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Earth stewards



COURTESY PHOTO

Saving the oceans one menu selection at a time

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BY **RAINA LONGOBARDI**

Chef Rick Moonen, executive chef of RM Seafood in Las Vegas, and author of *Fish Without a Doubt*, visited San Antonio's Watermark Grill last week to help spread the gospel of sustainable seafood. The term "sustainable" has begun to be bandied about as much as "recyclable" and "organic," losing meaning along the way. For Moonen, runner-up on Season Two of Bravo's "Top Chef Masters," it simply means "not participating in activities that bring a species to extinction."

Unfortunately, there's real reason to worry about such things. Moonen recalls perusing the fish markets for swordfish early in his career and seeing an abundance of "markers" and "double markers" (fish weighing over 100 or 200 pounds). By the 1990s, it was the "pups" that were coming to market instead. A pup, with a dressed weight

of less than 99 lbs., has not even reached sexual maturity. Scientists began to report that the world's large fish species was headed toward collapse.

In 1998, Moonen, along with such chefs as Nora Pouillon, Lidia Bastianich, and Eric Ripert, joined with SeaWeb and National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) to launch the Give Swordfish a Break Campaign. This effort asked that chefs, restaurateurs, and grocers "pledge to not serve swordfish from the North Atlantic until adequate conservation measures are adopted by the federal government." The campaign ended in 2000, with hundreds of chefs making the pledge. Organizers declared victory when the U.S. government passed legislation to protect juvenile swordfish by closing nursery areas in U.S. waters. In 2002, ICCAT (the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas) determined that swordfish had reached 94 percent of full recovery.

Moonen's passion for sustainable seafood, with its undeniable impact on our health and the oceans we rely upon, has become so acute that he urged San Antonians last week to consider walking out on any restaurant where the chef can't vouch for the source of its seafood. Watermark Grill is not one of those restaurants.

Robert Fairbrother, general manager of Watermark, called upon long-time friend Moonen several months ago when the management decided that a move toward sustainability was the right thing to do. Today, Watermark Grill is the first restaurant in San Antonio to offer a fully sustainable-seafood menu. According to their September press release, examples of new sustainable options include replacing Atlantic cod, monkfish, and farm-raised salmon with Pacific cod, Alaskan halibut, and wild-caught Alaskan salmon.

At the "Celebration of Sustainability" last week, guests were given an eye-opening presentation about sustainability, followed by an impressive five-course meal with carefully-selected wine pairings by manager Adam Spencer. Hors d'oeuvres included Thai-style shrimp wraps, prepared by Moonen, and lobster corn dogs: a delightfully tasty and playful item by Watermark's own chef de cuisine Tyler Horstmann.

Second and third courses consisted of Oyster Martinis with Black Pearl Olives and Grapefruit and Pomegranate Icelandic Arctic Char Ceviche. Its visually stunning pomegranate seeds and lively green cilantro enjoyed a pop of color from the locally grown Texas grapefruit and was balanced by the Arctic char. Moonen dubs char "salmon light," an environmentally friendly alternative to Atlantic salmon, with similar pink color and thickness.

Keep track of responsible fish choices by using the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch Consumer's Guide at seafoodwatch.org. Now available as a free iPhone app.

The fourth course was Moonen's New England Steamed Dinner with Alaskan halibut. This dish was introduced to us as "soul food." With its carrots, turnips, and potatoes, cabbage with bits of bacon, and a steamed piece of fish placed atop, drizzled with horseradish sauce, it certainly stirred that most ethereal region.

Watermark's "Chef Tyler" created the fifth course: Hapuka with Wild Mushrooms and Herbed Shellfish Vinaigrette. The hapuka, a member of the grouper family, is a sustainably fished species from the waters of

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Dessert was a sweet spin on an American classic — burger, fries, and shake. Pastry Chef Melissa Beverage arranged a chocolate mousse-filled macaroon (complete with sesame seeds) as the burger. Alongside she served seasoned apple fries with raspberry coulis. A Dr. Pepper ice cream float “shot” completed our unexpected dose of Americana. •

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

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