

# It's Squat



By Theodosia Greene

**O**n the Isle of Skye in Scotland, if you see "squat" on the dinner menu, it's neither a command nor a misprint. Simply sit straight in your chair, look at the waiter without so much as a hint of a smile and order, "Squat, please."

Creeler's Seafood Restaurant, in the seaside village of Broadford, the second largest town on the island, serves a wide variety of gourmet fish, mollusks and crustaceans. On this chilly September evening, we'd returned hungry from a drive along the promontories, which fringe Skye's indented coastlines of heathery mountains, tawny moors and spectacular sea cliffs. Inside the little restaurant of seven tables, the red walls, green tablecloths and fresh flowers created a cozy intimacy. Outside the eight-foot windows we could see white houses with gray slate roofs, as well as a few fishing boats heading for port in the fading silvery light on the Sound of Sleat's Broadford Bay.

Although Creeler's famed specialty is a seafood gumbo, it was the challenge of "squats" which hooked us. Suspecting a joke, we asked the waiter, "Why have we never heard of squats?" — as if we'd heard of everything.

"Tourists haven't heard of it because our squats don't travel," he said. "They're very fragile. Squat is our local shellfish — the tail of a crayfish, actually. It tastes like lobster."

"Have you ever heard the American saying, 'I don't know from diddly-squat'? And did you know that 'squats' are the anarchists' answer to free housing? And that 'squats' are bodybuilders' power sit-ups? And now you say we're supposed to eat them?"

There was a pause. The waiter's pencil hesitated politely.

"That settles it: We'll have squat, please."

Steaming plates of peeled, garbanzo-sized morsels arrived promptly, framed by a colorful salad of red and green lettuce, cel-

ery, onion, chives, basil, coriander and parsley. I could see why the squats didn't travel. Not only did they have no legs, they were too little. They were also so succulently delicious in their garlic butter sauce that every scrap of squat would be gobbled up before they left the island. What genius chef had invented such a delicacy?

Then appeared Dr. David Wilson, chef, owner and refugee from 15 years in a successful Harley Street medical practice in London. He sat down with us.

"On my 40th birthday I was overworked, my marriage was falling apart and I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I came on holiday to Skye. It happened that there was a restaurant for sale — and with the quality of light on the sea, the enormous kitchen. On impulse, I bought it," Wilson said, slapping his forehead. "I thought, 'My God, what have I done?'"

Becoming a chef seemed oddly appropriate for a burnt-out professional.

"When I was a child, my mother was an appalling cook," he continued. "So I've been cooking since I was 13. Eating and cooking are my thing ... it's relaxing, like eight hours' sleep. Tastes and textures are my specialties. I love it."

A dark-haired woman approached the table. David rose. "Meet my partner, Anne Doyle," he said. "We'd been friends for years. After I bought the restaurant, I asked her, 'How do you fancy running a restaurant in Skye?' She replied, 'It's my life's dream!' She'd had a long history of working in restaurants ... so now we're partners."

The next day we left Broadford to drive the coastal route around the island. That evening, avoiding such Scottish horrors as haggis (sheep's stomach bag stuffed with offal) and black pudding (pig's blood with chopped gristle and fat), we ordered squat at another restaurant. They were delivered like tiny love letters — sequestered in dozens of little impenetrable shells. We fell out of love ... fast.

Back at Creeler's — after all, how could we resist? — we tried their specialty of thick and spicy seafood gumbo. A large blue and white bowl of steaming mussels, squid, cayenne (good on cold, foggy days), cod, haddock, salmon, monkfish, smoked mackerel, prawns and — you guessed it — squat was set before us. Ah.

Of course, if someone wanted to sound erudite and elegant, they could always order *astacidae*, but it wouldn't be nearly as good. We'll stick with squat. ☺

