

HOT DISH

Butter fish: the filet mignon of the sea



Richard Montoya, executive chef at Fish Tale Grill in Cape Coral, creates the restaurant's signature dish, butter fish — a miso-marinated black cod and seared scallops with julienned vegetables in a coconut lemongrass sauce. AUBRIE GERBER/THE NEWS-PRESS

By Aubrie Gerber
The News-Press

A “do not touch” sign should hang from the butter fish dish served at Fish Tale Grill.

“I’m a firm believer that you can make a dish look so beautiful if you add beautiful colors to it,” said Richard Montoya, executive chef.

He leads his culinary team to create a masterpiece of a dish, to say the least. Asia meets Alaska and colors pop as Montoya plates miso-marinated black cod with seared sea scallops atop his signature coconut lemongrass sauce with julienned vegetables.

There’s no question whether the seafood is fresh. Fish Tale Grill and its adjacent neighbor, Merrick Seafood Market, are owned and operated by Kerry and Patrick Krieg.

At 6 each morning, Merrick Seafood receives fresh seafood ready to be prepped and sold in the market. Montoya peruses making his selection for the restaurant’s proteins that day



Miso-marinated black cod and seared scallops with julienned vegetables in a coconut lemongrass sauce served at Fish Tale Grill in Cape Coral. AUBRIE GERBER/THE NEWS-PRESS

and gets inspired for house specials.

And while Montoya changes menu items every two to three months, butter fish has remained a running staple for seven months.

“It’s one of the main dishes that is very popular on the menu and basically no one has in this area,” Montoya said.

He starts making the edible work of art by preparing the marinade; sake, a Japanese alcohol that’s also referenced as a rice wine, is reduced in a pot with a cup of sugar. White miso paste is gently folded in and the sauce is chilled.

For 24 hours, a filet of Alaskan black cod (also known as butter fish) bathes in the golden marinade.

“Cod is the filet mignon of fish,” Montoya said. “As soon as you put a fork to it, it just melts in your mouth.”

Meanwhile, the chef gets working on the

Where: 1229 SE 47 Terrace, Cape Coral

Hours: Fish Tale Grill, 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Monday-Saturday; Merrick Seafood Market 9 a.m.-6 p.m. Monday-Saturday; closed Sunday

Hot Dish: Butter fish, \$27

Service: Lunch is served until 4 p.m.

Information: Visit fishtalegrill.com or call 257-3167



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dish’s iconic bright yellow sauce. He dices lemongrass and cooks it down in coconut milk. As if that isn’t enough, he adds sweet chili sauce for that extra kick.

“When we say sweet chili sauce, customers sometimes expect it to be spicy, but it’s not,” Montoya said. “The dish is sweet and savory.”

The miso-marinated butter fish is placed on a heated flat top alongside two large sea scallops. The seafood is complete when a crispy sear forms on both sides creating what Montoya calls “that beautiful bronze color.”

The artist promptly gets to work.

A ladle of coconut lemongrass sauce creates a neon circle against the stark-white canvas of a plate. Sautéed julienned zucchini and yellow squash is piled off-center and the seared cod is draped over. The scallops are topped with parsley and lemon zest infused aioli, and red and black caviar.

Blanched fava beans surround the seafood while maroon-colored roasted-beet emulsion and translucent-orange annatto oil are strategically dotted in the sauce. Added julienned vegetables top the cod and a purple orchid petal completes the dish.

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