

Northwest palate

FOOD, WINE & TRAVEL OF THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST

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GIFTS FROM THE SEA and Thalasso Therapy

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"You are looking at a very wild exotic garden," expounds Bernard, sweeping her arm to cover the entire coastline. "On the B.C. coast, we have over 500 varieties of edible seaweed. On this small stretch of coast from Whiffen Spit up to Port Renfrew, we estimate up to 300 varieties alone," she says, attributing this diversity to the cold, volatile influxes of water meeting at the southern tip of Vancouver Island.

A tall, no-nonsense woman with a deadpan sense of humor, Bernard operates Outer Coast Seaweeds, a hand-harvesting operation that supplies wild seaweed to the region's top restaurants and spas.

Bernard began to seriously consider a seaweed career in 1999. Bernard transformed this into a business that has won the attention of British Columbia's most innovative restaurants and spas. Among them are the Aerie Resort north of Victoria, Delta Ocean Point Resort in Victoria, The Four Season's in Whistler, and SpaUtopia in Vancouver.

The low tide has exposed a variety of seaweed and Bernard is quick to locate her favourites clinging to rocks in the shallow pools. Bernard's bucket is soon filled with wide fronds of brown Hedophyllum (sea cabbage) and sheets of dark green Laminaria and Porphyra. Clinging to the rocks are translucent sea lettuces which, when rinsed in the ocean and eaten with eyes closed, are a refreshing and subtle expression of the sea.

Seaweed offers a concentrated source of B Vitamins, as well as vitamins A,C,E, and K, iron, and trace minerals. In the early 1800's, European spas developed thalasso-therapy, which applies seaweed (and seawater) directly to the skin as a means of detoxifying and nourishing the body. Because the skin easily absorbs nutrients from the seaweed, practionners consider thalasso-therapy more efficient than vitamin and mineral supplements. In France, it is a recognized medical treatment for degenerative disorders, post-surgical recovery, weight loss, hit blood pressure, stress, and fatigue.

Vancouver Island Spas that offer Outer Coast Seaweeds Thalassotherapy programmes include The Aerie, Delta Ocean Pointe Resort and Spa, Sooke Harbour House, Kingfisher Oceanside Resort and Spa, Solana Day Spa, Cannon Beach Spa and others. **J.S.**