

# Western Wheel weekend

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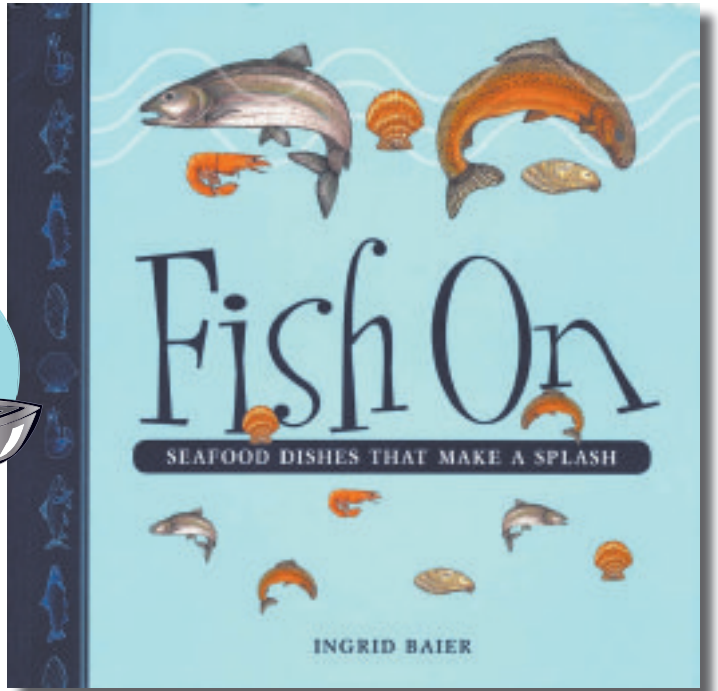
## Fine Fish

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# Weekend Food



## Woman's west coast childhood inspiration for splashy cookbook

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Photos by Jordan Verlage

A former RCMP officer, turned teacher stops playing by the rules when she steps in the kitchen. Actually, Okotoks cookbook author Ingrid Baier gives her students the same advice she tells people about cooking – think for yourself.

"I'm not saying totally wing it," she said. "Cooking is physics and chemistry. But sometimes we get to the point where we don't trust ourselves. Trust yourself. Go with what you like and if it's not what the food police say – oh well."

Baier calls herself an anti-foodie and turns her nose up at pretentious ingredients and kitchen gadgets.

"How many knives do we need?" she said. "We need big knife and a little knife and maybe a bread knife."

When it comes to what goes into the food, Baier also keeps it uncomplicated.

"Everything should be as simple as possible," she said.

Baier said she will work with what she has in the kitchen.

"I'm not sourcing esoteric ingredients like gold foil," she said. "I try to use what I have."

That being said, if you are preparing a dish from Baier's cookbook, *Fish On: Seafood Dishes That Make a Splash*, you may have to do some legwork. Baier suggests people source stores that sell wild fish and seafood, preferably from the west coast.

It may seem strange to see a seafood cookbook coming from landlocked Alberta. However like most prairie-dwellers, Baier is a transplant. She grew up on the northern tip of Vancouver Island and then made several moves around the west coast and on the island before relocating with her family to Okotoks.

"My dad used to take me fishing all the time," Baier recalled.

As she got older, Baier and her friends would head out on the ocean to fish and catch crab, she added.

"We learned by doing," she said. "People didn't worry as much and we were allowed to go out fishing at 16 or 17 by ourselves."



Dishes from Ingrid Baier's cookbook *Fish On* include grilled salmon with pineapple salsa (top), scallops sauteed in Grand Marnier and garlic (middle) and Thai curry mussels (left).



Ingrid Baier prepares pineapples for grilling at her Okotoks home. Baier's seafood cookbook titled "Fish On" has received critical acclaim and inspires creative seafood dishes at home.

While getting familiar with what the sea had to offer, Baier was also learning her way around the kitchen.

"My mom had a business so me and my sisters would cook," she said. "We would cook stews, spaghetti sauce, sometimes roast."

It was a task she learned to love.

***"Don't be afraid of seafood. There are a few basic rules and rules are often meant to be broken."***

*Ingrid Baier, author of Fish On*

"In my mid-20s I was experimenting," she said of her cooking journey. "Seven or eight years ago I started taking it to the next level."

It was three years ago Baier had an idea for a book. It would combine seafood recipes with tips on west coast fishing.

"I had just come back from a fishing trip that was a disaster trip," she said.

Trying to get her haul back to the prairies proved to be painful, she related, and the experience inspired her to make a guide to help others avoid the pitfalls of getting fish on a plane.

However, when she sent in a pitch to a publishing company, the response was they were more interested in Baier's culinary creations than her advice.

Thai curry mussels simmer in their own broth.



They were looking for a manuscript and Baier recalls panicking.

"I didn't respond for three days," she said, laughing. "I thought what was I going to do?"

It took three days in front of the computer to get a rough manuscript and in the end the publisher was impressed.

Baier's cookbook starts out with some of her kitchen philosophies, including keeping it simple

and not taking your food too seriously and she touches on sustainable fishing and eating practices. Although admittedly no expert on the fishing industry, Baier said she likes to encourage people to be thoughtful when buying and eating seafood and fish.

"I think it behooves us to cook mindfully and shop mindfully," she said.

What you do with your food after dinner is also important, said Baier.



Sauteed scallops in Grand Marnier and garlic accompany asparagus.

"I think it's dreadful when we kill an animal and it ends up in the trash," she said.

To that end, Baier's cookbook concludes with a chapter of recipes for leftovers.

The book also has cooking tips at the beginning of each chapter.

She said some people are intimidated by cooking seafood and her explanations at the beginning of each section give easy explanations of how to get the best results from your fish and seafood.

"Don't be afraid of seafood," she said. "There are a few basic rules and rules are often meant to be broken."

When it comes to fish, overcooking is often an issue, but some fish, like salmon and halibut, can be more forgiving, she said.

When it comes to shellfish, Baier said she prefers to cook them as humanely as possible. When she cooks crabs, she kills them first and then boils them.

For more tips on cooking seafood and fish from the west coast check out Baier's cookbook, *Fish On*, which can be found at Chapters stores in Calgary and on Amazon.com and will be signing copies of her book at the Okotoks Costco June 23 from 1 to 3 pm. Baier also blogs recipes and food thoughts from her blog: [food-forthought.blogspot.ca](http://food-forthought.blogspot.ca)