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Chef Jean-Marc Weber



Photos: Jeff Lipsman

INSPIRATION, SERENDIPITY, AND THANKSGIVING A TALE OF THREE CHEFS —BY JEFF LIPSMAN

When Chef Whitney Flood, now at the Muddy Leek Restaurant, was just a few years into his career, he came across an odd jar of 'pickles' in the kitchen. The label was in Italian, but he recognized the word *tartufo* and was intrigued.

He popped the top and recognized the aroma of a "nice mellow truffle." But they were hard and tart, like nothing he had ever tasted before. They were unripe green peaches—picked early to improve the orchard's yield, then canned with truffle juice. "Who thinks of this?" asks a rhetorical Chef Flood. "Obviously, the Italians!" He was so intrigued with the truffled dwarf peaches that he created a venison dish and won a recipe contest with it. *Chef Flood's imaginative cuisine is dished up at the Muddy Leek Restaurant, 8631 Washington Blvd, Culver City, 310-838-2281. Truffled dwarf peaches are available from GreatCiao.com*

Chef Whitney Flood

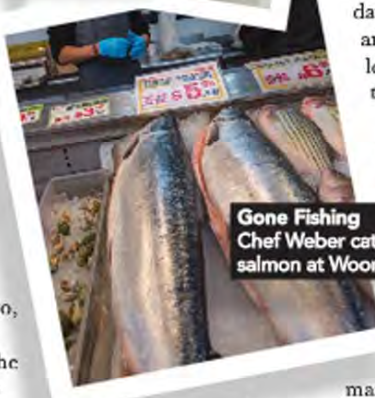


Comfort Food
Muddy Leek's Egg
with Chanterelles

The catering manager at the California Club had just transmitted an order to Chef Jean-Marc Weber for a party of 100. As club events go, this one was on the small side. It was scheduled for the following week and the menu included gravlax, their house-prepared salmon, a famously delicate dish that takes five to six days to marinate. The only problem was, this was Thanksgiving eve. There would be no salmon delivered tonight or the next day. In fact, there would be no deliveries at all until Monday—far too late to prepare the dish. The powerful and privileged club members, usually an affable lot, were nonetheless unaccustomed to hearing the word 'no.'

As Chef Weber recalls, "I thought about several seafood warehouses in the neighborhood and headed out after work to see." After a brief tour of downtown's Central Ave., he realized "I must be dreaming to think that any would be open or even have the lights on." He wheeled the car around and headed home to his loft in L.A.'s Arts District. His path took him through Little Tokyo, and past one last market, the Woori at 3rd and Alameda.

Gone Fishing
Chef Weber catches fresh
salmon at Woori market



Los Angeles's Italian impresario, Celestino Drago, is always on the lookout for new and interesting wines to serve with his dishes. Sometimes the wines come from unexpected quarters. Thirty years ago, when he opened his first restaurant on Beverly Drive, one employee stood out: Sean Salem, the parking valet. "He was so great, this kid," says Drago. "He remembered everybody's name. He watched the restaurant through the window and when you stood up to leave, your car was waiting for you. If your tires were low, Sean filled them. He was amazing. He started his own valet service. Then a few years later he married and moved to Vancouver."

Once in Vancouver, Sean partnered with his father-in-law. "And slowly, slowly they opened two wineries. They're very well known in British Columbia, and I'm the only one who has the wine in the United States." Drago is clearly pleased with his former protégé. *La Stella Winery's wine-maker dinner, March 5 and 6 at Osteria Drago, 8741 West Sunset Blvd, LA, 310-657-1182*

It was ten minutes to closing and it didn't look good. "I asked the fish monger, as he was hosing down the seafood area, if he had any better looking salmon. The ones he did have looked like small locally caught salmon brought in by one of his family members hoping to be rid of them." The monger pointed to a Styrofoam bin behind the chef. "I saw two fantastic looking shiny whole salmon with crystal-clear eyes and plenty of fresh blood around the gills—good signs of freshness. They looked as though they could have been caught just hours ago." In fact, they were. This salmon was wild caught, from Shetland Farms in Scotland, just delivered from LAX that evening. Did they have any more? "He brought out four gorgeous looking fish, as if they had just been pulled from the sea. So off I went, with a big Styrofoam carton overloaded with sixty pounds of Scottish salmon dripping with the aroma of fresh sea water."

While virtually unknown to most, the Woori Market's seafood department is second to none. Visiting the market is like visiting the Long Beach Aquarium, except you can eat the displays. They have live abalone, live halibut, live geoduck clams, Cherry Point clams, blue crabs, lobsters, and more. Ten feet of shelf space is dedicated solely to nori, the tasty seaweed that wraps your sushi. Another ten feet is used to display sushi-grade filets. If you visit on a Saturday the ahi is available for tasting. *Woori Market, 333 S. Alameda St., LA, 213-617-0030*



The Canadian Petrus?
La Stella's 100% merlot
Maestoso aims high