



FISH UNION:

FROM DAY BOAT TO PLATE IN LESS THAN 24 HOURS

WHEN THE PANDEMIC HIT THE LONDON HOSPITALITY SCENE HARD, CHEFS RICHARD KIRKWOOD AND ANDY ROBERTS OVERCAME THE INITIAL SHOCK OF REDUNDANCY TO QUICKLY REALISE THAT THEIR LEVEL OF EXPERIENCE, EXTENSIVE LIST OF CONTACTS AND SHARED PASSION FOR FISH PRESENTED AN OPPORTUNITY TO BRING RESTAURANT-QUALITY SEAFOOD DIRECT TO LOCALS IN SUBURBAN KENT. **BY GWEN LARDNER & SAMANTHA READY**

Fiercely enthusiastic about seafood as a healthy and flavoursome alternative to meat and boasting over 30 years' experience between them (including stints at some of London's best known restaurants including The Ivy, J.Sheekey and Wright Brothers.) Chislehurst-based Richard and Andy not only appreciated the logistical sense of being based closer to home during the pandemic, but also of the opportunity afforded by Chislehurst's Kent/London border location that enabled them to make use of their existing suppliers. A pop-up temporary fish stall outside the local pub was the last assurance needed for the duo of the demand for a chef-led fishmongers in the area.

After considerable investment to completely refurbish and equip a previously empty shop unit, Fish Union opened in November 2020. Behind the unmissable bright blue facade on Royal Parade and to a backdrop of striking shop design courtesy of Kent-based interior designers, Guthrie & Kirkwood, is a novel concept of traditional wet fishmonger with an upmarket seafood and champagne bar under the same roof.

Customers now clamber not only for the restaurant quality seafood that arrives from boat to counter in less than 24 hours, but also for a prime spot on one of the 16 bar stools or a space on the outside terrace.

Both chefs are hands on, serving customers and willingly sharing their expertise on how best to

prepare and cook fish. Their aim is to create the ultimate seafood shopping experience for fish lovers and adventurous types looking to try something new.

The menu changes daily based on what's coming in off the boats. Nothing is bought in or pre-prepared and fish is cured and smoked onsite.

All the dishes are fastidiously fresh, paired with simple, tasty sides such as tomato salad or minted new potatoes. The ingredients are defiantly British and sourced as locally as possible, yet the menus are excitingly international. The Japanese sashimi has been a big hit, as has the ceviche, a South American dish made from raw fish cured in fresh citrus juices.

There are sharing platters, hot and cold tapas-style plates and main course options of market fish cooked fresh according to customer preference. Seafood lovers will be in their element, the less adventurous can enjoy more conventional dishes, such as croquettes or shrimp burger. Shellfish enthusiasts will want to compare the taste of oysters from different coastal areas, helped along by a glass of wine or champagne.

The fishmonger prices may be slightly higher than in supermarkets, but this is a reflection of the quality and freshness. "I challenge anyone to question the value for money once they've actually tasted the

fish," says Richard. Andy, a marine conservationist is also committed to cutting back on single use plastics which means that Fish Union carrier bags and packaging are plant based and compostable.

Most fish is sourced via Chapman's, a Kent fish supplier working with specialist fisheries all along the South Coast, including Rye and Hastings and as far as Newlyn and Brixham in the West Country.

Richard adds; "Unlike your average fish counter, we can tell you exactly where each piece of fish comes from. We even know the name of the boat and its skipper. The fish is all responsibly sourced and is in our shop within 24 hours of being caught."

Fish Union is open Tuesday to Saturday. Walk-ins are welcomed, although booking is advisable to avoid disappointment. Visit the website for opening times or to make a reservation. Follow Fish Union for recipe inspiration and seasonal promotions.

www.fishunion.co.uk

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