

WestShore Sea Bread

By Mike Wicks

The first time I tasted Angelo's sea bread was several years ago when my wife and I stayed at Cooper's Cove Guesthouse where this top chef has his cooking school. It was one of the items he taught us to make and I have never forgotten it, especially the moment he insisted I try some raw seaweed! While I was a little reluctant to take on this new culinary challenge, it was actually surprisingly pleasant.

When I was looking for a quintessential WestShore recipe for this magazine, Sea Bread came to mind immediately – there is something marvellous about gathering ingredients yourself and cooking them up into something really special. That's how I found myself driving west out of Sooke with Angelo Prosperi-Porta, the extraordinary chef at Cooper's Cove Bed and Breakfast (www.cooperscove.com), early one morning in search of what he refers to as his sea salad buffet.

We arrive at a beach, just south of Shirley, and immediately see that we are a little ahead of the tide, which although receding, is still higher than Angelo would like. He explains that we are looking for seaweed that is still alive and attached to rocks – he says this as he wades out into water that is edging precariously close to the top of his gumboots.



Gumboots, there's an idea I think to myself as I look down at my new white sneakers. He looks back at me and says, "You wouldn't pick lettuce off the compost heap now would you? You'd pick it fresh from the garden; that stuff you're standing on is already decomposing!" By now he has a handful of shiny, almost iridescent, seaweed that he has plucked from beneath the surface of the water. "Avoid anything that is discoloured or bleached," he advises.

There are hundreds of edible seaweeds and unlike when foraging for mushrooms, the danger of picking up something that might kill you is minimal. The types of seaweed we are looking for today include: Alaria (Winged Kelp) which is so thin that it looks a little like latex; Angelo tells me is wonderful for wrapping fish before baking; Sea Lettuce (*Ulva Lactuca*) which is bright green even after cooking, and has a quite pungent, fishy taste; dark brown *Porphyra* (think Nori used in making Sushi) with its sweet almost meaty taste; Dulse, which is shaped like a hand, purple, chewy and a little spicy; Sugar Kelp which has elongated, oval leaves and is, as its name suggests, sweet, becoming increasingly gelatinous the more you chew it. It can also be used to thicken sauces; and *Egregia* (Feather Boa) which is a brown kelp with chocolate-brown blades and olive-shaped floats.

Angelo proudly shows me a frond of seaweed glistening olive green in the sunlight and tells me that this will be the shape of the bread we will make. I notice that his gumboots have succumbed to the lapping



Back in the kitchen, Angelo steams some limpets with a handful of the seaweed he gathered to get us in the mood for baking – literally a few minutes from the ocean they taste wonderful; the seaweed giving them a flavour I hadn't experienced before with shellfish.

Angelo washes the seaweed, and creates his 'sea salad' on a platter; the bright greens, olive browns, reds and purples coming together in a tangle of shapes and textures. He randomly cuts pieces for me to try and even though hesitant at first, I enjoy each of their delicate flavours in turn constantly surprised at how much I am enjoying this bounty from the ocean.

For the next few hours we become bakers, and after awhile the aroma of home-baked bread starts to permeate the kitchen; all is right with the world as we finish a glass of Farmhand ale and talk of our next trip in search of WestShore ingredients to share with our readers.

We are woken from our revelry by the ping of the oven announcing that our bread is ready. It is golden brown and it has taken on the shape of fronds of seaweed. Barely waiting for it cool, I rip off a piece and take a bite, half expecting it to taste fishy or overly salty, but the flavour is far more subtle than that; the flecks of seaweed - small reminders of the ocean and this morning's harvest. This is bread to serve with pasta, especially spaghetti vongole, or a bouillabaisse. But me, I'll sit here nibbling away at these loaves, drinking Driftwood beer, feeling that it really doesn't get any better than this. **WS**

waves, but he is too intent on the wonderful crop he is gathering to notice. Behind him two otters sitting on a rock look on curiously, and I am reminded what it is about the WestShore that I love so much.

On the way back to Angelo's cooking school kitchen we stop off and buy some local beer, which is an integral ingredient of this fruits-of-the-ocean bread. We choose a new brew called Farmhand Ale, from Driftwood, an aptly named local brewery, which seems perfect for this recipe as the ingredients listed on the label include black pepper – perfect!

Recipe

Ingredients

| | |
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| ½ cup | warm water |
| 1 tbsp | dry yeast |
| 2 tbsp | honey |
| 12 oz | beer (at room temperature) |
| 2 tbsp | olive oil |
| 2 cups | assorted fresh seaweeds (coarsely chopped) |
| 2 tsp | sea salt |
| 1 cup | yellow corn meal |
| 1 cup | whole wheat flour |
| ¾ to 1½ cups | bread flour* |
| | Egg-wash (made with 1 egg and 2 tbsp water) |
| | Coarse sea salt to sprinkle on the bread |

Method

- 1 Combine the warm water, yeast and honey in a mixing bowl and set in a warm place until frothy.
- 2 Stir in the beer, olive oil, seaweeds and salt, then add the corn meal, whole wheat flour and enough bread flour to form a firm dough that clears the sides of the bowl, and is not sticky to the touch.
- 3 Place the dough on a lightly floured board and knead until smooth and elastic (about 8 to 10 minutes)
- 4 Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover with a damp cloth or plastic wrap and set aside to rise until doubled in bulk (approximately 1-hour)
- 5 Remove from the bowl, and on a lightly floured board knead briefly then divide into four pieces.
- 6 Form each piece into a ball then roll into an oval about 8-10 inches by 4-5 inches wide.
- 7 With your hands, flatten and push out the dough to about 1 to 1½ inches thick and irregularly shaped.
- 8 Place two loaves each on two 12-16 inch baking sheets dusted with corn meal, cover and allow to rise to about one and half times.
- 9 With a pair of sharp scissors dipped in flour make random cuts into the edges of the dough at different lengths to resemble fronds of seaweed.
- 10 Brush with egg-wash and sprinkle with sea salt.
- 11 Bake in a 375° oven for 20-30 minutes.
- 12 Remove and cool on a rack.

**Depending on the moisture of the seaweed you may need to add ½ to 1 cup extra flour for the proper consistency.*