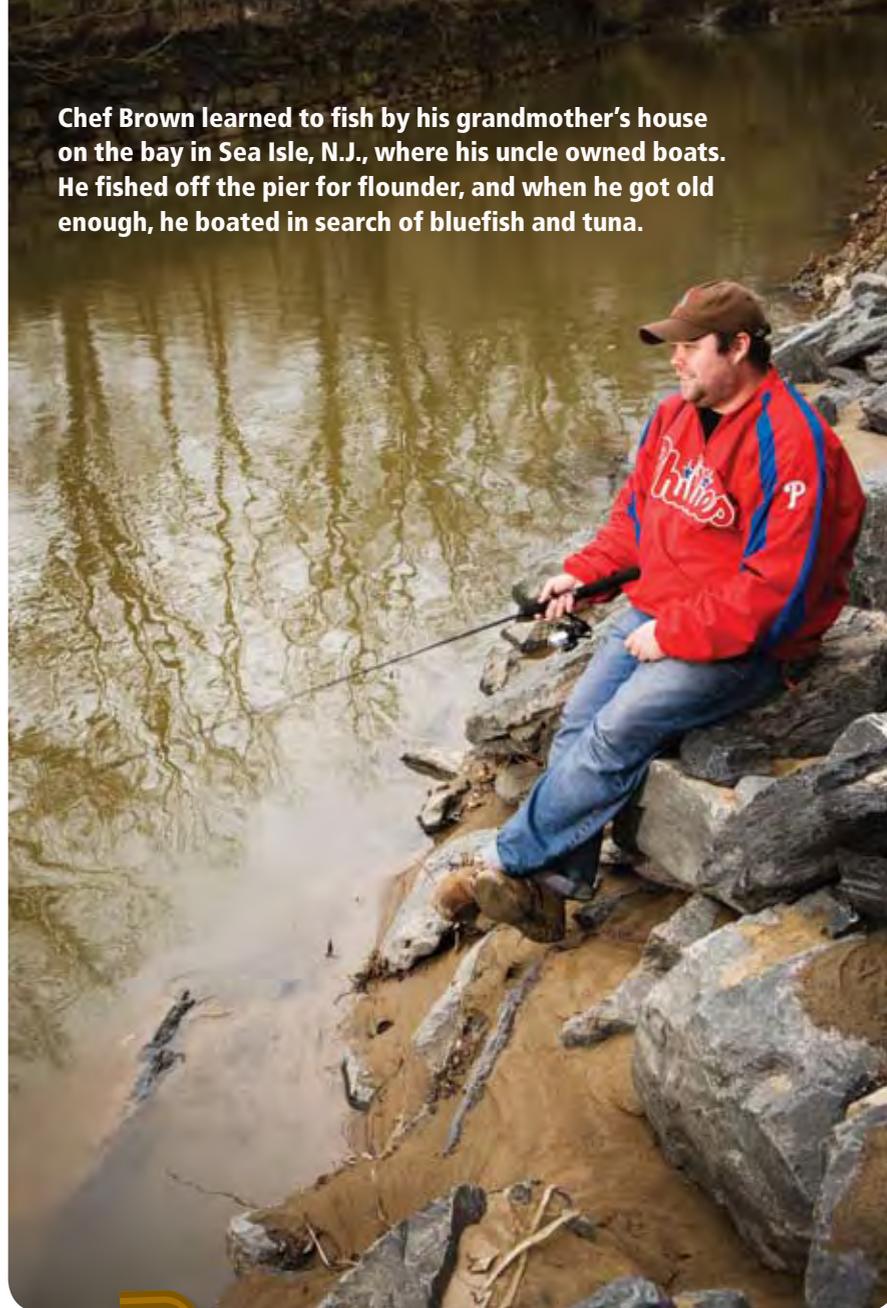
"You have to do your part," he says. "There's a price. You want the populations to come back."

Chef Richard Hamilton of the recently opened Restaurant Local in Easton, Md., is a member of the Chefs Collaborative, which promotes sustainable cuisine. He uses farmed shrimp and oysters, and buys other fish depending on what is in season.

"We as chefs are responsible, not only to our guests but to the environment," he says. "We decide what we sell or cook. We can decide how much, from where and how often we cook or sell something. It's a responsibility we have, so our children and their guests can cook the same things we can and enjoy the same foods we do."

Brown, of White Dog Cafe, recently cooked a sustainable seafood dinner for

**Chef Brown learned to fish by his grandmother's house on the bay in Sea Isle, N.J., where his uncle owned boats. He fished off the pier for flounder, and when he got old enough, he boated in search of bluefish and tuna.**



**"As chefs we are responsible, not only to our guests, but to the environment."**

an event for Slow Food, the international organization formed to "counteract fast food and fast life." (Slow Food also organizes an

event in Italy called Slow Fish.)

Brown served pole-caught ahi tuna tartare with lemongrass, ginger, yuzu and a quail egg; Monterey Bay squid stuffed with mortadella and braised in a guianca tomato sauce; and local sea bass.

He made sure the tuna was caught by hand and that the squid was caught in a sustainable manner, using lights to lure the oldest ones to the top of the water.

Brown is familiar enough with the techniques of fishing. His grandmother had a house on the bay in Sea Isle, N.J., and his uncle always owned boats. He'd fish off the pier for flounder and, when he got older, take the boat out for bluefish and tuna during the season.

Yes, fish have seasons.

Brown gets a fax from Ecofish, one of his suppliers, telling him exactly where the fish is coming from throughout the year.

"Each river, each stream," he says. "I can follow the season as it moves up the state."

And though the seasonal fishing is not as well understood as the eat-local movement, people are starting to come around—slowly.

"They walk into a market in the middle of February and say, 'Why don't you have any wild salmon?'" Seaver says. "They're out to sea! You don't walk into a farmers market in the middle of December and say, 'Where are the strawberries?'"

#### WHAT'S SO FUNNY ABOUT FISH, LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING?

Speaking of berries and farmers markets, it was only a couple of years ago that I offered to bring fresh produce from my local farmers market to my friend's first grilling party of the season.

"Sure, how about some blackberries?" she asked. "And corn?"

But it was May, I told her. We won't see blackberries until July. And corn doesn't come until August. At least in New York.

Today, that same friend understands that sour cherries come in June, and then they're gone. She is giddy with anticipation for my annual choucroute party in winter—one that comes only after we've harvested our cabbage in the fall and turned it into sauerkraut after six weeks in the basement. But she—well, like most of us—still doesn't understand the seasonality of fish.

Understanding is the start. I will continue my fish mandate, but before I head to the counter, staring through glass at an icy sea of monotony, I will educate myself. What is the season for tuna? (Summer, mostly.) Which salmon should I buy? (Wild. Line-caught.) And maybe, as I learn more, so will my friends. And the fishmonger. And a few more of his customers. Perhaps soon, what the fishmonger stocks won't be flounder, scrod, tuna and salmon. It'll be what the customers really want: seafood that will be around when they pass their recipes down to their children and grandchildren. Farm-raised tilapia. Wild-caught striped bass.

"It's just about education and it's about patience," Brown says. "It's not about instant gratification. If I want a piece of snapper, I can't serve it. But I can find a sweet piece of fish and I can serve that instead. It's about finding out what's out there to use." 🐟

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