

# FROM POT TO PAN

THE PIERHOUSE HOTEL HAS AN AFFINITY FOR FRESH SEAFOOD, SOMETHING THAT THE WEST COAST OFFERS IN SPADES.

PHOTOGRAPHY: COLIN NICHOLLS

**T**HINK SHELLFISH, and it doesn't get fresher than the West Coast of Scotland. Fact. Pot to pan is a matter of metres and minutes.

And nowhere is this more patent than at The Pierhouse, an award-winning hotel hidden in the quiet village of Port Appin, on the shores of Loch Linnhe. Owners Nick and Nikki Horne pride themselves on their long-standing

relationships with suppliers who share their commitment to produce which is of the highest quality, is locally sourced and of known provenance.

Whether it's langoustines, lobsters, oysters or mussels, all their seafood is sourced within a stone's throw of the hotel, ensuring an unmatched freshness when entering the kitchen and going under the skilled hands of head chef Laura Milne and her team.



## HUGHIE MACLEOD

Hughie Macleod, a local prawn fisherman with over 30 years of experience, has been supplying The Pierhouse for more than two decades. In his boat *Novar Star*, Hughie only catches langoustines using the traditional method of creel baiting as opposed to the very controversial and non-environmentally-friendly method of trawl fishing, where nets are dragged along the sea floor catching everything and anything in their path.

Although labour intensive, requiring upwards of 400 creels to be lifted every day, this is the only sustainable method of catching prawns – something that is of major importance to the ethics of The Pierhouse and Hughie. With an order of around 60kg per week, the prawns supplied to the hotel from Loch Linnhe are the more common orange prawns, and the ones he catches in Loch Etive on the odd occasion are of a brighter red colour brought on by the higher freshwater content in the loch.







## CALEDONIAN OYSTER CO.

Hugo and Judith Vajk at the Caledonian Oyster Company have been farming oysters for more than 20 years – most recently in the clear waters of Loch Creran just around the corner from The Pierhouse. The Pacific oysters are harvested after three to four years – each oyster picked and graded to ensure the best possible end result.

It's very much a family affair – Judith is also well known on Twitter as The Oyster Lady and has an ever-growing following, while the Vajk children are already winning international oyster shucking competitions.



## LAURA MILNE

Originally from the Scottish Borders, Laura spent much of her early life fishing on the Tweed and learning about plants and trees from her father, a gardener at Dawyck Botanic Gardens. Laura's career as a chef took her to the Isle of Skye (and later Inverness) where she drew inspiration from the island's culinary history and traditional recipes that use the best of the land, the sea and the seashore.

At The Pierhouse, Laura's cooking is traditional Scottish with a modern twist, utilising fresh, locally sourced, seasonal ingredients wherever possible. Such is the wonderful access to produce; each dish is simply cooked to let the food speak for itself.



## GETTING TO GRIPS WITH SEAFOOD



### Mussels

Always ensure that the mussels are closed, as this means they are still alive. Before cooking, squeeze the mussels sideways between finger and thumb to make sure they are not full of sand, then give a scrub to remove any barnacles and pull off the beards. Rinse in cold water, and they are ready to go.

Laura cooks her mussels in a rich white wine cream sauce and adds a signature ingredient of Inverawe smoked salmon, which gives a real smoky flavour to the dish.

First, heat a small amount of dry white wine (roughly 500g mussels to 50ml wine) in a pan, then add chopped garlic and shallots (1 clove of garlic and 2 shallots), and pop the mussels in and cover with a lid.

Once the mussels have opened after a minute or so (giving a shake of the pan in between), drain off a quarter of the liquid and add a splash of double cream and a pinch of diced Inverawe smoked salmon. Put back on a high heat for 1 minute and serve topped with chopped chives.



### Scallops

Add a knob of butter and a dash of oil to a frying pan and heat until very hot. Season the scallops, place in pan and cook on a high heat for about 1½ to 2 minutes. Do not move the scallops around the pan until caramelised on each side. Squeeze a little lemon juice over the scallops and serve in their shell, which you have preheated under the grill.