

鲍你
喜欢



chilled pearl abalone with kombu sauce by Chef Martin Foo

Abalone

The moment the word abalone is mentioned in Asia, two aspects come to mind: the wealthy and the Chinese. The former because of the numbers attached to the price tags and the latter because of its value in the Chinese culture. There are various forms available on the market; fresh, frozen, canned or dried which each factor affecting the amount one pays. In a blind tasting session hosted at EMPRESS restaurant with Chef Ricky Leung; VLV's Chef Martin Foo; Chef Edward Chong of Peach Blossoms, Chef Teo Chin Hwa from Xin Cuisine and Chef Chung Lap Fai of Hua Ting, we fed the five Chinese cuisine chefs with eight abalones. Four canned versions, one alive and three in pouches. Later, we got the chefs to tell us their views on cooking with abalones.

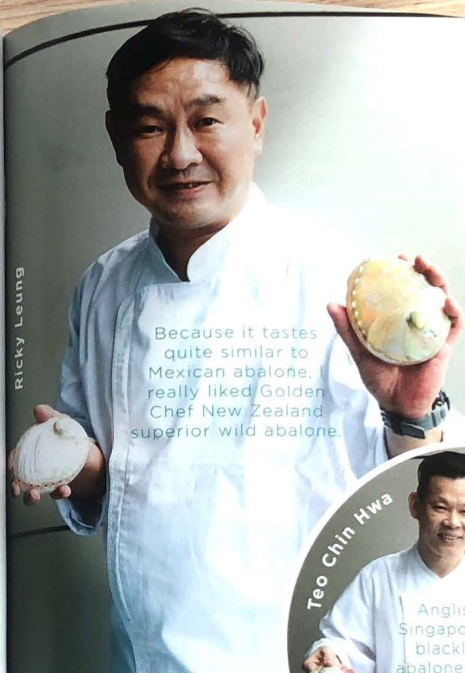
Nature Vs Nurture: An Abalone's Life

The only prized gastropod that lives in the sea is the abalone – which is really a sea snail. It is known by many names: haliotis, ormer by the British, pāua by New Zealanders, bao yu by the Chinese and awabi by the Japanese. With the exception of the Arctic and Antarctica, almost every continent holds some species in its waterbeds. Abalones tend to thrive in colder waters and are most commonly found in South Africa, New Zealand, Australia, Japan, China and some parts of America. Like the oysters, abalones breed by broadcasting their sperm and eggs through the holes in their shells. They spawn together after being triggered; increasing the likelihood of fertilisation. The fertilised eggs are known as veligers and will eventually settle down on flat substrates or stay hidden in narrow crevices. However, they are not protandric and can be identified by the colours of their sex organs: females have green reproductive organs and males, beige reproductive organs. Abalones feed off algae, primarily coralline algae and as they don't move around much, they depend on whatever algae grows in the area, directly affecting their growth. Abalones that are farmed will grow differently at different rates due to their surroundings and diets which in turn affects the way they taste and the shape as well as colours of their shells.

Price Points: Human Greed

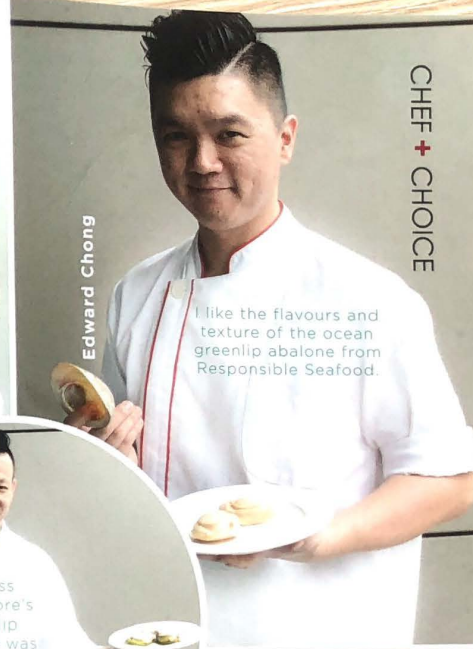
No one would think to pay for a snail, but the abalone industry is worth billions of dollars, some even uncounted for. For years, under the cover of the moon, divers would dive down in oceans around the world and pry the abalones from their homes. Most of which ends up smuggled to the East, bought by crime syndicates and corrupt businessmen. As contraband, these abalones are carried under false labels and are being traded by Chinese triads for chemicals used in drug production. Authorities have stepped in since then, and regulations have been tightened, but the damage has been done. There are many species of abalones that are almost poached to extinction. It'll take many more years before the stocks are replenished, so one must be vigilant and do their part to ensure that they are purchasing sustainable produce.

Ricky Leung



Because it tastes quite similar to Mexican abalone, I really liked Golden Chef New Zealand superior wild abalone.

Edward Chong



CHEF + CHOICE

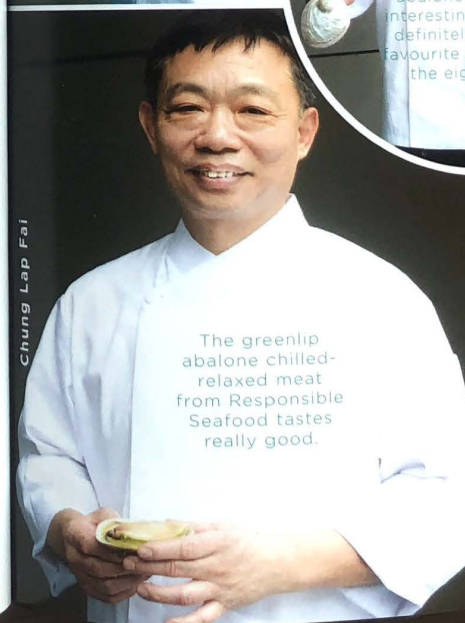
I like the flavours and texture of the ocean greenlip abalone from Responsible Seafood.

Teo Chin Hwa



Angliss Singapore's blacklip abalone was interesting and definitely my favourite out of the eight.

Chung Lap Fai



The greenlip abalone chilled-relaxed meat from Responsible Seafood tastes really good.

Martin Foo



The greenlip abalone in the cooked retort pouch with consommé is really nice.

鲍你喜欢



Haton Snow Tiger Abalone

A can carries five pieces of 'snow' white abalone. The abalone come from Australia and has a striking cream hue against the tones of most abalone. The meat itself is naturally white with some black stripes. After harvesting, these stripes are scrubbed off and the abalone is processed. It can be eaten straight out of the can or braised with thick sauces.

Golden Chef: Australian Baby Abalone

(FairPrice) Each can holds eight pieces of baby abalone. Harvested from the southern coasts of Australia, this species has an intense flavour and smooth texture as they are a hybrid between the blacklip (male) and greenlip (female). They are farmed in underwater sheds where the sea water is continuously cleaned and treated to remove wastes before being pumped back into the farms. They are then fed with protein-based pellets without genetically modified hormones for a minimum of three years. Once a suitable size is reached, they are harvested and are cooked with three flavour enhancers and kept with four acidity regulators as well as sulphites.



Tasting : Eight Abalones

Blacklip Abalone (Angliss Singapore)

The only live abalone of the tasting, this wild caught species is called *Haliotis rubra* and is endemic to the southern regions of Australia as well as Tasmania. These abalones thrive on low tides (about 40m) on rocky surfaces be it in exposed or sheltered waters. The adults tend to conceal themselves in fissures, caves or vertical flat surfaces while the younger ones hide under boulders. As they hardly move around (they tend to remain in a fixated spot unless there are weather issues), they feed on drift algae and kelp fronds that they can get within the vicinity. That means their size is relative to their habitat: the more food that comes their way, the more they eat. The shell also serves as a plating option with iridescent sea-green and red hues. The chefs recommend that all live abalones should be thoroughly scrubbed to remove grit and must be sliced as thinly as possible for it to be enjoyed sashimi style.



Chilled-relaxed Meat

This greenlip abalone comes in vacuum packs of three pieces each, weighing approximately 50g each, though options ranging up to 100g are available. Once harvested, a stringent yet natural process with no chemicals involved is used to relax the abalones, halting rigor mortis when they are pried from their shells – a crucial step to ensuring the meat remains tender. Because of this process, cooking methods are not limited to the traditional braising or slow-cooking. Instead, chefs can choose to serve the abalone sashimi style or stir-fry, grill or even roast without having to worry about resulting a tough rubbery taste.

Abalone Frozen Whole In Shell

For chefs who want to serve their dishes in 'mother-of-pearl' shells or want to cook using the viscera, this is another option. The algae, sponges and corals growing on the shells are physical manifestations that cannot be found on farmed abalone. The abductor muscles of these ocean grown abalones are more pronounced compared to the flat ones belonging to farmed abalone. The flavour profile tends to be on the sweeter, creamier side and the quick-freezing process declares it sashimi-grade. Average weight is 180g but can go up to 300g.

Cooked Retort Pouch With Consommé

Weighing about 150g with two pieces, these retort pouch abalones come with two pieces per pack. Thoroughly cleaned, the abalones are cooked with a pure abalone consommé and cooled down. They are then packaged in sterile retort pouches which functions the same way as canned goods without any chemicals.

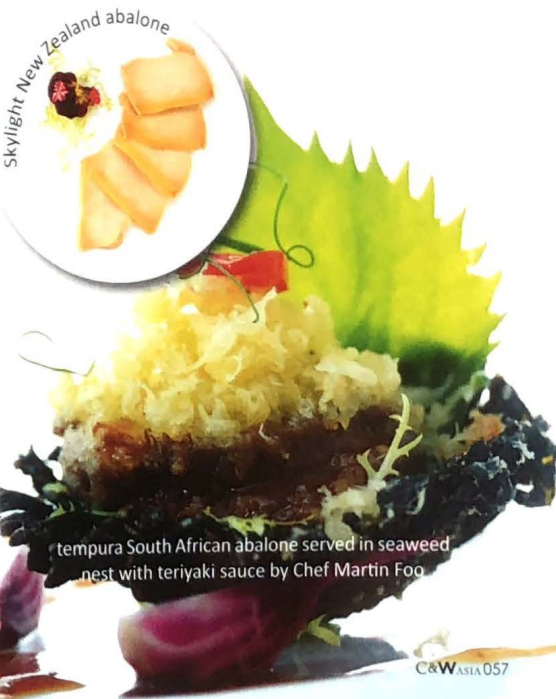
Ocean Greenlip Abalone (Responsible Seafood)

Endemic to Australia, the scientific name for this species is *Haliotis laevis*. The company Ocean Grown Abalone (OGA) has a patented reef modules called 'abitat'. As there are no rocks or suitable surfaces for the species to live on, these 'abitats' are made on land and carefully placed into the waters to construct lines of reefs within Flinders Bay, Augusta, where the Southern Ocean and Indian Ocean combine. Baby abalone that have been bred in captivity are raised for 18 months – an age when they're old enough to survive in the wild. They are then 'seeded' on the abitat reefs, feeding on drifting natural algae that are naturally present in the ocean till ready for harvesting.

Golden Chef: New Zealand Superior Wild Abalone

Sponsored by Singapore's celebrity chef Eric Teo, these adult abalones are wild caught from the waters of New Zealand. Each can contains one large abalone that has been cleaned and cooked with salt, water and a flavour enhancer. It is preserved with four antioxidants and sulphites. "I usually buy three cartons of these abalones during Chinese Lunar New Year," quips Chef Teo.

Skylight New Zealand abalone





double-boiled Buddha jumps over the wall in young coconut with South African abalone, fish maw, sea cucumber, dried scallop by Chef Ricky Leung



baked baby abalone tart by Chef Chung Lap Fai

Skylight New Zealand Abalone
Harvested off the waters of New Zealand, this abalone is known as Haliotis iris. Like most canned abalone, it has been cleaned and cooked with salt, sugar, flavour enhancers and preserved with antioxidants as well as sequestrants.

poached South African abalone with jelly fish & sake granite by Chef Chung Lap Fai

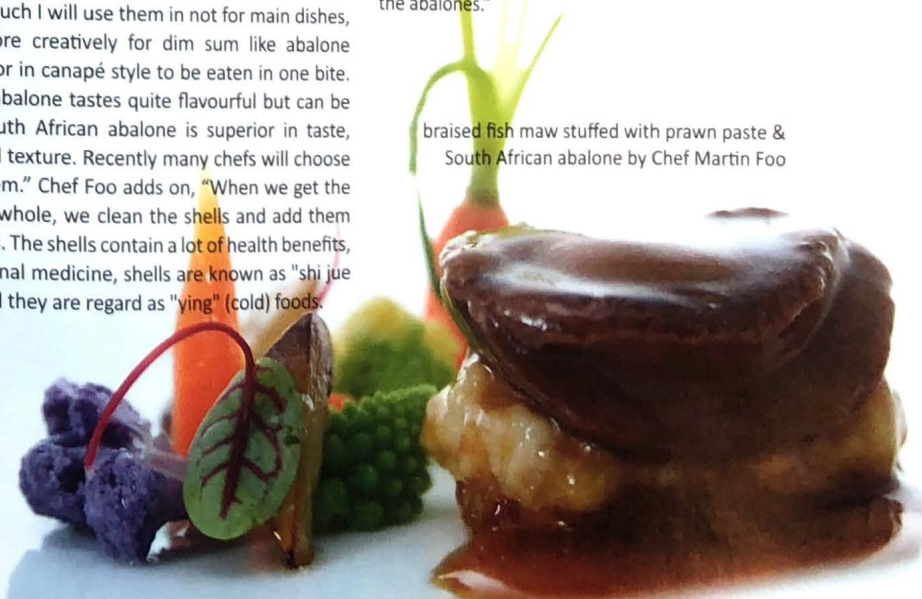


VLV: Chef Martin Foo quips, "You can eat fresh abalone, but with Chinese cuisine it's more common to use processed ones to cook. Processed abalones are clean out the impurities and boil till tender." He uses both South African abalone and baby abalone from China. "Abalone from China tends to be smaller in size as such I will use them in not for main dishes, rather more creatively for dim sum like abalone siew mai or in canapé style to be eaten in one bite. Mexican abalone tastes quite flavourful but can be costly. South African abalone is superior in taste, shape and texture. Recently many chefs will choose to use them." Chef Foo adds on, "When we get the abalones whole, we clean the shells and add them into soups. The shells contain a lot of health benefits, in traditional medicine, shells are known as "shi jue ming" and they are regard as "ying" (cold) foods.

Hua Ting, Orchard Hotel Singapore: In lieu with Hua Ting's re-opening, Chef Chung Lap Fai presents three abalone dishes from his newly re-vamped Cantonese menu; "I tend to use South African abalones as I feel the abalones have more flavour and the texture is just right; not too tough or too soft." He elaborates, "Cooking techniques are more or less the same, but it's a matter of flavour when working with abalones. For example, New Zealand abalones tend to be tougher, so longer cooking times are needed. The waters these abalones grow in ultimately affect the taste and texture. For sashimi-style dishes, fresh abalones are more flavourful. But otherwise, canned abalones are better to work with make a good sauce."

Xin Cuisine: Chef Teo Chin Hwa uses abalones from South Africa, Australia and China in his dishes. In a contemporary Cantonese setting, he serves three abalone dishes that uses hua diao jiu (Chinese rice wine) and fresh herbs. "South African abalone has a perfectly firm texture that complements Chinese cooking wines every well; whereas I find Australian abalone is softer and more suitable for soupy dishes. Chinese abalone sports a milder flavour and is great for stir-fried dishes." With regards to his preference of canned or fresh abalone, Chef Teo points out, "Canned abalone usually has a stronger flavour so they are suitable for dishes that require light cooking or are to be served chilled. But with fresh abalones, I think they're better for stir-fried dishes as the flavours are more subtle. I like poaching abalones as it preserves the original sweetness and texture of the abalones."

braised fish maw stuffed with prawn paste & South African abalone by Chef Martin Foo



「鲍你喜欢」

Peach Blossoms, Marina Mandarin Singapore: Pressure cooking the abalone for one of his dishes, Chef Edward Chong presents three his dishes with modern uptakes. "At Peach Blossoms, I include Western techniques and ingredients; presenting them with Cantonese flavours. Cheese and foie gras are not common ingredients used with abalones, but I think they work well together. For one dish, I focused on textures and made a 'cake' using layers of abalone and shrimp paste." He uses wild ocean-grown abalones from the coasts of Western Australia that are certified sustainable. "Depending on where they come from, each abalone is different in terms of taste and texture. I think it's important for a chef to ensure the products they use are sustainable."



pressure-cooked wild abalone with Japanese sake & kombu by Chef Edward Chong

braised South African abalone with chicken collagen by Chef Chung Lap Fai



Cuisine & Wine Asia would like to thank Chef Ricky Leung and the staff of EMPRESS restaurant for accommodating the group tasting. We also thank Angliss Singapore, Responsible Seafood, FairPrice and Chef Eric Teo for kindly sponsoring the abalones.

EMPRESS: Chef Ricky Leung served a coconut-soup dish using Australian abalone and two dishes using South African abalone. "I chose the Australian abalone for the soup as it has a milder flavour which complements rather than overpowers the fresh coconut. The firm yet chewy texture and more intense flavour of the South African abalone would be wasted in soup, which is why I chose to pair it with Iberico ham and white asparagus." Chef Leung also presents an unusual dessert using abalone, "Taking inspiration from a more Western-style of cooking, I mixed ham and honey for a sweet yet savoury taste profile for the abalone. It takes a lot of effort and skill to work with abalone, but the end results are always satisfying."
DD

CHEF + CHOICE

Chinese Cuisine By Chefs Mok Wan Lok, Ace Tan & David Lee

CHEF + RECIPE

Formerly from Hong Kong, **Chef Mok Wan Lok** (53), of Szechuan Court specialises in Sichuan dishes tempered with a Cantonese sensibility. "In Sichuan, the steamed fish would be more fiery, and oily," says Chef Mok of the steamed dragon tiger grouper. Tiger prawn, served with edamame, scallion, ginger, and pickled red chilli pepper, has a juiciness and sweetness which reminds one of the succulence of lobster. It is paired with bamboo leaf green tea from Mount Emei in Sichuan, named "Blue Lake" and "Drifting Snow". For the sweet and sour spare ribs, a pu-er which in the past was served only to royalty, and therefore named "Royal Court Pu-er", is served. The tannins of this tea, which is considered an antique in the eyes of collectors, help clear the palate between bites of the pork. Steamed tofu topped with a spicy mix of shredded chicken and jicama is a favourite among both the elderly and the young.

Having worked at several modern European restaurants, **Chef Ace Tan** (36), and **Chef David Lee** (24), of Ards decided to tell a story of flavours that mean something to them. An Asian staple, noodles, is reinvented, dressed in scents of yuzu and fungus. The dumpling that you'll encounter from Dragon Boat Festival is turned into a crusty morsel, served with a curry battered lotus chip. Their love for pearl barley resulted in a warm, Asian-flavoured dessert, made using the same technique that is used for cooking risotto. "If a guest has flown 12 hours across the world, I'd like to share a story with them, of the experiences that inspired me, and my food," says Chef Tan. "I hope that when they go back, they'll think of this as a memorable experience". QL

