

Fresh Catch, Local Table: Inside Marstang's Relationship with Ærø's Fishermen

The distance between the sea and the plate at Marstang Mad & Vin can be measured in kilometres. Sometimes in minutes. On the best days, the fish that appears in a guest's starter was still in the water that morning, brought ashore by the local fisherman who work the channels and shallows of the South Funen Archipelago, and collected by Marstang before the day's prep had even begun.

This is not a romantic story about the good old days. It is a practical description of how Marstang has operated — and it is made possible by a set of direct relationships between the restaurant and the island's fishing community that took time and genuine commitment to build.

Artisanal fishermen do not catch to order. They catch what the sea provides on any given day, in the quantities that their nets and their knowledge of local waters make possible. For a restaurant used to calling a wholesaler and specifying exactly which species it needs in what quantity and at what size, working with artisanal fishers requires a fundamental shift in approach. The kitchen must adapt to the catch, not the other way around.

At Marstang, this shift was built into the restaurant's DNA from the beginning. Because the menu changes weekly and is designed around whatever producers can supply, the kitchen is structurally prepared for uncertainty. When a fisherman arrives with a species that was not expected — a forgotten fish, in the full sense of the term — there is no panic, no refusal, no call to the backup wholesale supplier. There is a conversation about what was caught, how much there is, and what might be done with it. And then there is cooking.

'The fisherman here know things that no cookbook can teach you,' Ida says. 'They know which fish behave differently at different times of year, which ones are rich right now and which are lean, which ones the sea is full of this week because of the weather. When you start actually talking to them rather than just placing an order, you learn a completely different vocabulary for thinking about what you're cooking.'

This is the supply chain that the Forgotten Fish project wants to help build across Europe — not just on islands like Ærø, where geography makes it logical, but in coastal communities everywhere that have artisanal fishing traditions and restaurants willing to honour them. The relationship between Marstang and the fisherman is not a niche experiment. It is a proof of concept.

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