

WASHINGTON LIFE

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SUMMER GLOW

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BIGGER FISH TO FRY

With fresh catches and ingredients sourced from Lebanon's coast, Chef Ali Bader launches a new culinary experience at Gerrard Street Kitchen

BY DARA KLATT

In the quaint coastal town of Saida, Lebanon, Chef Ali Bader grew up surrounded by the flavors of the sea. Now, after 30 years in the restaurant industry, learning from renowned chefs such as Michel Richard and currently serving at the helm of Gerrard Street Kitchen at The Darcy Hotel in Logan Circle, Chef Ali reclaims that hometown nostalgia, bringing a modern twist to traditional summer fish dishes with 'Fish Fridays.' Launched this month, the new menu for the patio features fresh dishes such as meze platter and fattoush, mediterranean spiced whole branzino and whole snapper, and desserts including pistachio baklava. We spoke to Chef Ali about the signature fish dish and the summer sentiment of his youth. >>



simplicity and complexity it offers. On one hand, fish has a delicate and subtle flavor that allows it to be a canvas for showcasing other ingredients. This versatility allows me to create dishes with a wide range of flavor profiles, from light and refreshing to bold and robust.

Fresh fish, whether grilled, baked, or prepared in various other ways, perfectly complements the lighter and fresher ingredients that are abundant during the summer months.

Can you tell us more about sourcing fish from the D.C. area?

One aspect I appreciate about sourcing fish closer to D.C. is the availability of local and seasonal options. It allows us to support local fishermen and showcase the freshness and diversity of seafood found in the nearby waters. Utilizing local ingredients promotes sustainability and strengthens

Tell us what 'Fish Fridays' brings to mind for you, personally.

It brings to mind fun days spent close to the beach and creating memories with my uncle while fishing. It evokes a sense of joy, relaxation, and the carefree spirit of those summer days. The abundance of seasonal ingredients, outdoor grilling, and the simplicity and freshness of summer dishes all contribute to the delightful experience of cooking and food.

the connection between our culinary offerings and the surrounding community.

However, it's important to note that the availability and variety of fish from closer to D.C. may not always match the range of flavors and species found in other regions. While there are delicious options locally, there may be certain characteristics or specific varieties that are more prevalent or highly sought-after in other parts of the world.

'Fish Fridays' certainly aren't new, but tell us more about your inspiration to launch it at on the patio at Gerrard Street Kitchen.

It is inspired by my childhood memories in a small fishing village by the beach in Saida. I wanted to bring a unique and authentic dining experience to DC, where patrons can share the joy of communal dining and indulge in fresh seafood.

How do you stay inspired in your cooking?

Exploring various culinary traditions and techniques allows me to bring a fresh and innovative perspective to the table. By immersing myself in different food cultures, I gain a deeper understanding of their unique flavors, ingredients, and cooking methods. This exposure sparks my creativity and inspires me to experiment and push the boundaries of traditional dishes. **WL**

The choice to source ingredients from Saida, Lebanon stems from my desire to create an authentic culinary experience that reflects my childhood memories and pays homage to the flavors of my hometown. The fish we use, such as branzino and snapper, is sourced directly from the wharf fish market in DC, known for its fresh and high-quality fish.

Is there anything different about your approach?

We innovate traditional fish dishes by slow cooking them on natural wood charcoal and grilling them in a fish basket with unique Lebanese spices and flavors. This approach enhances the smoky flavors and textures of the fish, creating a delightful culinary experience on our patio.

Describe what you love about cooking with seafood.

What I absolutely love about cooking with fish is the inherent balance of

CHEF ALI'S FAVORITE SUMMER DISHES

- Mezze Table:** Vibrant and flavorful Mediterranean small plates, such as hummus, tabbouleh, baba ghanoush, and stuffed grape leaves.
- Grilled Lamb, Octopus, and Shrimp:** Grilling brings out the best in these proteins, creating delicious charred and smoky notes.
- Watermelon Salad:** Juicy watermelon, crisp cucumbers, tangy feta cheese, and fresh mint provide a burst of sweetness and a cooling effect on hot days.
- Shawarma:** Marinated and slow-roasted meat, typically served in pita bread with a variety of toppings and sauces, offers a flavorful and filling option during summer gatherings.
- Chicken Meshwi:** Grilled chicken skewers marinated in aromatic spices, herbs, and citrus are juicy, tender, and packed with flavor, making them a popular choice for light and healthy meals.