

# Ebb & Flow

Seafood, Straight-Up

BY RICH HIGGINS

What's old is new, and like a great Savoy cocktail, Ebb & Flow is so classic, it's hip. The straightforward fish house has been open for less than a month, but already it's got the self-sufficient, well-adjusted attitude of a restaurant that's been open for years. It relishes the classics and plies the age-old ideas of wholesome, fresh, and comfortable. Think seafood caught this morning; house-filtered tap water (still or bubbly); accessible beer and wine lists; natural lighting through big, breezy windows; and fresh flowers in the bathroom. Ebb & Flow embraces all these not to rub elbows with trendy restaurants, but just because they're good, timeless, unfussy ideas.

Vincent Schofield is the captain of the kitchen, at once confident and deferential. His pedigree includes time behind the stoves at Boulevard, but he'd rather talk about how much he learned fishing and cooking the day's catch at a B&B in Washington's San Juan Islands. At Boulevard, Schofield had learned how to cook fish in a fine dining kitchen; it took Puget Sound commercial fisherman (and B&B owner) Riley Starks to teach him how to catch a fish, how it lives, and how to honor it as food. He returned to San Francisco invigorated and ready to reacquaint San Franciscans with the city's robust history as a fishing town — all but forgotten as working waterfronts fall out of public favor, wild stocks are fished unsustainably, and aquaculture depletes the ocean for wild fishmeal to feed a handful of popular fish species.

Schofield and his staff are getting to know the fishermen and distributors who fish locally and sustainably. His goal is to learn from and develop ties with the fishermen who respect the seas as much as he does, and between discussing Ebb & Flow's dishes, he excitedly daydreams about bringing staff aboard boats like the Mr. Morgan for a day or two to learn to fish out of Half Moon Bay. Part of that thrill is to dine on



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the dock, bathed in the salt of the sea, and eat the sea's offering because it's as good as it gets. This is the cooking that Schofield embraces at Ebb & Flow: "straightforward, not complex."

His cooking is guided by "whatever tastes good," and it includes rustic, simple dishes that borrow loosely from his and his partners' backgrounds in California, Nova Scotia, and Italy.

My meal at Ebb & Flow began with one of the day's five specials, the ceviche (\$12). It dressed vibrant, rust-colored rock shrimp and supple halibut with lime juice, onion, and serrano pepper slices. The seafood was sublimely fresh and sweet. Too often a ceviche's lime juice is a puckering wallop, but at Ebb & Flow the lime was restrained, allowing the fish to shine through.

Another special, sardines on toast (\$10), was equally fantastic. Three large sardine fillets, grilled till charred and smoky on the outside, were still dense and moist on the inside. They lay atop a large slice of toasted Italian bread slathered with a bright salsa verde, piquant with lemon and parsley and unctuous with the rich sardine juices.

The seafood chowder with chorizo (\$4/\$6) was a great taste of the sea. Unlike so many overly thick chowders, this one's broth was a heady combination of milk, butter, and white wine that showcased the briny fish well. The dish was garnished with crumbled chorizo sausage, but unfortunately its smoky accent was largely lost because it had sunk to the bottom of the cup like scatterings of lost treasure.

Laid-back Americana is evident on Schofield's menu. My dining companion passed up the tempting fried petrale sole sandwich and fried-oyster poorboy in favor of the tuna cas-

serole (\$16). Shell pasta was smothered in a rich béchamel and baked with sweet peas and olive oil—poached albacore tuna. A side of peppercress in a vinaigrette with fried onion strips cut the richness nicely.

Alaskan halibut season had just opened the day before we dined there, and the specials board proudly featured a seared halibut fillet (\$22). It was a dish out of water, so to speak, as it showcased some of Schofield's more complex fine dining chops. The fillet was served nestled in a grilled radicchio half that was dressed in a rich vinaigrette and baked fingerling potatoes drizzled with salsa verde. Perched atop the fillet was a brochette of five grilled bay scallops — in all their tender, succulent, and sweet glory — and a healthy dollop of scallop *rémoulade*. It was a varied, decadent, and delicious dish, to be sure, but required me to abandon my laid-back fish-house reverie.

Dessert choices included a pear galette, orange olive oil cake, and chocolate Bundt cake, served with or without Bi-Rite ice cream from down the block. They sounded tasty, but after a meal of such great seafood, I didn't have much of a sweet tooth.

Ebb & Flow is the seafood restaurant that the Mission has been waiting for. It is rustic and unfussy, and its clean lines, airy interior, and hushed music effect a cool savvy. Schofield's dedication to top-quality seafood is evident in every dish, and it's nice to taste a history, and future, of great local seafood. 🐟

*Rich Higgins, brewmaster at San Francisco's Social Kitchen & Brewery, is also a foodie and a cicerone, pairing great beer and great food wherever he goes. Contact him at richhiggins.com.*