

when her boat comes in!

Gillian Reacord doesn't need to fish for compliments – her catch says it all.

Words **Bill Jenkins**

There was a time when buying fish was no big deal. In villages and towns a short trip down the road brought you to the local fishmonger. Not any more. The supermarket fish counter is the nearest most get to wet fish.

While this image of days gone by is certainly true in relation to the abundance of fishmongers, it is fair to say that many had a limited variety of fish on offer – cod, hake and haddock would be the staples with regional variations of skate wings, eels, huss made to look more appealing when sold as rock salmon, and – if you were lucky – the odd Dover sole.

While today's supermarket often does a good job in bringing a variety of fish to the customer (just a few years ago who would have thought we would be eating mahi mahi steaks with our chips?), it is invariably the independent fishmonger who delivers such delights as locally caught sea bass fresh from the boat.

As an island race it has always been a puzzle as to why our taste in fish has been so conservative. Why in the past we have often sold the best abroad, or, worse still, thrown it back because it simply won't sell?

But one fishmonger who thinks that the tide is changing is Gillian Reacord, who runs Gill's Plaice in the seaside town of Aberdyfi.

Chef-trained Gillian is a true champion of the quality fish caught off the Welsh coast. She buys as much of her fish as locally as possible, with one local boat fishing exclusively for her.



Her ambition is to get Welsh fish back on as many professional and home-based menus as possible. Her motto "if in doubt, throw it out!" goes a long way to explain her obsession with selling only the very best to her growing band of loyal customers.

While Gill's favourite fish is locally-caught sea bass, an unusual choice of many customers is weaver fish.

Prime fillets are prepared from boat-caught weaver. The fish will only be known to many people for all the wrong reasons. Small specimens lie on beaches covered with sand at low tide. For the unsuspecting bather who accidentally steps on them, poisonous spines on the fish's dorsal fin can inflict a nasty wound.

But it has proved a real hit with many of Gill's customers as do such treats as dressed lobster.



"The skill in preparing really good fresh fish and shellfish is to do as little as possible. Let the quality of the fish show through. You don't need heavy sauces and strong flavours when what you are about to eat is fresh."