The spicy cioppino at Tadich Grill comes with crab and a few slices of butter-soaked garlic bread made from Boudin sourdough.

San Francisco's Fresh Catch

Cioppino, the old-school fisherman's stew, is sailing back.

by SERENA RENNER *photographs by* JAKE STANGEL

FOR 165 YEARS, Tadich Grill in San Francisco's financial district has operated at the same rhythm. Salmon sizzles under the broiler, white-jacketed bartenders stir and shake lunch-hour martinis, and servers hurry by with bowls of the restaurant's famous cioppino, a tomato-wine stew brimming with clams, mussels, shrimp, whitefish, and Dungeness crab.

With that much history under its belt, the cioppino is, understandably, delicious. The dish is also ubiquitous in San Francisco, having become as clichéd as Fisherman's Wharf, where nearly every eatery hawks a version. For the first five years I lived here, I avoided it entirely. But when I heard that Tadich was opening a second location in Washington, D.C., I realized it was time to discover cioppino before East Coasters beat me to it.

I started by meeting with chef Wil Going,

The original Tadich at 240 California Street

the Virginia native charged with re-creating the Tadich experience at its new D.C. location. He was in San Francisco to get schooled in coat-and-tie hospitality at the original Tadich, and to learn the restaurant's cioppino recipe, which dates back at least 50 years.

The original dish likely arrived in San Francisco in the mid-19th century.

"Cioppino has always been a part of my repertoire," Going says. "But I had to come here to archive this unique recipe, which has been passed down verbally from cook to cook."

The original dish likely arrived in San Francisco with Italian immigrants in the mid-19th century. At the end of each day, these fishermen, most of them from Genoa, would combine whatever seafood they couldn't sell with ingredients they had on deck, namely canned tomatoes and wine. Legend has it someone would walk around the docks calling for leftovers to throw into a communal cauldron. "Chip in, chip in," the Italian-accented solicitor would yell, which morphed into "chip-EE-no." Others say the soup is essentially the Genoese stew *ciuppin* but with such local ingredients as Dungeness crab.

Whatever the origins, the stew has endured—and for years it remained something you could only truly experience in San Francisco. That is, until Tadich announced its plans to build a grand corner bistro just down Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House, a big move for a restaurant with such strong ties to the Left Coast. Tadich, however, is no sellout on authenticity. The restaurant will regularly fly in a supply of Dungeness crab and specially baked Boudin sourdough.

While Going has been tasked with transferring cioppino to a new city, other Bay Area chefs are reviving it in creative ways. I inhale a

3 Cioppinos to Eat in San Francisco

1
ALIOTO'S
One of the oldest restaurants on Fisherman's Wharf, Alioto's still serves "Nonna Rose's Famous Cioppino." Dungeness crab from the restaurant's tanks is cracked live and the shell's 'butter' is immediately cooked into a buttery sauce.
aliotos.com

2
SCOMA'S
The broth for this Sicilian standby's cioppino has been made by the same cook, Weng, for 30 years. The seafood is now as sustainable as it comes, paired with such modern touches as wine on tap and barrel-aged cocktails.
scomas.com

3
TOWN HALL
A Southern restaurant with chandeliers and a blues sound track, Town Hall gives the seafood stew a Big Easy bent and pairs it with red pepper aioli-smeared grilled bread.
townhallsf.com

Find crab tours, a recipe, and more at afar.com/cioppino.

version at Town Hall that features Herbsaint liquor, fennel, Early Girl tomatoes, potatoes, and a deep-fried softshell crab. I discover the secret technique behind Alioto's cioppino. (See previous page.) And I pay a visit to Scoma's, another local stalwart that recently made waves by becoming 100 percent compliant with the Monterey Bay Aquarium's sustainable seafood program.

Yet it's Tadich that's introducing the classic cioppino to a new audience. A classic, it turns out, that has evolved: Going admits that the restaurant's recipe has more than 30 ingredients, including a few Asian components that he's forbidden to reveal.

"Cioppino is attributed to Italian immigrants, but this city is a definite melting pot of cultures," he says. And really, is there any better dish to absorb such changes? After all, Going says, "the whole origin of the dish is about chipping in." A

"At Tadich, the average age of the waiters is 70." Going says. "The guys who work here are serious about hospitality."