



June 2019

# FISH TALES<sup>TM</sup>

A Samuels Seafood Magazine



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# Spotlight

## Mexican Food Factory

Marlton, NJ

Mexican Food Factory -  
A Story of Tacos and Togetherness

by: Jessica Jewel Tyler



The name "Mexican Food Factory," to some, may conjure images of tacos on a conveyer belt, similar to the classic scene in "I Love Lucy" (with tacos instead of chocolates.) But at the Mexican Food Factory in Marlton, NJ, that's the furthest thing from the truth. The name today, speaks to the amount of hard work that happens in this building every day. For the past 40 years, the Sodaski family has run their restaurant by relying solely on experimentation, elbow grease, and most importantly each other.

Paul and Pamela Sodaski opened the Mexican Food Factory in 1979 when there were few other Mexican spots in the area. With that being said, the selection of authentic Mexican ingredients available was also lacking. But Pamela, who had grown up in California and even lived in Mexico for a while, longed for the cuisine of her youth and was ready to take a chance. That's when she and her husband, Paul, decided to open a Mexican restaurant where everything was made from scratch and as authentic as possible.

Turns out, the Sodaski's took "from scratch" very literally. A lot of the beautiful artwork that adorn the walls of the Mexican Food Factory, were hand painted by Pamela (such as the huge wooden sturgeon over one of the archways) or exhaustingly procured and refurbished by Paul. When the restaurant was about to open, the family bought old pews from a church and retrofitted them. Paul sawed each bench in half, by hand, to construct what are now almost 30 roomy, one-of-a-kind restaurant booths.

Each item on the wall also holds a unique quality and a bit of mystery to it, like the Aztec head statues overlooking the bar and the back room. These found their way to the restaurant from the commodore hotel, after overlooking New York City for the past 200 years. One unsolved mystery however, is the portrait next to the bar, featuring a young Pamela Sodaski holding the leash of an invisible dog.

Pamela was the chef for the first 35 years, but now the youngest son Taylor, holds this job with pride and continues in the same manner of using fresh ingredients and making items from scratch. In fact, the Mexican Food Factory fries their own chips, cuts their own produce, shreds their own cheese, and creates all their salsas, sauces, and salad dressings by hand. This

is because the family really cares about the quality of each ingredient. Take onions for example, this restaurant cuts 50 pounds of onions a week by hand. When they tried using machines, the blades would dull too quickly, causing the skin to bruise and the produce to taste less sweet. They decided then, that "by hand" is always better.

Mexican Food Factory's produce is actually grown in their own garden. There are quite a few peppers and herbs that are hard to find, in addition to their authentic Mexican heirloom tomatoes. Chef Taylor also excitedly spoke about his ghost peppers and his Mexican chilies. He says the Mexican chilies are similar to a red jalapeno and he uses them in a few dishes. His favorite is the Texas Gold Shrimp tacos. He dries and smokes the peppers and makes them into a jelly. When he sautés the Shrimp with the pepper jelly, it melts together and adds a wonderful succulence and spicy flavor to the dish.

You'll notice the Mexican Food Factory offers many seafood options that go beyond fish tacos. "You don't see much fish at your typical Mexican spot," said former fisherman, Paul Sodaski. He wanted to change that and represent the more coastal areas of Mexico. Of course they have a killer fish taco made with Mahi Mahi and a mango mint salsa, but they also offer a blackened Snapper, a grilled Salmon salad with honey serrano dressing, and a black pepper corn and ancho chili-crusted Tuna.

Chef Taylor says he's gotten a lot of inspiration from "crossing cultures." He has recently created Ahi Tuna poke nachos for the menu, combining a popular Hawaiian dish with a Mexican staple. Another great example is the New Zealand Mussels served with a cilantro sauce that has been thickened with almonds, similar to a Mexican pesto. This sauce also delightfully pairs with the sautéed Softshell Crabs.

Chef Taylor loves being in the kitchen and getting to experiment with fresh ingredients. He says it reminds him of his youth when he and his father would catch a fish and smoke it, while his mother and brother would prepare salsas and side dishes. They always competed to figure out which piece of the meal turned out best, but in the end, the "best" was the total result of what they made together.

## Employees of the Month



Luis Ramos, Orlando Transportation Manager, does everything possible to help the Orlando office grow, whether it's coming in for night shifts, helping the shipping office, or coaching his peers.

Laureano Vazquez-Avila, Philadelphia Driver, is currently running some of our longest, toughest routes and he's capable of handling whatever is thrown at him, wherever he goes.

Nick Anastasi, Philadelphia Dock Manager, is famous for doing everything from shucking and cutting, to packing trucks and making deliveries, and everything in between.

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# A Passion for Astan

By Jessica Jewel Tyler

The Astan family have been fishing pioneers since 1818. The founder, Max Astandoust's grandfather, started this legacy when he fell in love with seafood and the Caspian Sea. He then went on to invent the first modern technology for extracting Caviar. The Astan family continues this trailblazing with their innovative, new product: Astan Tuna. Providing chefs with some of the world's first traceable Tuna, Astan is here to shake up the seafood world with Tuna that comes with a reputation of quality, sustainability, and trust.

Today, their last name, Astandoust, further emphasizes this acclaim – "Doust," meaning passion, and "Astan," which relates to a Caspian Sea province, used together translates to "passionate fisherman." After 200 years, the Astan family knows excellence and continues to stake their famous name on the unsurpassed quality and freshness of their wild-caught Tuna.

This passion also comes through in how the fish are caught and how the business is run. The Astan family employs a single supply chain with full transparency protocol. By owning and operating all their own vessels and processing factories, Astan ensures that Astan Tuna is completely traceable and of the utmost quality.



This fully-integrated company also uses fair trade and labor practices, along with sustainable fishing practices like shorter long line catch methods. This method of catch uses a fraction of length on the long line for better control, meaning less by-catch and more pristine quality. In fact, they are Friend of the Sea Certified and produce zero unused by-catch. The company also prides itself on



attention to detail and a never-ending pursuit of supreme freshness. In most instances coming from hook to your plate in less than 72 hours, Astan Tuna is incredibly fresh with the succulent flavor and firm texture you expect from amazing, wild-caught Tuna. This Yellowfin Tuna is caught daily from the beautiful waters off Sri Lanka and graded using a rigorous inspection of unique characteristics and a meticulous eye for excellence. Astan Tuna Premium Gold Loins are then skillfully carved and prepared by artisan Tuna carvers. The loins are lastly, packed carefully in Astan's exclusive "BLOOM-Naturel" wrapping that naturally maintains the exceptional freshness, color, and amazing taste unique to Astan Premium Gold. After the loin has been graded, carved, and packed by hand, it will not be exposed to oxygen until you open it.

When ready to be served, Astan Tuna Loins simply need to be exposed to air for 45 minutes and they will "BLOOM" to their perfect, natural state just like they were when freshly caught. With every Astan Tuna purchase, you'll receive pristine Tuna wrapped in this exclusive technology, along with a golden certificate stating where, how, and when your Tuna was caught and processed, and the confidence in knowing you purchased the best tasting, most sustainable, and truly traceable Tuna.

Astan is making history in the world of Tuna. Increasingly restaurant customers want to know with certainty where their food is coming from and how it affects the world around us. Astan is at the forefront of the movement to provide these answers along with an immaculate, bright and beautifully red Yellowfin Tuna Loin that tastes impeccably delicious in any application.

## In The News...

by: Jessica Jewel Tyler

## Philadelphia Chefs Take a Bite Out of Childhood Hunger



Chef Nicholas Elmi, Top Chef winner, of Laurel, ITV and Royal Boucherie, hosted Philadelphia's annual Taste of the Nation event, on May 9th, to raise

money for the national campaign, "No Kid Hungry." As the chairman of the event, this is a cause he feels very strongly about. "I'm proud to partner with 'No Kid Hungry' for a fun evening that's serious about ending childhood hunger," quoted Chef Elmi. He went on to say that one in six children in America lives with hunger, including more than 1 in 8 in Pennsylvania.

Chef Elmi and over two dozen other chefs got to show off their skills on the beautiful rooftop that is South Philadelphia's Bok Bar, while guests enjoyed sweeping views of Philadelphia, craft cocktails, and small plates. All proceeds from ticket sales went to "No Kid Hungry" in efforts to create programs that help kids get access to the food they need. Congratulations on another amazing Philadelphia event and good luck on the rest of the events across the nation!

We also want to mention Philadelphia committee members, Kiki Aranita of Poi Dog, Pierre Calmels of Bibou, Jesse Ito of Royal Izakaya & Sushi, and Judy Ni and Andy Tessier of Baology. Other notable restaurants that participated were Abe Fisher, Amis, Andiaro, Barbuzzo, Cadence, Fond, Fork, Hardena, Lacroix, Lalo, Le Virtù, Musi, Noord, Nunu, Osteria, Res Ipsa, Saté Kampar, Spice Finch, Townsend, Vernick Food & Drink, Vetri Cucina, Walnut Street Café, Will BYOB/Forsythia, and plenty others.



# Think Outside the Shell: An Array of Shellfish for Po'boys

By Jessica Jewel Tyler



Oyster Po' Boy

There is no food as underrated as the sandwich. The sandwich is possibly the easiest, most versatile, and most universally liked meal in the nation. It's true, pretty much every culture has a sandwich unique to them, from the bahn mi, to the torta, to the Lobster roll. This summer, Samuels has all the delicious shellfish you need to make unique and tasty sandwiches your guests will crave.

Perhaps one of the most iconic sandwiches is the po' boy. Although this is a New Orleans staple, this sandwich is reaching new heights across the nation, where people are mixing up the fillings with all types of fried seafood, just in time for shellfish season.

The po' boy, once a roast beef sandwich, has an interesting origin story. The legend has it, that in the mid-1910s, Bennie and Clovis Martin worked as streetcar conductors in New Orleans before the brothers decided to open their own restaurant in 1922. It was called Martin Brothers' Coffee Stand and Restaurant, and they specialized in completely customized French loaf sandwiches. These slowly morphed into what we know as the po' boy around 1929, after a railway strike.

During the strike, thousands of streetcar workers went without a source of income and the Martin brothers wanted to show their support for others in the business. They wrote a letter to a local newspaper, stating that they would give a free meal to any out-of-work conductors. "Here comes another poor boy," became sort of a "call-to-arms," when a former worker would walk in expecting a satisfying meal. Thusly, the name "poor boy" and eventually "po' boy" became associated with the sandwich.

The sandwich was satisfying indeed. The Martin brothers worked with a baker to create a longer and fuller bread loaf and they utilized tougher cuts of beef by simmering them for hours to create a tender and very indulgent sandwich on the cheap. Today, the ingredients get more extravagant by the day with everything from bananas to gold flecks.

The po' boy has also gone through an evolution, for example in 1975, with the increased immigration from Vietnam, the bánh mì meshed with the po' boy to create sandwiches composed of Vietnamese ingredients like cilantro, cucumbers, and carrots, mixed with New Orleans staples like hot sausage and BBQ Shrimp.

People are doing cool things with po' boys especially now, and this summer, with Soft Shell season opening, we are in for a bevy of options. Whether made with classic lettuce and tomato or a unique slaw or roumalade, any shellfish on a po' boy is a winner. Take for example, our Conch, which are offered on special for the month of June. The sweet and slightly smoky flavor of Conch is amazing fried and paired with all your favorite sandwich fillings.

Other traditional options include fried Oysters and Clams. For your convenience, Samuels offers pre-shucked Virginia or West Coast Oysters, pre-breaded Oysters and Clams strips, and an array of fresh options. With Oysters, we have around 100 different varieties from Mexico, Canada, and all across the U.S.A. Keep your eyes open for our Oyster of the Evening on our Nightly Specials and our Monthly Special Oyster - this month it's the Chunu, which has a nice briny flavor with a medium, plump texture and a slight grassy finish. (Speaking of Oysters and Clams, right now is prime time for Manilas, Razor Clams, and Cockles. Talk to your Samuels Agent for more information.)

And you can never go wrong with a Shrimp po' boy. Texas Gold Shrimp are tasty brown Shrimp wild caught straight from the Gulf of Mexico. They offer lovely notes of richness and sweetness with a beautiful, consistent appearance that's truly as good as gold! New to our arsenal of Shrimp, we have Oishii White Shrimp, that made history as the first Shrimp to be processed live. Another new item is Agua Blanca white Shrimp that made major breakthroughs in sustainability by cleaning, sanitizing, and reusing their own water without causing extra stress on the ocean. Our Monthly specials also contain tons of Shrimp options for all your Shrimp sammies, whether they be buffalo Shrimp Po'boys or a classic Shrimp Roll.



Shrimp Po' Boy

We're on a roll with the Sandwich talk, so we'd also like to mention Lobster and Crab Rolls. On Special this month we have Live Lobsters, and King Crab Select Portions, just ripe for the pickin'! And as always we offer our exclusive Blu Crabmeat in several varieties with incredibly sweet and succulent taste and great texture. Don't forget about Dungeness, Jonah, and Maryland Crabs and Crabmeat- they're all in season right now! No matter the dish, Summer is a great season for shellfish and we have plenty of amazing options to choose from.

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# Enjoying the Summer Harvest with Astan Tuna

by Chef Anne Coll



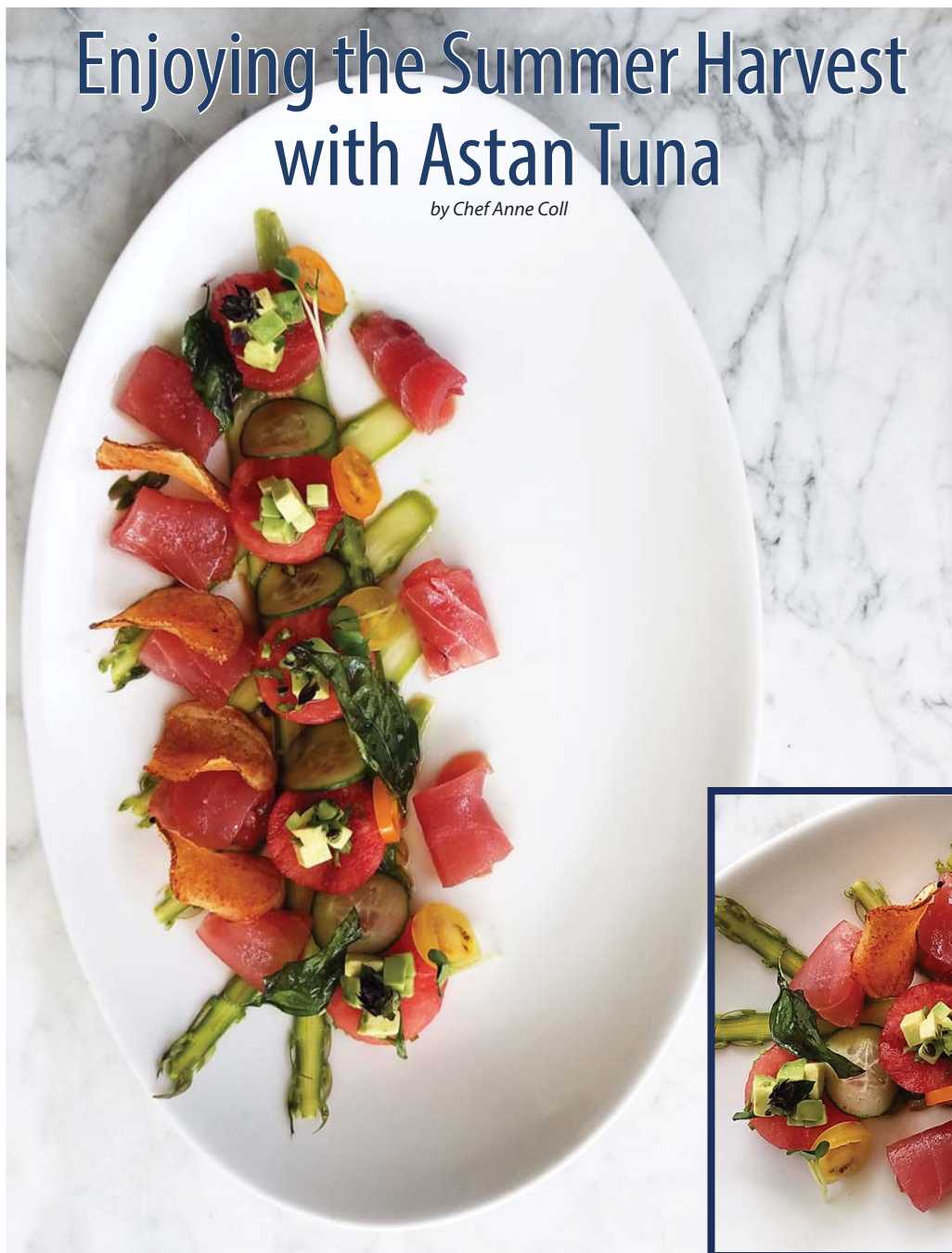
**Chef Anne Coll**

Questions or Comments?

Chef Anne will be happy to assist.

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Photos by: Josiah Andrews

Flowers are blooming, gardens are producing an abundance of great local produce, and nothing goes better with summer produce than Astan Tuna - the perfect summer protein that is great on the grill and even better served raw. Astan Tuna is a wild fish that is traceable, sustainable, and versatile enough to wow your guests as an appetizer or on the center of the plate. This versatile fish can easily be paired with many flavor profiles whether it is Asian, American, Latin, etc. Astan Tuna is a family-run company that has been around since the 1800's and they definitely know their Tuna.

Astan Tuna has a wonderful ruby color that blooms even more after being sliced. The supple flesh makes it a delight to eat raw. And since local produce is at its best, I like to pair Astan Tuna with compressed summer melon that is marinated in fish sauce, coriander, and lemongrass. The sweetness of the melon enhances the flavor and texture of this tasty fish. Shaved asparagus and pickled summer cucumbers also add crunch, texture, and color to the dish, making it a feast for your eyes and your palate. I like to thinly slice the Tuna so I can drape it on the plate around the vegetables and garnish it with herb blossoms like Thai basil or fennel flowers giving it an herbaceous edge. The Tuna gets dressed with sea salt, freshly ground pepper, and Santa Ines Extra Virgin Olive Oil. It is a great

summertime dish, light, refreshing, and perfect to enjoy outside in the fabulous summer weather.

Another great way to enjoy Astan Tuna is grilled on the BBQ. I love to pair it with a light basil or mint pesto. Nothing says summer like sweet white corn. A grilled corn salad with summer squash, heirloom tomatoes, lemon, and fresh herbs make a great accompaniment to the grilled Astan Tuna. I prefer the fish grilled to a nice rare to really appreciate the succulent flesh. This Tuna lends itself to so many possibilities and pairings especially with the abundance of great vegetables from the plethora of local farmers markets and roadside stands.

Astan Tuna is a superior Tuna product due to the traceability, sustainability, and the way in which the Tuna is caught. Generations of this family of fishmongers really ensure the quality of Astan Tuna. The versatility of the fish allows for so many different preparations with different flavor profiles. The summer months are a great time to prepare this striking red fish along with the lovely greenery of Summer. Whether it's a cooked or raw application, there are endless ways to prepare this superior Tuna.







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