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Are We On The Verge Of A Seafood Tower Revolution?

The future is now, and it comes with cocktail sauce

Oct 6, 2014 10:00 am

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Greg Hozinsky is pushing the limits of fruits de mer at The Strand House in Manhattan Beach.

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Nice restaurants around the world love serving **chilled seafood towers**. Why? They're a great way to pad the bill and are incredibly easy to assemble. Get some crushed ice, add shrimp, a few oysters, maybe half a lobster and voilà, *fruits de mer*. Chefs can send seafood towers out knowing that as long as the seafood is fresh, the guests will be happy — and guests can order them knowing that as long as the seafood is fresh, the chef can't fuck anything up. It's been like this for decades — centuries even — and there's been no sign of change coming... until now.

In today's chef-driven culinary world filled with innovative plating and seasonal ingredients, why do we still accept the same old boring seafood platter? That's the question being asked by Greg Hozinsky, executive chef of [The Strand House](#) in Manhattan Beach, California, where the classic seafood tower has been replaced by a three-tiered oceanic revolution. "I wouldn't say I was frustrated by the tradition, as much as I was excited about putting forth a fresh take on the seafood tower and pushing the envelope," says Hozinsky.

That means that you'll find freshly shucked Barnstable oysters on the bottom tier of the custom-made tower just like anywhere else, but you'll also find oyster shooters made with creamy bite-sized Kusshi oysters sitting in Hozinsky's "ginonette," a play on a traditional mignonette sauce with gin, champagne vinegar, pickled ramps, muddled cucumbers, lemon juice and a splash of soda. A tiny cocktail on a seafood platter? This *must* be the future.

The innovation doesn't stop there, though. Tier three is a study in contrast. On one side, you have a fresh Alaskan king crab leg served completely raw. On the other side, that same crab leg is served with the refined touch of a chef deft at combining pear, vadouvan, coconut and lime for a sort of East Indies meets West Indies crustacean mash-up. It's the perfect illustration of old school and new school, kind of like a seafood version of the *Back To The Future II* scene where 1985 Jennifer meets future Jennifer and freaks out.

While the oyster and crab tiers are both great, the middle level may be the best of all. It features a super-clean hamachi crudo dish with avocado, tomato seed vinaigrette and red Alaea sea salt from Hawaii. And though it's a wonderfully refreshing, composed bite, it doesn't come close to competing with the star of the entire tower: wagyu beef tartare under a blanket of Russian osetra caviar in a legit caviar tin complete with Mother of Pearl spoon. It's decadent in all the right ways and may just be the first beef tartare to wind up on ice in the company of Nemo's friends. That's the beauty of the seafood tower in 2014 — it doesn't have to follow the same conventions of all the platters that came before it. If the chef wants to throw in a caviar tin filled with beef tartare, why not?

One last exciting thing about the way Hozinsky has reimagined the tower is that it's ever-changing. He'll be constructing it the same way chefs create menus based on what's available at the farmers market and he's really excited about all of the possibilities: "I'm highlighting what is fresh, interesting and of the moment, even if it is only in season for a week or two." That means Maine cold water shrimp in January, super-sweet hand-dredged Nantucket Bay Scallops in early November, raw Norwegian Sterling Halibut, and his own take on escabeche. This is all to say that the Strand House Seafood Tower will be constantly evolving, just like the concept of the seafood tower itself. The future is now — and it comes with cocktail sauce.