

# voyager

JULY 2007

## MONSTERS OF THE MIDWAY

AMERICAN  
FOOTBALL'S  
CHICAGO BEARS  
UNLEASHED

SIT DOWN  
FOR A CHAT  
AND A NICE  
CUPPA WITH

*Brenda  
Blethyn*

## THREE MEN IN A BOAT

HUNTING FOR  
SCALLOPS  
IN THE OUTER  
HEBRIDES

PICASSO,  
RENOIR  
& MONET

THE FRENCH  
RIVIERA YEARS

bmi

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER



# The Shell Seekers

It might sound like the start of a bad joke, but when a Scotsman, a Dane and a Frenchman meet in the Outer Hebrides in search of king scallops, all three are deadly serious about the task at hand

Words: Caroline Deacon   Photography: David Gillanders



Above: luxury hotel Langass Lodge attracts hunting and fishing enthusiasts from all over the world

Left to right: from the icy waters of the Minches to the table. When eating out, make sure that the scallops on the menu have been diver caught for the best flavour



**PICTURE AN ANCIENT LANDSCAPE**, almost completely submerged in a turquoise sea, save for tiny bumps of islands dotted with wild primroses and wispy grass. Edged by miles of pristine white beaches pounded clean by Atlantic surf, a land not yet tainted by the 21st century, inhabited by only a few thousand people, with no chain stores, coffee shops or wine bars, yet only 50 miles from mainland Britain. This is the Outer Hebrides; last stop in the ocean before America. This place may be home to only a handful of people, but its waters teem with life: Arctic charr, sea trout, salmon, lobster, monkfish, mackerel, to name but a few. Here, on the last frontier, come three men (a Scot, a Dane and a Frenchman) who get together in a boat to revel in their shared passion: food.

Scotsman Niall Leveson Gower has always lived on the Outer Hebrides but for Soren Jessen (the Dane) and Frenchman David Duverger, the owner and head chef respectively of Papillon restaurant in London's Chelsea, this is their first visit. It is perhaps not the usual party for a fishing expedition, but all three are in search of regal bounty – *pecten maximus* – king scallops.

Jessen, who worked as a trader in the City of London in the 1990s, has long had a visceral passion for food; he hunts big game and relishes the process from the kill to the plate. It was during his City career that he noticed the Square Mile had a dearth of restaurants, so took the opportunity to open his own, 1 Lombard Street. David Duverger was to the kitchen born. Cooking is in his genes. He started working as a chef aged nine in his father's kitchen in Clermont

Ferrand and left school as soon as possible to train as a chef. He headed first to the South of France, in love with the region's herbs and fish. But with his sights set on his own kitchen, he came to London en route to New York, where he met Jessen, and the two discussed their meeting of minds. Thus Papillon was born with a focus on sourcing good produce.

In their search for these ingredients – namely scallops – Jessen and Duverger have come to the Outer Hebrides to team up with Leveson Gower, a commercial diver and the owner of Langass Lodge.

Now a luxury hotel, it was originally built as a sporting lodge for North Uist estate and the walls are adorned with stag heads and monster salmon. It attracts people from all over the world who come for the fishing, and Leveson Gower arranges parties in search of whatever they fancy, cooking the spoils in the restaurant. The winds and Atlantic rollers bring surfers and kite flyers, while others come to bird watch as the area has everything from Arctic skua and corncrake to golden eagle.

Otters can be seen frolicking in Langass

Loch, and a pair of sea eagles, reintroduced to Skye six years ago, have now made the Uists their base. The fireplace in the Lodge, made entirely of scallop shells, tells the story of Leveson Gower's other line of work: scallop diving for the restaurants of London – with a few put aside for his own kitchen, naturally.

If you want the more prosaic details, king scallops, also known as Coquille St Jacques, are sedentary filter-feeding bivalves. Far better though to imagine their link with Venus, the Roman goddess of love, who floated ashore on a scallop shell. Like trees, scallops ►

“Venus, the Roman goddess of love, floated ashore on a scallop shell”





## | Scottish Scallops



reveal their age by rings on their shells. In Scotland, they can live more than 20 years and grow in excess of 175mm wide, coloured from pale white to deep red depending on their environment.

It may seem excessive to make the day-long journey from London to the Outer Hebrides just to check out some scallops, but for the Papillon duo the continuing success of the restaurant lies in their care over ingredients. Hence, for Duverger certain ingredients must hail from France. While he insists that foie gras and steak are best across The Channel, he raves about British lamb and, despite his love of southern French cooking, he acknowledges that Scottish seafood is plentiful and incredibly tasty.

Scallops sit on the seabed, and are thus easily accessible to dredgers, fishing boats towing huge scoops of chain mesh along the seabed. Unfortunately scallop dredging is very destructive to the seabed, and although scallops themselves are not endangered, the Marine Conservation Society is concerned about the effects on other sea life from indiscriminate dredging and recommends consumers ask for diver-caught scallops. Leveson Gower agrees: "You know when you dive an area that has been dredged; it looks like a wasteland."

Dredged scallops are half the price of those hand dived, but Duverger dismisses the inferior product with a Gallic shrug. "The dredger stirs up sand and sediment, the scallops are tossed around and they absorb this which makes them gritty. The flesh is then a different colour and they can taste muddy." Scallops delivered by Leveson Gower, however, arrive in London the day after he has picked them from the seabed.

“ Like trees, scallops reveal their age by rings on their shells ”

Above: Chef David Duverger is delighted by the 50g scallops; below: sea urchins are considered a delicacy but don't travel well

First stop in today's search for ingredients: a visit to the Hebridean smokehouse, a tiny company producing a high-quality range of smoked salmon, sea trout and scallop. Locally reared, these are peat smoked and hand filleted. The end result speaks for itself. Then on to the harbour, where Leveson Gower introduces the French chef to the Scottish sea urchin; this pale pink echinoderm with its soft prickles is a contrast to the French version with dense black spikes. Unfortunately, sea urchins don't travel. "If we could transport these we could make a fortune as the Japanese love them," comments Leveson Gower. In the meantime he picks these off the pier in passing and eats them sashimi style, or serves them in his restaurant to the guests with more adventurous tastes.

Now a plunge into the icy waters to search for scallops. The Minches, the expanse of water between the Scottish mainland, Skye and the Outer Hebrides, are normally turquoise blue, but today are inky black from preceding Atlantic storms. Jessen and Leveson Gower kit up in dry suits, and emerge minutes later with a bagful of enormous scallops, their shells a deep orangey brown. The scallop-diving expert points out the rings of growth which suggest these monsters are at least seven years old. Anything smaller than this he returns to the sea for another few years growth.

Scallops are generally sold already shucked, that is, with the nuggets of flesh that we eat already removed from the shell. These nuggets are the muscles or "meat". Sometimes fresh, whole scallops are also sold with a red crescent-shaped part of the inside flesh still attached, which is called the "coral" or "roe". This can have a slightly bitter taste, which contrasts with the sweetness of the muscle.

Duverger is amazed at the size of the Hebridean scallops – each weighs well over 50g without the ►





## Scottish Scallops |



### Langass Lodge, North Uist

+44 (0)18765 80285; [www.langasslodge.co.uk](http://www.langasslodge.co.uk)

### Hebridean Smoke House, North Uist

The company is open to the general public and also runs a mail-order service.

+44 (0)1876 580209; [www.hebrideansmokehouse.com](http://www.hebrideansmokehouse.com)

### Papillon (pictured)

96 Draycott Avenue, London SW3 3AD

+44 (0)20 7225 2555; [www.papillonchelsea.co.uk](http://www.papillonchelsea.co.uk)

✈ bmi flies direct to Inverness from London Heathrow.  
For more information and to book, visit [flybmi.com](http://flybmi.com)

roe. The biggest he has seen in France are barely 40g. Meanwhile the local fishermen learn something as they see the chef carefully shuck the scallop and keep all the contents. They would chuck into the sea, the "skirts", the frill around the centre meat which contains among other things, the creatures' eyes. But Duverger intends to use these to create a roux.

Morsels of raw scallop are passed round, the flesh sweet and incredibly firm. Later that evening he cooks the remaining shellfish, its only accompaniment the skirt in roux now tender as pasta, the roe served as topping (below). The effect is sweet, meaty with a hint of warmer seas, while the flesh is robust and speaks of Atlantic breakers. Flying back the following day, I distinctly feel that my seat is carrying a heavier load. And as the plane flies low over the sea, I see that the waters are now turquoise calm and empty of boats. ●



## Coquilles de Papillon

Papillon executive chef David Duverger's special scallop recipe. Serves four



### INGREDIENTS:

8 large scallops in their shells  
2 carrots (100g)  
1 onion (100g)  
4 garlic cloves  
1 bay leaf  
80ml extra virgin olive oil  
100ml white wine  
40g butter  
¼ bunch of flat parsley  
¼ bunch of dill

### METHOD:

Open the scallops. (Hold the shell curved side up, insert the tip of a knife on one side of its hinge at the back and work it round to the other side. Lift off and discard the top shell.) Discard black stomach bag. Slide knife under the meat and coral to detach them from the shell. Remove the coral (roe) and refrigerate. Wash skirt thoroughly. Dice the onions and the carrots finely.

### COOKING – SAUCE:

First, sear the skirts for 4 minutes in 20g butter, drain and keep the juice. In the same pan, sauté onions, carrots and garlic with the rest of the butter.

Philippe Messy, sommelier at Papillon, recommends Crozes Hermitage White, Alain Graillot, 2005, to accompany this dish. "Great structure; sufficient weight to balance the power of the dish with a mineral finish."

Add skirts and bay leaves, glaze with white wine. Add water to cover and simmer for 1 hour to reduce by half.

Meanwhile, blanch the scallop roe for 30 seconds in boiling water. Remove the fine skin, chop the rest very finely and add chopped parsley and dill. Heat in a pan and whisk in 40ml of virgin olive oil.

Finally, cook the scallops in a hot pan with olive oil, salt and pepper, for 30 seconds on each side. (Basically you need to cook them just until they become firm and opaque and are heated through.) Top with roe and pour over sauce.