

# Cellar & Galley

A CHEF AND A MASTER SOMMELIER SERVE UP THE PERFECT PAIRINGS. **By ANDREW PARKINSON**



Chef  
James Howard  
M/Y LADY J

It's the morning of the annual chefs' competition at the Antigua Charter Yacht Show, and James Howard, first-time participant from the 142-foot (43.2-meter) Palmer Johnson *Lady J*, is as primed as a fuel pump at the Monaco Grand Prix. He's been ready for weeks, if not his whole life. The 30-year-old chef has a passion for perfection in cooking technique, and his submission to the judges was a lobster delicacy.

"I've been working out that dish in my mind for about a month now," Howard says. "I spent a great deal of time just with the cooking process, trying to find the exact temperature and timing where the lobster, at its cooking point, turns from translucent to opaque—the precise moment when you want to stop the cooking. I experimented at 45 degrees [Celsius] cooking it *sous vide* for half an hour. Then 50 degrees ... then 51 ... 52 ... I got to 55. At 56 to 57, it started to get too opaque, so 55 was the magic number. I'd say we went through about seven or eight lobsters. The crew was definitely loving me that day."

He's hoping the judges will love him too.

"They are used to seeing amazing dishes; you have to stand out," he says. "You're talking about a month's work—so much passion—on a plate."

Originally from Yorkshire, England, Howard became hooked on gastronomy during an apprenticeship in Cannes, France, at age 16. After a few seasons as a chef in the South of France, he participated in a cook-off in Monaco that landed him in the galley of a yacht, which he enjoyed.

But, as the story typically goes at that age, he had to go see about a girl.

"She was studying in Paris, and we went out to this little restaurant, and the food was terrible—the wine was fantastic, but the food was terrible," Howard says. "I was chatting with the owner over a couple of glasses of wine, and I told her what I could do with the menu. She said, 'Okay, let's do it.' So at 21, I'm suddenly the head chef of a restaurant in Paris."

After nearly three years of Howard stoking a reputation in the Paris foodie scene, the sea beckoned. He was young and curious about the world, and the charter lifestyle seemed a perfect fit.



## The Menu

SWORDFISH CARPACCIO  
WITH ANTIGUAN LIME  
AND SALICORNE

CHILEAN SEA BASS  
WITH CITRUS *BEURRE  
BLANC* AND GARLIC  
CHIVE PEARLS, PURPLE  
POTATO DILL MASH AND  
SEA FENNEL

WHITE CHOCOLATE  
MATCHA AND HIBISCUS  
ICE CREAM WITH  
PUMPKIN SEED AND  
HAZELNUT BRITTLE



### PRO TIP: HOW TO PREPARE PERFECT SCRAMBLED EGGS

In France, when you go for a chef job, the head chef will often have you make scrambled eggs. If you blow it, forget the interview—just pack your bags and go home. Salt draws the moisture out, so don't salt them until the end. And don't overcook them. When they're nearly opaque, take them off the heat and stir in a splash of *crème fraîche* to stop the cooking. —J.H.



"Moving around from place to place on a yacht, I get to play with more ingredients than with a land-based job," he says. "I love being able to modify the menu each week, depending on where we are. I'm constantly searching for new ingredients. If I see something interesting, I'll buy it and experiment with it. Traveling the world has its perks as well. I find it amazing that you go to Mexico and Thailand and they use many of the same ingredients, but how they use them is totally different."

Even in his free time, Howard says, he incessantly

marries flavors in his head. He imagines most of his creations and the way they will taste even before he procures the ingredients.

"I'm always waking up at night with ideas and jotting them down," he says. "For most of my menus, I'll open my fridges and brainstorm. On a boat, I'm alone in the galley a lot, so I've got loads of time to think—not just about the menu, but also the technique I can use to make it extraordinary."

For the tasting menu in this month's Cellar & Galley, he aimed to showcase that technique.

"Take the swordfish carpaccio, for example," he says. "Everyone knows swordfish is tough, so it's not typically thought of for a carpaccio, but in this particular cooking process, it actually really takes well to being cooked and tenderized in the acidity of lemon and lime."

Results of the chefs' competition were announced later in the week. While Howard didn't take home the trophy, he was right at the top in the scoring.

And his melt-in-your-mouth swordfish carpaccio was the best carpaccio I've ever had. I can only wonder what other surprises he must have in mind for future charter guests of *Lady J*.

For more information: [ladyjyachtcharters.com](http://ladyjyachtcharters.com)

## Master Sommelier Virginia Philip

There's nothing better than comfort food and wine at this time of year, and this menu is a great example of how to do comfort with panache.

The first course of swordfish carpaccio with Antiguan lime and salicornia calls for a crisp, refreshing white with lots of mineral and acidity. Cieck's Erbaluce di Caluso, Piedmont, Italy, 2016, will be a winner here. Erbaluce is an indigenous grape with all the right flavor components and textures to complement the marinated swordfish. Carpaccio preparations have such pure expressions of the ingredient, and the wine's bright acidity will cut through the fleshy meat and citrus notes. The minerality is perfect with the lime and salicornia herb, too.

The second course of Chilean sea bass with citrus *beurre blanc*, garlic chive pearls, purple potato dill mash and sea fennel requires a heavier white with riper stone fruits. La Conreria D'Scala Dei's Les Brugueres, Priorat Blanc, Spain, 2015, will be



### PRO TIP:

#### SHOP LOCAL

Always. Or grow your own vegetables. Sometime it's not easy. When I joined the boat, I brought some plants with me. The engineer said they would die. I was like, 'What do you mean they'll die?' The boat's windows had UV protection. They died. But still. —J.H.



### PRO TIP:

#### GOOGLE IT

There's so much good info for chefs on the Internet. Find some cool ingredients, and Google them for recipe ideas. —J.H.



### PRO TIP:

#### BUY A QUALITY KNIFE

I literally spend hours on my knives. I'm obsessed with keeping them sharp. They once got lost with my baggage when I was traveling to a job. Horrifying. —J.H.

perfect. This mouthful of a wine is a full-bodied, dry white from northern Spain that's made from 100 percent grenache blanc grapes. The Priorat region is mountainous and remote, and the vineyards are steep, with llicorella slate as the soil that radiates through the flavor of the wines. The Les Brugueres has aromas and flavors of pear, apricot and yellow apple, and notes of that slate, on the long finish. This elegant white is heavy enough to face off with the fish and has just enough weight not to overpower the sauce. There is also enough depth and complexity to balance out the garlic and sea fennel.

The dessert is a white chocolate matcha and hibiscus ice cream with a pumpkin seed and hazelnut brittle. Enjoy this sweet and savory dessert with Veuve Clicquot's Rich Champagne, France, NV. This sweeter-style demi-sec has tiny bubbles with just enough residual sugar to complement the ice cream. The effervescence dances all over your palate when you take a bite of the pumpkin seed and hazelnut brittle. 

*Virginia Philip is one of only just over 200 professionals worldwide to hold the title of Master Sommelier. Her discerning palate and encyclopedic knowledge also earned her the American Sommelier Association's title of 'Best Sommelier of the United States.' She owns Virginia Philip Wine Shop & Academy in West Palm Beach.*

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## The Wines

**2016 Cieck's Erbaluce di Caluso, Piedmont, Italy, \$21**

**2015 La Conreria D'Scala Dei's Les Brugueres, Priorat Blanc, Spain, \$32**

**Veuve Clicquot's Rich Champagne, France, NV, \$59**

