

Roasted Fish With Chenin Blanc

Chef Alfred Portale, Gotham Bar and Grill, New York

Alfred Portale, who last year crossed the quarter-century mark at his landmark Gotham Bar and Grill, sounds almost surprised when he says, "I still love cooking, especially at home, for guests."

He likes to get everyone involved, even if just a little, in the process: "Sharing is important. Invite guests to help in the kitchen or have them set the table. Anything I can serve tableside, I like to do."

This dish is perfect for entertaining: Roasting is somewhat forgiving with timing, and it is nearly one-dish cooking. Put bread, a salad and some wine on the table and you're set. Arrange the fish on a platter (or even present it the roasting pan), and have at it.

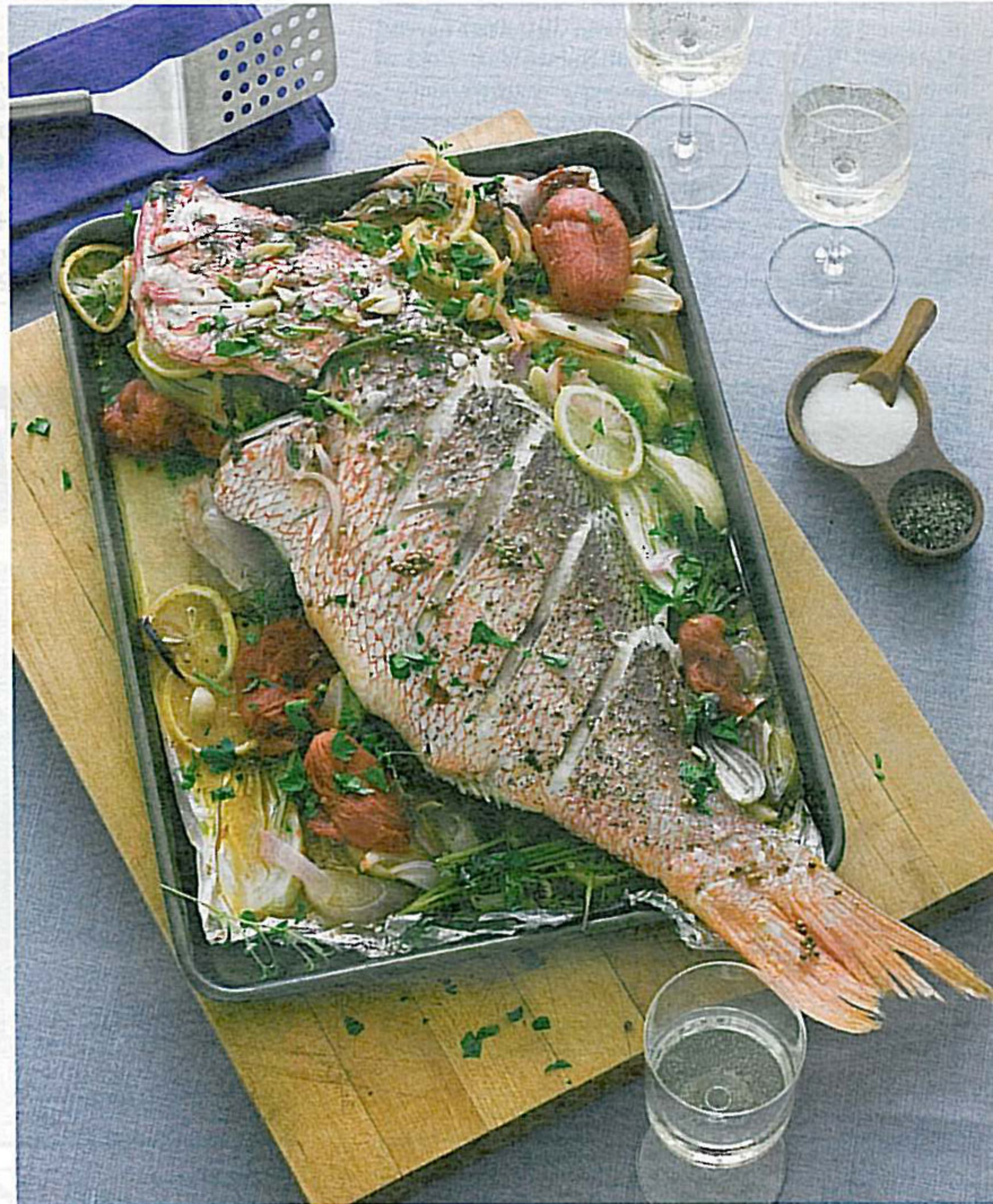
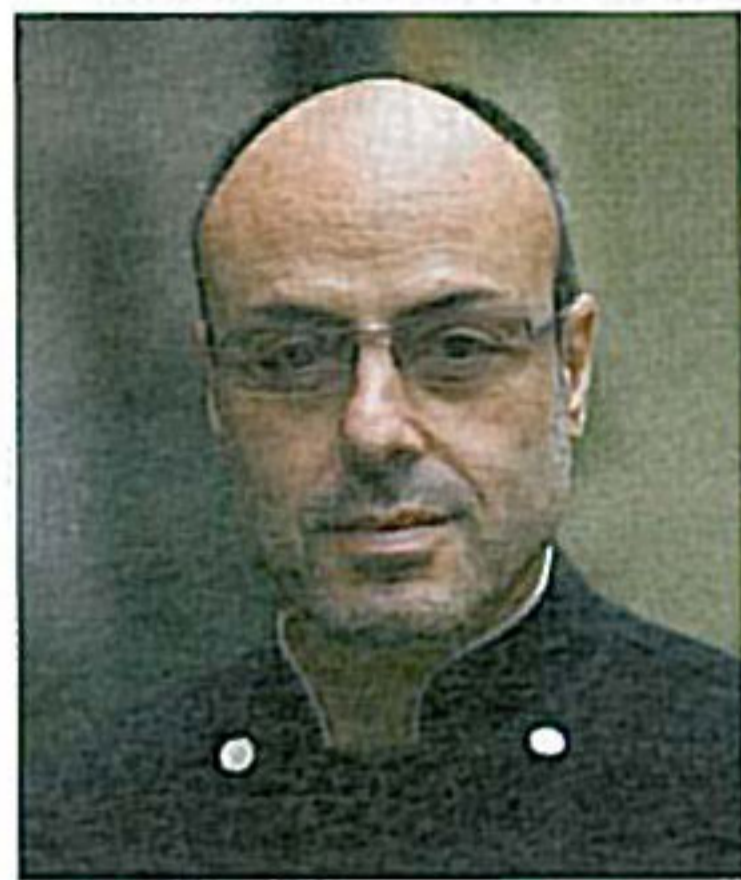
But for all this dish's apparent simplicity, its origins are not. Portale was one of the original poster boys of the New American movement in restaurants. He is somewhat shy of defining the term, saying, "You get a different definition from everyone you ask." But he does say that it basically means "American interpretation of classic cuisines."

He was classically trained, and worked as *commis* at the legendary Troisgros brothers' restaurant in Roanne, France. "My first week there, one of them dropped a whole fish at my station and told me to make a meal for the Troisgros family. I was horrified. Luckily, Michel [Troisgros] was there. He pulled me aside and proposed a simple approach, basically this dish." Portale has been making variations ever since.

For the wine, he plays to the tomatoes' acid and sweetness, reaching for a Long Island white with good acid and some lingering fruitiness. A subtle herbaceousness helps make the match, too. Chenin Blanc is underdog, and can be found from several regions around the world. Just be sure to look for high-summer versions with a fair amount of fruit.

Though Portale has avoided expansion, he has worked on television programs and written cookbooks. Currently, his only other restaurant is Gotham Steak, at the reopened historic Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami. Like this dish, it appears simple, and offers classics, perfectly made.

—Owen Dugan



CHEF'S PICK: Paumanok Chenin Blanc North Fork of Long Island Dry 2009

WINE SPECTATOR ALTERNATES:

Ken Forrester Chenin Blanc Stellenbosch 2009 (88, \$15)

Clos de Nouys Vouvray Sec 2009 (90, \$20)

TO MAKE THE FISH:

1 whole red snapper (about 6 pounds), cleaned and scaled

Coarse salt and freshly ground white pepper

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup shallots, thinly sliced

6 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

1 cup San Marzano tomatoes

1 small lemon, thinly sliced, seeds removed

1 tablespoon coarsely cracked coriander seeds

4 sprigs thyme

4 sprigs flat-leaf parsley, plus 2 tablespoons chopped for garnish

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1. Preheat the oven to 400° F. Lightly oil the bottom of a roasting pan (large enough to hold the whole fish).

2. Score the fish at least $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch deep. Season with salt and pepper. Place the fish in the pan and stuff about half of the shallots and garlic into the cavity.

3. Strew the tomatoes, lemon, remaining shallots and garlic, the coriander seeds, thyme and parsley sprigs over the fish. Drizzle with olive oil.

4. Cover with aluminum foil, and roast the fish for 35 to 40 minutes, until the fish is cooked.

5. Transfer the fish to a warmed serving platter. Pour the liquid from the roasting pan into a small saucepan. Taste and adjust flavor if necessary. Add herb garnish, and pour over fish.

Serves 4 to 6.

TO MAKE A ONE-DISH MEAL:

Portale likes to turn this dish into a meal by strewing potatoes and fennel under the fish. Follow the instructions for the fish, with the following additions:

1 large onion, thinly sliced (replaces the shallot)

6 to 10 garlic cloves, thinly sliced (replaces garlic)

Coarse salt and freshly ground white pepper

$\frac{3}{4}$ pound new potatoes, thinly sliced

1 head fennel, trimmed, quartered and thinly sliced (reserving fronds for garnish)

1. Make a bed of the sliced onion, fennel, half of the garlic and thyme sprigs. Season vegetables with salt and pepper. Add the remaining garlic to the vegetables that go on top of the fish.

2. Proceed with the main recipe.