

The fine art of preparing scallops

Good-quality products essential for tasty dishes

SUSAN SCHWARTZ
THE GAZETTE

I had the good fortune to spend a week earlier this fall in Les Îles de la Madeleine, a small archipelago of islands in the Gulf of St. Lawrence and a charming, welcoming and scenic part of Quebec — all dunes and light, water and wind.

We enjoyed amazing cheeses produced by the Fromagerie Pied-du-Vent and couldn't get enough of the fish and scallops smoked at Le Fumoir d'Antan; we sampled varieties of beer brewed at À l'abri de la Tempête, a micro-brewery ideally situated only a couple of hundred yards from a gorgeous, secluded beach, and ate fish or seafood for dinner most nights at places like the friendly Aux Pas Perdus and the glassed-in restaurant at the seaside inn Domaine du Vieux Couvent, with its stellar view — and food to match.

But one of the most memorable parts of my visit was a three-hour cooking workshop on scallops by Johanne Vigneau, the talented chef-owner of the elegant restaurant La Table des Roy.

Vigneau realized a long-time dream when she launched a new venture this summer, Gourmande de Nature — an inviting space that houses several elements: a carefully curated kitchen boutique featuring everything from dishes to cookbooks, and a large and airy room reserved for cooking workshops, where we gathered and sat at a long counter set across from a stove and prep area used for classes and demos.

There's a glassed-in case with prepared foods on offer for takeout, and a large glassed-in production kitchen is already turning out everything from wild rose butter and three-fruit jelly



PIERRE BEAUCHEMIN

Scallops with warm yuzu and bacon vinaigrette from Myriam Pelletier is included in the cookbook La cuisine de la mer.

to wild strawberry jam and flavoured salts and sugars. I bought a jar of salt flavoured with sea lettuce that transports me, each time I unscrew the lid to sprinkle it over soups or roasted vegetables, back to the fresh salt air and the raw beauty of les Îles.

I have taken dozens of cooking classes — and Vigneau is one of the most gracious and generous chefs from whom I have had the opportunity to learn.

She shared advice and tips with the seven of us who had paid \$65 for the weekday morning workshop (10 a.m. to 1 p.m.) and demonstrated a range of preparations for the fresh local scallops she had on hand — scallops just like the ones she serves at her restaurant.

Visitors, like me, were represented, as well as locals; I sat between a young businesswoman who owns a boutique on Les Îles de la Madeleine with two branches, Le Globe Trotter, and a former

resident who returns each summer.

We were all there for pretty much the same reason: We love scallops for their delicate sweetness and their meaty texture, but we have trouble preparing them properly. Mostly we overcook them — but we were also short on ideas of how to use them.

With assistance from Sophie Brodeur, who spent the summer cooking at La Table des Roy, Vigneau demonstrated several preparations: scallops served raw; as ceviche, in which the scallops are cooked with citrus in place of heat; and pan-seared.

Every dish demonstrated was in turn plated and placed in front of each student: We practically moaned with pleasure as we tasted everything — from the scallop sashimi with sesame and ginger to the mascarpone-filled ravioli with scallops. I came away from Vigneau's workshop with a good deal of inspiration and confidence



EMMANUELLE ROBERGE

Chef Johanne Vigneau launched Gourmande de Nature, where cooking workshops are held.



JEAN-PIERRE GRAPPE

La cuisine de la mer (Les Éditions de l'homme, \$39.95) is a new fish and seafood cookbook.

about preparing scallops — and printed recipes for no fewer than six dishes.

When I commented at the end of the workshop on her generosity with ingredients, time and advice, Vigneau responded with humility that, as far as she's concerned, no one who is not generous or who does not use the best ingredients has a place in the kitchen.

It's crucial, she said, to start with good products. "When you have good products, it's everything." Vigneau uses local scallops from a company called Culti-Mer (www.ilesdelamadeleine.com/culti-mer). She had Princess scallops, generally harvested at about 12 to 24 months, on hand, as well as larger specimens.

The part of the scallop we eat is the adductor muscle, she explained — the muscle that holds the two halves of the scallop's fan-shaped shell together. It's known also as the nut and it's the most commonly consumed part of the scallop in North America. Scallops also have another kind of meat, the soft and red or white-coloured roe, or coral, but it's rarely eaten here.

The Princess scallops, alive when the class started, before the students slid their knives in and dislodged the muscle, clacked and clattered slightly in their shells — a sure (if a slightly disconcerting) sign of their freshness.

Vigneau is big on marrying textures. "I make a big deal of textures," she said: the crunch of raw chioffa beets with the sweetness of scallop sashimi napped with a light Asian-style vinaigrette, for instance, or a ceviche of scallops marinated briefly in coconut milk, olive oil, lime juice and red onion, fresh basil and cilantro, garlic and a bit of chili paste (sambal oelek), then served over a granité of watermelon with diced mango. In some dishes, she likes to add lemon and lime zest right at the end. "It's another element that adds texture."

She illustrated a technique for searing scallops in which only one side is seared, quickly, in canola oil in a hot frying pan — and then finished in an oven heated to 400 or 450 F "for only a few minutes." Cook them at too low a temperature and they'll be rubbery and leach a cloudy liquid. Scallops need to be cooked at high temperature for a short time, Vigneau said, to maintain their texture and flavour.

Among other pieces of advice she dispensed during the workshop:

■ Make sure to dry scallops extremely well with paper towelling before cooking them. Ensuring the scallops are dry, Vigneau explained, ensures that they have the best possible colour when they are sautéed, and stay tender.

■ If you buy frozen scallops, the best way to defrost them is slowly in the refrigerator. To speed things, they can be placed in cold water on the counter, but it's important not to have a significant temperature difference between the scallops and the water: water that is too warm will affect the quality of the scallops by starting to slowly cook them.

■ Don't mix sizes when you're cooking scallops, because cooking times differ.

■ When you're cooking, allow creativity to guide; don't be a slave to recipes. Look for inspiration in different places: Sometimes particular plates give Vigneau an idea for how to prepare a dish — choosing cobalt blue plates for a scallop preparation featuring a lightly creamed Pernod-based sauce, for instance, created an interesting contrast.

For more information, look for Gourmande de Nature on Facebook or go to www.gourmandedenature.com.

A workshop on breakfast and brunch will be held on Nov. 25 from 9 to 11:30 a.m. Cost is \$60. Through December, Christmas parties will be held in the space; as well, corporate workshops and team-building workshops will be offered, on demand, on topics ranging from preparing a three-course breakfast to making filled pasta. Gourmande de Nature will be closed during January and February 2013, and reopen in March.

Gourmande de Nature is at 1912 Chemin de l'Étang-du-Nord, Îles de la Madeleine. Tel. 418-986-6767 or 418-986-3004.

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RECIPES

Versatile scallops work in a variety of dishes — from Japan to Italy

SUSAN SCHWARTZ
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After an excellent three-hour workshop on scallops given by Johanne Vigneau at Gourmande de Nature in Les Îles de la Madeleine, I had scallops on the brain.

As I browsed in the cookbook section of the kitchen boutique of Gourmande de Nature, an inviting space with a boutique and a production kitchen in addition to the workshop area, I came upon an attractive and authoritative-looking new book about fish and seafood from veteran Montreal chef and teacher Jean-Paul Grappe, in collaboration with the Institut de Tourisme et d'Hôtellerie du Québec. It's called La cuisine de la mer (Les Éditions de l'Homme, \$39.95) and it's full of recipes from Quebec chefs and teachers, along with informative sections describing the various specimens and their properties.

Here's one recipe from the new book, followed by a few from Vigneau.

Sautéed scallops, warm vinaigrette and yuzu

Serves 4

This recipe, from La cuisine de la mer, is from Myriam Pelletier, who has worked in restaurants in Montreal, including Toqué!, and in France, including Arpège in Paris. She now works as a food stylist and recipe developer for different publications, as well as for television. Yuzu is a tart Japanese citrus fruit.

1/3 cup bacon, chopped finely
1 dry French shallot, diced
1 garlic clove, chopped finely

1/3 cup blanched edamame beans
2 tablespoons lime juice
1/2 tablespoon soy sauce
1 teaspoon yuzu
1/2 tablespoon water
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon butter
8 jumbo-sized scallops
Salt and freshly ground pepper

Cook the bacon over medium-high heat for about 3 minutes. Add the shallot and cook two minutes more, or until it colours. Add the garlic and cook for 15 seconds, then remove from heat. Add the edamame beans and pour in the lime juice, soy sauce, yuzu and water. Set aside.

Heat a large non-stick frying pan over medium high with the oil and butter. Dry the scallops well with paper towelling, then sprinkle with salt and pepper. When the butter is foaming, add the scallops. Cook for 3 minutes on one side or until golden, then turn and leave to cook for another minute. Place on paper towelling, then plate and garnish with the vinaigrette.

Scallops with miso, the Nobu way

Serve 4 as main course

This recipe, from Johanne Vigneau of La Table des Roy and Gourmande de Nature in Les Îles de la Madeleine, is inspired by Nobu, possibly the world's most recognized Japanese restaurant, with branches around the world.

12 large scallops
1/2 cup sake
3 tablespoons mirin
1/2 cup light miso
3 tablespoons sugar

Heat the sake and mirin. Boil for 15 seconds, to evaporate the alcohol. Remove from heat and add miso, mixing it in with a wooden spoon. When the miso is well dissolved, put back on heat and add the sugar, mixing all the while. As soon as sugar has dissolved, remove from heat. Refrigerate to cool. Pour the marinade into a sealable plastic bag. Place the scallops into the bag, seal and marinate in the fridge for 3 to 4 hours. Remove scallops from marinade and dry gently, taking care not to blot off the marinade entirely. Grease a baking sheet. Heat the oven to broil.

Grill the scallops until golden, about 3 minutes. Turn and return to oven for another couple of minutes. Serve over seaweed, or over soba noodles that have been tossed quickly with a couple of tablespoons of shallot vinaigrette (see below) and with green onions. Just before serving, pour a few drops of the marinade over each scallop.

This marinade can also be used with any white fish, such as cod or halibut, as well as with salmon: just marinate longer — for at least 24 hours, and ideally 36.

Shallot vinaigrette

2 tablespoons sugar
1 cup mirin
1 tablespoon rice vinegar
1 tablespoon wasabi powder
2 tablespoons miso
Freshly ground black pepper, to taste
Dash sambal oelek, or to taste
2 dry French shallots, chopped finely

Dissolve sugar in the mirin, then mix with the rest of the ingredients and refrigerate.

Ravioli filled with mascarpone and lemon, with scallops, tomato and basil

Serves 4

To serve this dish, also from Johanne Vigneau of La Table des Roy and Gourmande de Nature, as a main course, allow for two to three ravioli and two to three scallops per plate; for an appetizer, use one of each. Feel free to substitute goat cheese for the mascarpone and hot paprika powder or New Mexico red chili powder for the Espelette pepper, if desired.

12 large scallops
2 teaspoons lemon zest
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 cup diced fresh tomato
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 tablespoons dry white wine
1/2 cup fish stock
1/2 cup 35 per cent cooking cream
2 dry French shallots, finely chopped
1 small garlic clove, chopped
3 tablespoons chopped basil

For the ravioli
1 cup plus 2 tablespoons cold mascarpone
24 square won ton wrappers
1 egg
1/2 teaspoon Espelette pepper
Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste
1 tablespoon cornstarch

Grate the lemon zest finely. Place the cornstarch in a small bowl. Separate the egg white and yolk. In a bowl, place the mascarpone, the yolk, the Espelette pepper, salt and pepper. Add 1/2 teaspoon each of the lemon zest and of the basil and mix all

the ingredients together. On a damp dishtowel, spread out 12 won ton wrappers and brush with the egg white. Place 1 teaspoon of mascarpone filling in the centre of each square and cover each with a second square. Taking care to put your fingers in the cornstarch first, press around the filling to expel any air and seal the packets. Cover and refrigerate until ready to use.

When you are ready to serve the ravioli, place water in a large pot, add salt and bring to a boil. Pour a splash of olive oil into a frying pan, heat to high and seize the scallops on both sides. Remove from heat, place scallops on a baking sheet and set aside. Heat oven to 350 F.

Put the frying pan back on heat with a splash of olive oil and sauté the shallots and garlic, but do not colour them. Over high heat, deglaze the pan with the white wine. Mix for a couple of minutes, add the fish stock and reduce by half. Add the cream and continue to cook over medium heat to bind the sauce. To finish the sauce, add the tomatoes, the remaining 1/2 teaspoon of lemon zest, the basil and the lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper. Turn off heat.

At this point, place the scallops into the oven for 4 to 5 minutes, depending on their size, to complete the cooking. Heat the serving plates. Carefully drop the ravioli into salted boiling water for 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from pot with a slotted spoon and drain. Remove scallops from oven. Add whatever scallop juice there is to the sauce. If serving as a main dish, place three raviolis at the centre of each plate, three scallops around the won tons and pour sauce over the raviolis. Garnish

each plate with a basil leaf and freshly ground pepper.

Scallop sashimi with sesame and ginger

Serves 4 as an appetizer

Another Nobu-inspired recipe from Johanne Vigneau. One large scallop should yield five to six slices: make sure to cut the scallop perpendicular to the lines of the muscle. The vinaigrette works also as a salad dressing; Vigneau stores fresh ginger in the freezer.

8 large fresh scallops
1 tablespoon freshly grated ginger
2 tablespoons Japanese soy sauce
1 teaspoon orange juice
1 teaspoon lemon or lime juice
1/2 teaspoon garlic, chopped very finely
1 tablespoon sesame oil
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 green onions, chopped finely
2 tablespoons toasted white sesame seeds

Place scallops in freezer for at least 45 minutes to facilitate slicing. Meanwhile, prepare vinaigrette by mixing the ginger, soy sauce, orange and lemon juice and the garlic. Toast the sesame seeds. Set aside. Into a small pot, pour the olive and sesame oil. Cut the scallops into slices and divide among four plates. When ready to serve, pour vinaigrette over the scallops. Add the green onions and sesame seeds. Heat the oil mixture and pour over the sashimi. Serve immediately with seaweed salad or a julienne of cucumber and daikon tossed with rice vinegar and mirin.