

SUPPER

HOTEL FOOD & DRINK







Big Fish to Fry

Award-winning Swedish chef **Frida Ronge** is using her unique blend of Nordic-Japanese cooking to champion local produce, sustainability and the way we think about seaweed.

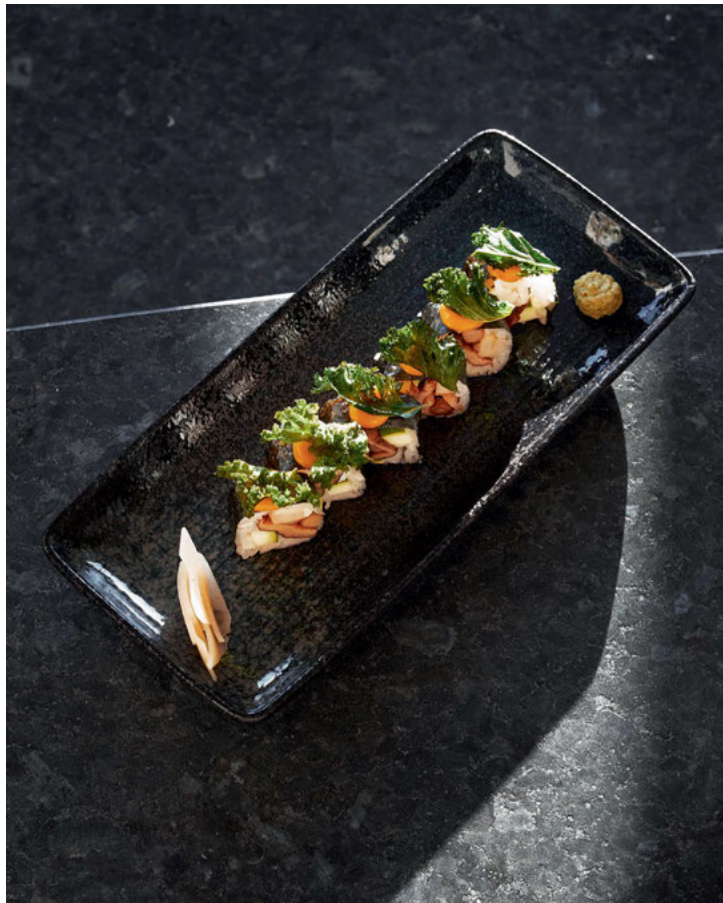
Words: Lauren Ho • Photography: © Lars Petter Petterson (unless otherwise stated)

Born and raised in Gothenburg, Sweden, Frida Ronge is about as un-Japanese as you can get. But a slow-burning fascination with the Asian nation's cuisine has developed into a distinct style of fusion cooking, earning the dynamic 37-year-old a place among Sweden's top chefs. "I love flavours from Japan and always feel good after eating Japanese food," says Ronge passionately, speaking from the rooftop restaurant at Sommerro, a newly minted hotel that has just launched in Oslo. "I get inspired by eating out, meeting people, seeing pictures of food that looks good, scents and other chefs. David Chang, the founder of the Momofuku restaurant group, is a favourite, as is Josh Niland, the chef and restaurateur behind Saint Peter in Sydney. He is so humble in everything he does and the way he treats fish is the best I have ever seen."

It was 16 years ago while working as a young chef at Sälens Högfjällshotell, a resort in Western Sweden, that Ronge – the daughter of a fisherman – began to question why she

was preparing sushi using vacuum-packed fish imported from Japan. Later, as Chef de Cuisine at Råkultur, a now-shuttered modern sushi joint in Stockholm, she found herself in a position to fuel her obsession with sustainability and took the initiative of sourcing fish from Nordic waters. A first for the city, the move was such a big hit that it kick-started her unique culinary style. The rest, as they say, is history.

Since then – after a few stints of working in Japan, where she honed her skills – Ronge has won numerous awards, including a silver medal at the Seven Sushi Samurai World Championships in 2009 and the White Guide Rising Star of the Year in 2013. She is the author of a handful of cookbooks and the driving force behind several sustainable eating initiatives. She also serves as an ambassador for various public health and sustainability causes such as the Hunger Project, a non-profit organisation that works to eliminate hunger and poverty, and the Marine Stewardship Council. Following the success of vRå, the Nordic-Japanese restaurant she opened in Gothenburg's Clarion Hotel



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Post in 2012, she is now the Culinary Director at Stockholm’s acclaimed eateries Tak and Unn. The latter is an intimate and exclusive teppanyaki spot, while Tak is Ronge’s signature restaurant that has been turning heads since it opened in 2017, thanks to its bold Japanese flavours and its use of fresh, sustainable Nordic ingredients.

It’s been such a hit that Sommerro – part of Nordic Hotels & Resorts – has joined forces with Ronge to open a second Tak outpost on its rooftop. “I am proud to call myself Frida’s first fan,” says Petter Stordalen, owner of parent company Nordic Choice Hotels. “From the time I appointed her to helm vRÅ at the Clarion Post in Gothenburg, I could tell she wanted to create something extraordinary with completely free rein. At Tak Stockholm, she combines magic on a plate with an informal atmosphere, and I look forward to giving people a taste of Tak in Oslo.”

Ronge, with typical enthusiasm, adds: “Sommerro is a fantastic destination in itself and as the only rooftop restaurant in the city, Tak Oslo will be one of the new spots to be. I think our Nordic-Japanese concept will offer a new type of interesting food to Norway and I hope we reach as wide an audience here as we have in Stockholm.”

Occupying the former headquarters of Oslo Lysverker – the city’s original electrical company – Sommerro’s opening marks the rebirth of a 1930s functionalist and Art Deco landmark in Frogner, one of the capital’s oldest neighbourhoods, where elegant 18th-century buildings fill peaceful, leafy tree-lined streets. Against breathtaking city views, Tak can be found on the top two floors of the hotel in a new circular extension designed by LPO Architects and inspired by the curved

shapes common at the time. The main restaurant sits on level eight, with Izakaya, a casual bar accessible via a sweeping staircase, located on the floor below.

Here, alongside sake by the glass and Japanese inspired cocktails – like the Tak Negroni made with Roku gin, fermented pineapple Campari, vermouth and blood orange sake – Ronge serves up a tasty offering of Japanese comfort food snacks and street food. The menu is filled with crowd-pleasers including a selection of fresh sushi and sashimi made using Norwegian fish, a deep-fried pork katsu sando sandwich with cabbage and cheddar cheese, and a soba noodle salad with marinated wakame from the Norwegian archipelago of Lofoten. “The point here,” says Ronge, “is for people to drop by for a drink and if they want some food, they can order a selection of small bites to share.”

Upstairs, against floor-to-ceiling windows that frame city views and shed light onto elegant interiors by New York and London-based firm Grecodeco, Ronge has given her distinct culinary concept a native twist. As such, diners can expect dishes like Norwegian boknafisk sashimi, served with potato, horseradish, trout roe, dill, shiso and a drizzling of brown butter and soy sauce, as well as Norwegian scallop tartare with cucumber, jalapeño, sesame soy and yuzu dressing. There is fresh Nordic sashimi made using local fish like Arctic char and served with house-made pickled swede – sourced from a local farm – instead of ginger, and for dessert, brunost cheese-flavoured ice cream with a white miso, caramel and yuzu sauce. “I love to look into the history of food in each country I am visiting, and Norway has some really unique products like Törfisk and brunost – a local cheese –

alongside the best fish in the world and great quality seaweed,” says Ronge.

Passionate about seaweed – both its health benefits and “the amazing umami flavours it adds to food” – Ronge, who also says she wants to inspire people to eat more of it, has partnered with Lofoten Seaweed, a local company that sustainably wild harvests seaweed from the Arctic waters of Lofoten. Not only does the organisation provide all of the seaweed used at Tak Oslo; she has also incorporated it into a vegan Nordic-Japanese furikake. Using handpicked wild seaweed from North Norway, mixed with sesame seeds and flavoured with plums and puffed rice, the Tak furikake is the perfect topping for anything from rice to salads, mashed potatoes, or in a sandwich. “I love to work with passionate people and it’s clear that Angelita and Tamara – the founders of Lofoten Seaweed – love the ocean, sustainability and nutrition, which is a perfect match with my vision,” says Frida. “We don’t know much about seaweed in Norway, but in Japan it’s a

base ingredient so I understand the power of it as a superfood.”

Lofoten Seaweed is just one of the many local producers that Ronge has gone out of her way to source. Her collaboration with Sommerro is a smart move that not only further boosts Oslo’s already thriving culinary scene, but sets a new standard for a city that is ready to shine on the world stage.

As for what’s next, Ronge wants to continue to champion sustainability and to learn more about the future of food. “I’d like to encourage people to think in a new way, to cook great food involving new ingredients and produce with no waste,” she says. She also plans on creating her own sustainable consumer sushi brand that will, of course, include Nordic seaweed. When we speak, she has just made it to the semi-finals of Kockarnas Kamp, a Swedish TV programme that sees the country’s top professional chefs compete against each other in tough culinary challenges. For now, it seems there’s no stopping this superstar chef on a mission.

Ronge has partnered with Lofoten Seaweed to ensure the plants she uses at Tak Oslo are harvested sustainably

