



thefishguy

Meet the Chicago fishmonger who's showing
Midwesterners the joys of eating fresh fish—and check out
some of his favorite recipes for the catch of the day.

Written by PAM HENDERSON • Photographs by BOB STEFKO and ROBERT JACOBS

Dressed as if he just left his Michigan Avenue office, a young man marches down gritty North Elston Avenue on Chicago's northwest side. A baguette in one hand, a bottle of wine in the other and a determined look on his face, he strides past the auto repair shops and small manufacturers, heading for the building with the metal sailfish leaping from its roof. Seafood is on tonight's menu, and he needs help. He's come to see the Fish Guy.

Many come, from top chefs to seafood newbies looking for fresh fish and advice. Inside the Fish Guy Market waits Bill Dugan, standing behind cases of fresh salmon, perch and catfish. Bill presides over a wide selection (up to 600 species each year), specializing in little-known delicacies, regional fish, and catches harvested with an eye on the fish population's health.

Best of all for the seafood-shy, the Fish Guy offers help, such as his simple tri-mantra: "Keep it simple. Don't overcook. Fresh means flavor."

"He's done more to move the Midwest palate beyond pork and porterhouse than anyone in the food business," says John Coletta, head chef of the Rosemont restaurant Carlucci. "As a chef, he inspires me to be more creative. But his passion also touches the fishermen and farmers he buys from and spills over to the masses through his retail market."

Bill, who works in the shop six days a week, grew up around Boston's rich seafood markets and started his first fish business out of the back of a 1957 Rambler with his brother at age 17. During a stint on the West Coast, he forged an informal agreement with some of the San Francisco area's top chefs: If they would share their secrets of cooking seafood, he would share the results of his tireless searches for new fish.

"The ocean's vast," Bill says. "There are a lot of undiscovered things out there."

When a personal relationship drew him to Chicago in 1990, Bill began creating a

(Below, from left) Finfish & Vegetables in Papillote (recipes begin on page 1XX). Bill Dugan has provided creative seafood selections to Chicago for nearly 15 years. (Opposite) Lobster Gazpacho.



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(Above, from left) Grilled Fish With Moroccan Vinaigrette on Couscous. Bill advises a customer on the perfect dinner

world-class seafood market that shows Windy City residents the joys of feasting on fish.

"My calling is to make sure the simple pleasures of life—quality and taste—don't get away," says Bill, a large man with a deep laugh.

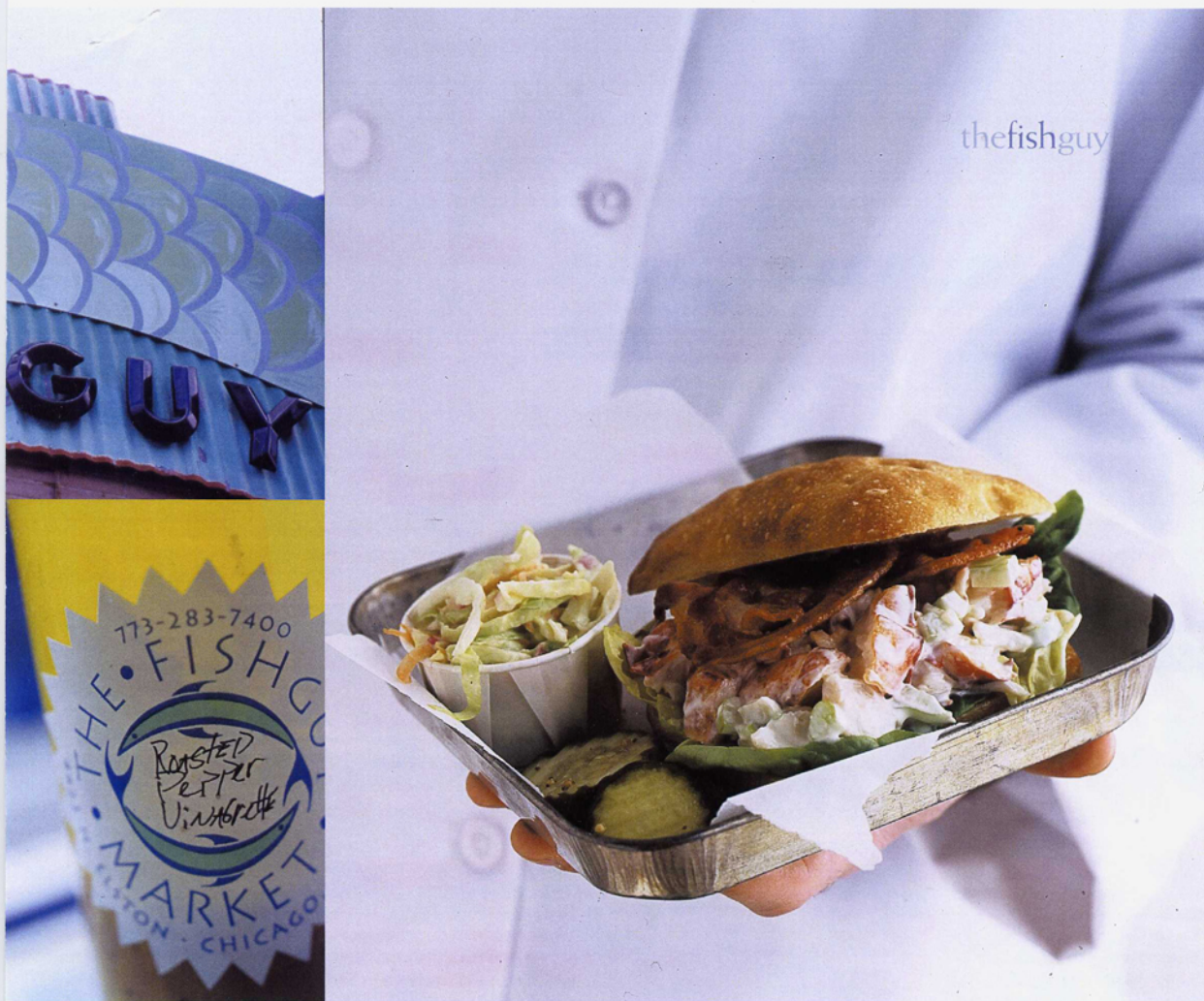
Behind the market's cases filled with seasonal catches, a copper pot bubbles with bouillabaisse, which is usually based on Midwestern fish such as walleye, bass, bluegill and whitefish. Nearby, one of the two in-house chefs chops cilantro and peppers to top a colorful salad featuring purple slices of octopus.

Bill labels regular customers his "afishianados" and encourages them to join his fish-buying club. These are folks who know exactly what to do

with Prince Edward Island mussels, and razor clams so special that they must be harvested at night by a certain phase of the moon.

But one of the Fish Guy's passions is coaching those shoppers who know fish only as food that comes square, breaded and deep-fried. At this market, cooking advice is part of every purchase. A visit to the shop reveals Bill's obvious knack for helping first-time customers embrace seafood.

"I know excellent cooks that remain intimidated by seafood," Bill says soothingly to those who look unsure around the unfamiliar offerings. He often drifts around the counter to answer questions about preparing sushi-grade tuna or choosing lobster pots (don't buy



choice and how to prepare it. The market's roasted pepper vinaigrette. Lobster Roll Salad Sandwich.

a huge one—boil a few lobsters at a time).

Bill's simple method of preparing fish is perfect for beginners: Sprinkle a fresh 4- to 5-ounce portion with salt, wrap in a parchment bag and steam in a vegetable steamer for 5 to 8 minutes. Serve with the au jus or a splash of vinaigrette. He also suggests baking delicate fish 15 minutes in a parchment bag with a hint of garlic. Grilling works great on meatier cuts such as salmon or tuna.

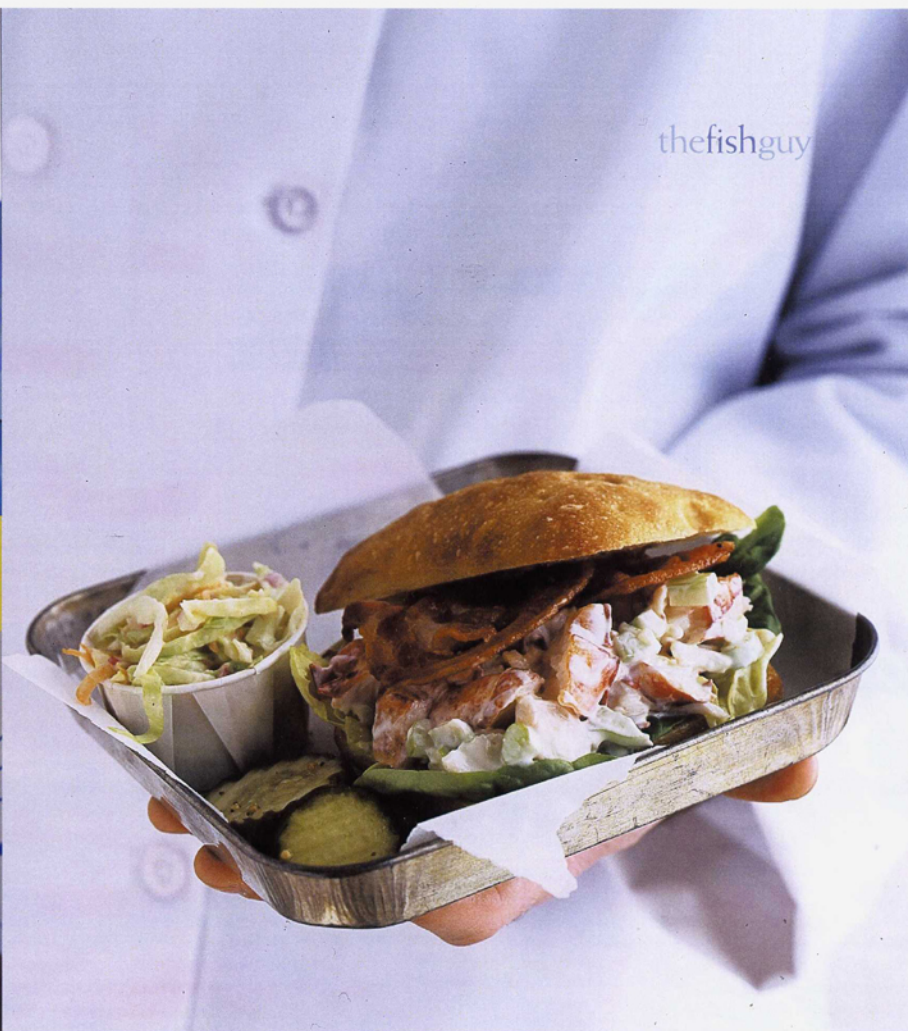
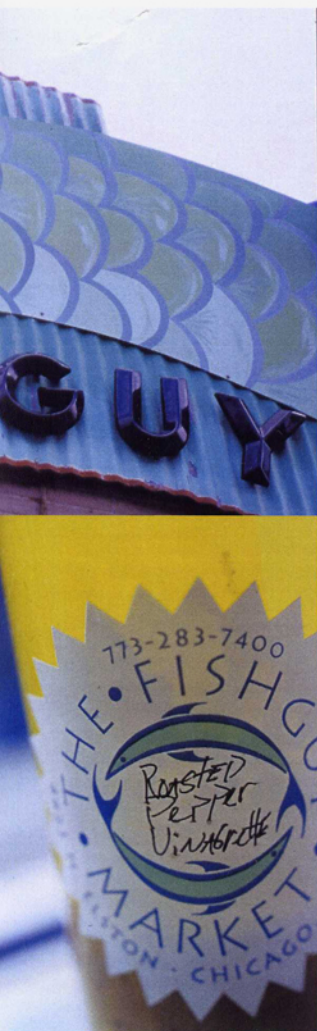
Well-known Chicago chefs come to teach monthly classes. The latest hot course: lessons from master sushi chefs, featuring products that even the best sushi bars don't know about yet.

For those who want the taste without the tutorial, the market also sells prepared foods,

including crab cakes, grilled calamari salad and Smoky Salmon Ravioli. Visitors on any given day may notice a sweet smoke wafting through the market. It's the scent of delicate skinless trout fillets, smoked over pecan wood. Bill suggests using them as appetizers with a fresh dill oil or processed into a delicate mousseline.

Bill's broad selection keeps pros like George Bumbaris, executive chef at Chicago's Ritz-Carlton Hotel, coming back for cutting-edge catches.

"He finds these amazing products for us, and when other purveyors start to catch on, he finds something else," George says. For example, the world's only certified organic grower of Atlantic salmon is in Scotland, and Bill carries the line.



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(Clockwise from above) Smoked Fish Spread. Checking out a fresh catch. The market's stuffed trout.

"There are many fish in the sea and so much to learn," Bill says. "I've been at it for 28 years, and I still learn new things every day."

He notes that some popular fish thought to be exotic are often found in Midwest waters and can be fresher and less expensive. For example, chinook and coho salmon, once confined to the West Coast, were introduced into the Great Lakes several years ago. "Freshwater salmon from the lakes is awesome," Bill says, although they're still unavailable on a commercial scale.

Lately Bill's been gushing about freshwater caviar from a third-generation Illinois fisherman.

"It's the freshest, best roe I've ever eaten," he says. "At \$160 per pound, I'd take it over

\$900-per-pound Iranian beluga any day."

When he buys any fish, Bill makes sure to get it in season. "The most sublime culinary experiences are those that last only a short while each year," he says. "It's nature's way of reminding us that everything should have a heritage."

The Fish Guy still personally selects every supplier for his store and insists on living within walking distance of the market to show his commitment to the local ideal.

"People seem amazed that a small store can access all this variety and quality," he says. "I just tell them that's what real fishmongers do." ■

For recipes, plus more information about the Fish Guy Market, see page 1XX.