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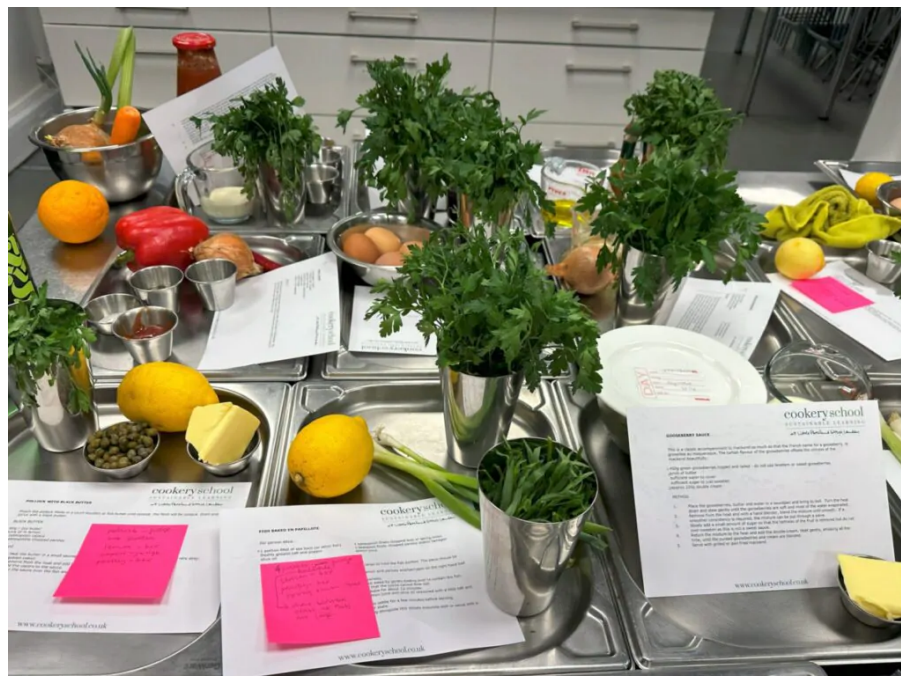
Ultimate fish and shellfish cookery course is a great catch

April 27, 2023 by [Madeleine Morrow](#) — [Leave a Comment](#)

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Sustainable Learning at the Cookery School at Little Portland Street

Invited to review the Cookery School at Little Portland Street in central London, I was intrigued to discover who my classmates would be on the Ultimate Fish and Shellfish day. Most had been gifted the opportunity and had travelled significant distances on a Saturday to be there. The most unusual response to the 'why did you come on the course' question came from a vegetarian who wanted to learn to eat fish. Talk about diving into the deep end...



The course at the Cookery School at Little Portland Street was both fun and intense. Within the space of five hours, we learned to cook so many dishes that my head was spinning. By the time we finished eating what we had prepared, my stomach was groaning. The Cookery School at Little Portland Street is a very well-oiled machine. A large kitchen table was packed with small stainless steel trays containing the mise-en-place for every dish and sauce to be taught and this facilitated the learning of more dishes than seemed possible in the allocated time. Most techniques were demonstrated and then participants had a go, while other dishes we observed being made. Recipes were provided for everything.

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John was a wonderful teacher, keeping us under firm and well-humoured control, along with endless patter and a stream of useful information. He had a Socratic method of teaching, asking us questions and encouraging further questions and discussion. This made me realise that although I know a fair amount about cooking and am a confident home cook, my knowledge has certain holes in it and John seemed to know just where those might be. Difference between a court bouillon and a sauce fumet? No, me neither. The best day to buy fresh fish? Tuesday as it turns out. From what to look for when buying fresh fish, to buying sustainable fish and then how to fillet it when you get it home along with a number of delicious methods of preparation, John had it all up his sleeve and made sure we had understood and memorised what he had taught. He was ably assisted by Michaela, who worked tirelessly throughout the day to keep the kitchen under control.



Arriving at 10 am at the Cookery School at Little Portland Street, the group of five students quickly coalesced to form a happy little team. We were served the daintiest of scones with raspberry jam along with tea and coffee while John quickly whisked up a batch of meringues for our pudding. I love watching professional chefs work, chattering away while multitasking on grilling, frying, and steaming dishes all while whipping up a gorgeous Hollandaise. For any of these tasks, I require a quiet kitchen and utmost concentration – woe betide the person who tries to speak to me.



After introducing us to the kitchen and how to use the knives safely, John discussed sustainability and sourcing fish which is something the Cookery School at Little Portland Street takes very seriously. I am sold on the idea of cooking with pollack which, to be honest, I haven't felt confident to do before despite it resembling cod in so many ways. Since John demonstrated several ways to cook pollack, I now have at least three new methods to hand. We also cooked another sustainable fish, mackerel – my least favourite fish on any menu – and while I will probably never be a convert to its full-bodied flavour, I do now know how to fillet one. Despite my antipathy to the humble mackerel, a creature that has done nothing to harm me – unlike squid, the ink of which has caused me several nights of horrible, allergic illness – I did enjoy the peppered, smoked mackerel pate that John demonstrated for us. He served it up as a mid-morning snack on crusty croutons.



We each had our own workstation where we filleted fish, shucked enormous scallops, cleaned mussels, got to grips with the insides of squid, chopped onions and herbs for sauces and salsas, and generally did the prep work for the actual cooking which took place thereafter. Once the cooking began, we were divided into two small teams and each cooked a number of dishes, demonstrating the methods learned to the rest of the group. Thus we all had a turn behind the stove or food processor whether that meant mixing, shaping and frying fish cakes or making lobster and prawn stock for the fish soup on a lobster bisque base. Other dishes were cooked by John – the grilled prawns and grilled mackerel, for example, or the calamari stewed in red wine, but we had all helped to prep the fish and shellfish and the ingredients for the accompanying sauces.



The menu was extensive and we all had our favourites. I found it helpful to leave with a number of dishes I can and will use for regular mid-week meals – fish cakes, fish en papillote and poached pollack in black butter, for example. Then there are more expensive items like scallops which I now not only know how to sauté perfectly, but also have an Asian sauce with which to dress and impress. Moules Mariniere is a dish I always make while on holidays at the coast but it could be a quick meal at home too. John showed us how to make two salsas – a stunning salsa verde which I will certainly be replicating often – and a spicier chilli sauce. Both are great with fish but are very versatile. The fish soup on a lobster bisque base is, as John pointed out, a dish for a weekend when you have more time in the kitchen. It was simply fabulous and I would have been very happy to eat this in a restaurant. As I would have with almost all the dishes we prepared.



Having kept us working hard and keeping the pace up, John made sure that we had 45 minutes at the end to sit at our workstations and enjoy the fruits of the sea – and our labours – along with a glass of white wine. We could eat as much as we wanted to and no one went hungry. The cherry on the top of an absolute feast was a big, blousy Mont Blanc – meringue, chestnut purée and cream. Whatever you do, don't make dinner plans after attending a cookery course at Little Portland Street Cookery School.



On the Ultimate Fish and Shellfish course at the Cookery School at Little Portland Street, we worked with mackerel, pollack, squid, clams, tiger prawns, mussels, and lobster. We learned how to fillet, poach, fry, steam, grill and stew. And then we ate it all. What a perfect way to spend five hours. And yes, the vegetarian went home having achieved a personal goal. The rest of us left with an armful of recipes to help improve our cooking and widen our horizons.

The Ultimate Fish and Shellfish Course costs £265. There are a wide range of courses to choose from.

[Cookery School at Little Portland Street](#)

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About Madeleine Morrow

Madeleine is a freelance journalist and writer for print and digital media. She focuses mainly on food and travel but with a lifelong love of the arts – especially visual arts, theatre and literature – she enjoys writing reviews for London Unattached. Madeleine