

# Welsh Diamonds of the Sea aim to sparkle at all the top tables

**SALT TEST:** David Lea-Wilson of Halen Môn checks the levels of salt in the Menai Straits. The new salt crystals are made from filtered seawater from the strait

THEY are the salt Diamonds of the Sea their makers hope will dazzle the world's top restaurants.

A Welsh food firm that already supplies eight of the globe's top 50 restaurants has developed what it says are the world's first "giant" sea salt crystals for fine dining.

Halen Môn, based on Anglesey, says top chef Raymond Blanc has already expressed an interest in the wafer-thin crystals.

The company already supplies its standard sea salt to Heston Blumenthal's Fat Duck in Bray, Berkshire, and Ferran Adrià's El Bulli, near Barcelona, which is considered the world's finest restaurant.

Halen Môn owners, David and Alison Lea-Wilson, believe the crystallised version of their product, containing between half a gramme and a gramme of salt, will prove equally popular with the world's most elegant eateries.

Mr Lea-Wilson, 54, said: "We can make hundreds of these crystals, but not tens of thousands to sustain a huge demand.

"But for gourmet chefs and people who want something amazing on their fish and chips we can do them.

"We have given some to our distributors. We've got a product champion in each country that we export to and they're just testing the market at the moment."

Mr Lea-Wilson believes there are a number of dishes to which the Diamonds of the Sea would make an ideal accompaniment, including steak tartare and quail's egg and hollandaise sauce.

He added: "Also because it's a crystal that is diamond-shaped you could use it to hold exotic food like caviar."

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## Chef Raymond Blanc is interested in the Anglesey salt crystals



**GOURMET GEM:** Halen Môn's Diamond of the Sea

Mr Lea-Wilson maintains the niche seasoning is a more natural and healthier product than the factory-produced alternative used in most homes and restaurants.

With a price-tag as exclusive as the product itself – the wafer-thin 2cm square crystals sell in tubes of eight for £3.95 – the crystals may not be to everyone's taste.

But president of the Welsh national culinary team Peter Jackson believes producing the sea salt in the distinctive shape of a diamond is an idea that could catch on for the company.

Mr Jackson, 52, who is the chef owner of the Plas yn Nantlle

country house hotel in Talsarnau, Gwynedd, said: "If you look at the Scottish food industry, they've got haggis, whisky and oatmeals and Wales needs original ideas.

"You can get lots of sea salt from around the world, so why not have Welsh sea salt produced as diamonds?

"Then when people see them on the table they'll associate them with Wales. It's a bit like TYNant's blue mineral water bottles.

"When you see them in a block-buster (Die Another Day) you think, 'Ah, that's Welsh water'."

Chef director of Conwy's

## Food innovations – the successes and failures

### Successes

**Fresh soup in cartons** – a relatively recent hit in the supermarket refrigerators; the alternative tinned variety has to be treated at high temperatures to ensure it remains edible.

**Fresh ready meals** – often criticised by those who insist it's better to cook from scratch, but they've been undeniably practical for busy modern living.

**Fruit and vegetables** – all-year-round availability due to developments in refrigeration.

**Frozen food** – this revolutionised the industry, transforming the length of time for which food could be stored before being prepared.

**Pot Noodle** – may not be to everyone's taste but, launched in 1977 and made in Crumlin, Caerphilly, this dominates the potted snack market with a 77% share.

### Failures

**Canned cooking sauces** – considered a significant innovation in their time these eventually flopped and moved into jars.

**Chocolate-covered chips** – that's fried potatoes covered in chocolate. They're on display at the US museum of food failures.

**Crystal Pepsi** – a clear cola launched in 1992, that was quickly withdrawn as a flop.

**Garlic Cake** – this was meant to be served with sweet breads and meats, but the company neglected to mention the ways to use the product on the package.

**Anchovy essence** – this is a natural juice concentrate and the British equivalent of Asian fish sauce, but another of those foods that seems to have disappeared from the supermarket shelves.

the crystals, made from filtered seawater drawn from the Menai Strait, will build on the company's international reputation.

Mr Tinsley, 49, who manages the Welsh culinary team, said: "I use Halen Môn all the time and think it's a fantastic product.

"And Halen Môn is already quite a large flake when you buy it – because it's a wet salt and you can't put it in a salt grinder.

"You have to crumble it in your fingers. I reckon it will catch on because Halen Môn is used all the over world now.

"I remember being in a deli-

on sale and persuading a couple of Americans to try it."

Chairman of the Food Drink Innovation Network, Jeffrey Hyman, said the crystals are perfect for recession-hit consumers trying to cultivate a special time atmosphere at home.

He said: "It's tapping into a phenomenon whereby dining out is the new dining out. With the crunch people have got less money to spend and instead of going out they're eating at home and it seems more special.

"And the idea of a diamond-shaped salt crystal is to