

## 17. Recipes from Finland

Most countries with a coastline can count a hundred or several hundred species of sea fish in their waters. Not so Finland, which has barely a dozen. The waters in the recesses of the Baltic, where Finland is, are so low in salinity that few sea fish can tolerate them. However, there is some compensation. Freshwater species can come out into and be caught in the sea. This is confusing for writers on seafood. Are they seafood or are they not? It suits me to include some of them here, so I have.

Baltic herring dominate the Finnish catch. Proportions by weight in a recent year were: Baltic herring 73; vendace 9; whitefish 3; sprat 1; salmon 0.7. Cod and flatfish are so few that they barely swim their way into the statistics. So, as in the other Baltic countries, the preparation of herring is an important part of the cuisine; and on some parts of the coast, as I mentioned on page 29, may be treated as a qualification for marriage. Aspiring brides no doubt swot up *Silakka*, a book containing 145 herring recipes and written, significantly, by a professor of theology.

Buying fish in Helsinki is a joy. The old-fashioned covered market by the port has stalls at which every kind of preserved fish and caviar can be bought. Outside, stretching across the head of the harbour, is an open-air market, blessed to have as backdrop the pistachio, apricot and mushroom colours of Engel's classical buildings and supplying with its own wares the touches of bright red and green which are needed to complete the scene. Statistics may show that relatively few salmon are caught, but last time I was there I saw more than I had ever seen before, laid out on stall after stall to be sliced up and packaged with free bunches of dill for the purchasers, who were numerous. Finns boggle less than most people at the idea of buying fresh salmon. Indeed, it used to be eaten *ad lib* in the north. It may be this familiarity which led to the discovery that the fins of a salmon, when removed, incorporate some rather succulent flesh; and that if the fins are grilled over charcoal they become not merely edible but delicious. This dish, Pariloidut Lohenevät, is a Finnish speciality.

It must be said that most Finnish cookery is hard to disentangle from Swedish cookery, not least because a substantial proportion of Finns are of Swedish origin and Swedish-speaking; or from that of Russia and the Baltic Republics. Thus Kalamureke (page 365) is a fish pudding which probably

reached Finland from Norway and Sweden; Kalakukko, the famous freshwater fish pasty from eastern Finland, is clearly related to the Russian Kulebyaka (page 348); and Rosolje, a Finnish herring salad, is very close to the Estonian dish described on page 357.

There is, however, no possibility that the visitor to Finland could be mistaken, whether travelling through the lake-filled countryside or eating in a city restaurant, about where he is. The Finnishness of things Finnish may be difficult to define, but it is remarkably easy to recognize.

### Caviar in Finland

The most comprehensive caviar-tasting which I have achieved was in Helsinki, at the Havis Amanda Seafood Restaurant, where I noted the following comparative prices (given in Finnish marks, valid for June 1976):

'Russian' (i.e. sturgeon) caviar	50
Smoked forel (trout) caviar	38/40
Vendace caviar	36
Whitefish caviar	about 32

It is interesting that the disparities should be so limited, but my tasting did not suggest that they should be wider.

Working from the bottom upwards, I tried the whitefish caviar first. The colour is a pleasant orange, the taste good but rather salty.

Vendace caviar is also orange in colour, but smaller in grain, since the vendace is a much smaller fish. It has a good taste and a pleasantly gritty texture. I was told that some people think it the best caviar of all; although still others prefer mateenmäti, burbot caviar eaten with the burbot liver, which is only in season from November to January.

The eggs of the forel (trout) are cold-smoked, separately from the fish, by a process which is still considered secret. They are large and distinct and glistening, bright orange in colour. The flavour is superlatively good. M. Catani, who manages the restaurant, told me that this product freezes well and can thus be available in perfect condition at any time of the year.

The Russian caviar was, of course, extremely good, but did not stand out as unquestionably the best.

All the caviar was served with sour cream and chopped raw onion. There was also a peppermill on the table. I thought that the sea trout caviar was so delicious by itself that it was a pity to add anything. M. Catani agreed, but said that it is excellent if served with thin toast or pancakes (blinis). I agreed with him that the vendace caviar benefited from the sour cream, which tended to diminish its salty taste, and from a discreet sprinkling of black pepper. I did not care for the raw onion with any of the caviar.

## Kalakeitto

*A simple Finnish fish soup*

serves six

fish, 1 kg (2 lb), cleaned and cut into pieces	milk (goat's if possible); 400 ml (2/3 pint)
salt, 1 tbs	chives, parsley and dill, finely chopped, 2 tbs
onions, 2, sliced	a little thyme
whole allspice, 8	butter, 2 tbs
new potatoes, 900 g (2 lb)	
flour, 2 tbs	

Bring 1¼ litre (2¼ pints) water to the boil with the salt, onions and allspice. Add soon afterwards the potatoes and let them cook for about 10 minutes; after which add the pieces of fish and, a few minutes later, the flour and milk (which must first be mixed together).

Let the soup go on boiling gently until the potatoes are fully cooked. Then add the remaining ingredients and your soup is ready.

## Suomalainen Lohikeitto

*Finnish salmon soup*

This has three invariable ingredients: salmon, potatoes and dill. The question whether milk should be added excites a certain amount of passion among Finns. I think that the soup is very good either way.

The Havis Amanda Seafood Restaurant in Helsinki makes the milkless kind thus. Take the head and tail of a salmon, and some narrow pieces from the flank. Cook these for 15 to 20 minutes with onions, carrots, black and white peppercorns and a bay leaf; then strain it, collect from the debris all the meat which you can find and cut this into bite-size pieces.

The quantity of potatoes should be about equal to the quantity of salmon. Cut them into small pieces and cook them in the strained broth until they are done. Shortly before they are ready, add some chopped leek.

When the potatoes are ready, put the pieces of salmon in with them, add chopped dill and serve.

Now for the version with milk. It so happened that I arrived in Finland to investigate salmon soup just after H.M. the Queen paid her state visit in 1976. I learned that she had gone up country to Jyväskylä, where she was served salmon soup in the forest; and that it was Mr Tarmo Salminen who had organized the 'kitchen in the forest' and made her soup. It is his directions (with quantities 'for one Queen and twenty-four others') which appear below. At this meal, the soup was treated in true Finnish style as the main course. After it came pancakes; and that was that.

fresh salmon, 1¼ kg (2¾ lb) meat, plus head and trimmings	potatoes, peeled, 1 kg (2 lb)
peppercorns, 8 black and 8 white	milk, 1½ litres (2½ pints)
whole allspice, 30	dill, chopped, 100 g (3½ oz)
onion, sliced, 100 g (3½ oz)	salt, as required
	butter, 1½ kg (3¼ lb)

The salmon stock should be prepared by adding the head, bones and trimmings of the fish to 3¼ litres (5½ pints) water, with the whole peppercorns, allspice and onion. Let all this simmer gently for 20 minutes, removing all scum, then strain it. You should have 3 litres (5 pints).

Cut the potatoes into 3 cm cubes and bring them quickly to the boil, to remove excess starch. Drain them and add them to the stock. Cut the salmon into 4 cm pieces, free of skin, and add these too.

Bring the milk just to the boil. When the potatoes are half cooked, add the milk and remaining ingredients. Correct the seasoning and cook for another 10 minutes. You will have 5 litres (8 pints) of soup.

## Savustettu Siika ja Muhennetut Korvasieni

### *Smoked whitefish with morels*

This is a simple recipe from the Havis Amanda Restaurant, where they prepare it just as one would at home, using a small Swedish fish-smoking box (see page 262). Remember, in this dish the smoking is the cooking.

Clean your whitefish, but do not scale it. Put lots of rock salt in the gut cavity, with a generous amount of fresh dill.

Have your smoking box ready, using hickory sawdust if possible. Put the fish in and keep it over a high heat for a few minutes, then over a lower heat until it has been smoked for 15 to 20 minutes, according to size.

Finland is rich in edible fungi and the morels (*Morchella esculenta*) are among the best. However, they need to be treated with caution if bought fresh, since it is necessary to boil them for 10 minutes before proceeding to do anything else. (If tinned or dried morels are used, this precaution is unnecessary.) Having boiled the morels, rinse them in cold running water, squeeze out the water and cut them into manageable pieces. Put these in a clean dry pan and heat them gently to banish the last traces of moisture. Then put some butter in the pan with them, adding a little minced onion. When the onion has turned golden, add enough cream to turn the morel mixture into a sauce, let it come to the boil and then simmer for 3 minutes. Finally, add a little salt and white pepper.

The smoked whitefish, which is firm and succulent inside and beautifully 'caramelized' outside, is served with the morel sauce, with the usual delicious Finnish potatoes and the usual fragrant Finnish dill.