

for example, uses icy deep water to hold lobsters that they fly in from Maine, nurse to optimal strength and size, and then distribute throughout Hawaii and across the Pacific. Big Island Abalone runs a 10-acre aquafarm to raise Japanese northern abalone for markets in the United States, Japan, and Canada. Other operations raise black cod, sea vegetables, a Japanese flounder called *hirame*, and cold-water oysters. One company has a nursery for *kampachi*, a tuna-like yellowtail, which it raises just offshore.

“Almost every self-respecting restaurant on the island, and on Oahu, too, uses fish from NELHA now,” Babian

says. “We bought the first aquaculture products and the operators would ask us, ‘What else would you like to see?’ And we told them. The *kampachi* is just an incredible success story—one of the most versatile and delicious fish in the sea. Now they’re working on farming giant grouper.”

At the Four Seasons, Babian also started Saturday-night farm-to-table dinners that he would personally cook at a table-side kitchen. Since his departure, Nick Mastrascusa, the executive sous-chef, has taken over the theatrics. Mastrascusa and another chef spend Saturday mornings foraging at

the two Waimea farmers’ markets for foods with fleeting seasonality, like raw *ōhi‘a le hua* honey that might be caramelized to top a chocolate tart made with locally grown cacao. They will likely buy freshly dug ginger, turmeric, and galangal for a Big Island curry to accompany steamed mussels. Chances are, they will run into Babian as he scores a few perfect strawberry mangoes or some pristine greens for his Kekela Farms market salad. ☐

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