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FOOD & DRINK

Caviar Without the Caveats

Skip the imported beluga this holiday season. These domestically produced caviars provide the same pop, often at a fraction of the cost



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Clockwise from top left: Black Diamond Caviar Bowfin Kosher Caviar, Russ and Daughters Hackleback Caviar, Pointy Snout Caviar White Sturgeon Caviar Avancé, Petrossian Ossetra President Caviar, California Caviar Company Salmon Roe and Gravlax Salmon Roe F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS (5)

By Jackie Cooperman

Dec. 19, 2014 12:23 p.m. ET

CHAMPAGNE LOOKS so lonely at an end-of-year soiree without its old friend caviar on hand, too. Fortunately, since 2005, when the United States Fish and Wildlife Service banned imports of Caspian Sea beluga sturgeon—the endangered fish itself as well as the prized and pricey eggs it produces—a booming trade in domestically produced caviar and roe has hatched. From Brooklyn to California to the Louisiana bayous, U.S. caviar companies are harvesting, curing and packing roe from sturgeon and sturgeon-related species such as transmontanus, hackleback and paddlefish, as well as other fish such as trout and salmon. Buying domestic is not only more sustainable; it may also be healthier, as the U.S. prohibits the use of borax, a preservative commonly used in packing caviars produced overseas.

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A few things to keep in mind: Like other luxury goods, caviar is part of an industry rife with counterfeiting and confusing terminology. Fish eggs are highly perishable and quality can vary wildly, so use a trusted purveyor and note that,

officially, caviar refers exclusively to sturgeon eggs; eggs from other fish are roe. Farmed or wild, assertive or mild, fresh or aged—there's an American option for every budget, menu and palate. Here is a look at some of the most interesting available now.

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The Entry-Level Entertainer



Russ and Daughters Hackleback Caviar F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

th-generation owner Niki Russ Federman tastes excellent caviars every day at her family's 100-year-old emporium on Manhattan's Lower East Side. For her own Thanksgiving feast, Ms. Federman served eggs harvested from freshwater hackleback (also known as shovelnose sturgeon) in the Mississippi River Delta. More diminutive than other sturgeon, the wild-caught hackleback produces delicate, dark beads smaller than those of Caspian caviars, with a mild, buttery taste. The relatively reasonable price makes this a great choice for entertaining a crowd. "It's a very exciting, affordable caviar," Ms. Federman said. Hackleback Caviar, *from \$60 for approx. 1.8 ounces, russanddaughters.com*

The Kosher Choice



Black Diamond Caviar Bowfin Kosher Caviar F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

Brooklyn-based Black Diamond Caviar produces an inexpensive, kosher roe using the *Amia calva* species of bowfin, a fish that has both fins and scales (sturgeon does not, and therefore doesn't pass muster according to Jewish dietary laws). Harvested from bowfin caught wild in the Louisiana bayou, the roe resembles black sturgeon caviar, albeit with a slightly brownish hue. The natural color requires no added food coloring, a rarity for roe marketed as kosher, according to Black Diamond co-owner and president Raymond Mizrahi. Although caviar snobs tend to dismiss bowfin, for kosher diners it's an appealing option. In 2013, the company sold 5,000 tons. L'chaim! Bowfin Kosher Caviar, *from \$50 for 3.75 ounces, blackdiamondcaviarnyc.com*

When money is no object, aficionados turn to Alexandre Petrossian, the dapper vice president of his family's third-generation caviar business. For discerning clients wanting to try a newer domestic caviar, Mr. Petrossian offers a limited supply of North Carolina-farmed Petrossian Ossetra President, from the sturgeon species *Acipenser gueldenstaedti*. The caviar has a mellow, nutty flavor and a color that ranges from amber to mocha, and is aged for up to a year. "The eggs need time to absorb the salt, so when you crunch them, you have the true flavor of caviar," said Mr. Petrossian. "I'd rather cut my hands off than sell a caviar less than three months old." Ossetra President Caviar, *from \$251 for 1 ounce, petrossian.com*

California Caviar Company's wild-caught Alaskan salmon roe has a festive rosy color, a large bead and a satisfying pop when you bite it. The roe comes from a species called *Oncorhynchus keta* (aka chum salmon) and lives in extremely cold water, which promotes a rich oil content.

The Gold Standard



Petrossian Ossetra President Caviar F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

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mbled eggs and salads; company founder and CEO Deborah Keane even recommends using it on pizza. She sells several tons each year, and it's popular with chefs, including Jacques Pépin. California Caviar also produces several flavors of infused salmon roe. The

The Party Popper



California Caviar Company Salmon Roe and Gravlax Salmon Roe F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

gravlax-inspired version is brined with salt, brown sugar, white pepper and dill. Salmon Roe, from \$8 for 1 ounce, and Gravlax Salmon Roe, from \$12 for 1 ounce, californiacaviar.com

The Fishonista



Pointy Snout Caviar White Sturgeon Caviar Avancé F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, STYLING BY ANNE CARDENAS

Named for the sturgeon's legendary proboscis, Pointy Snout Caviar sells white sturgeon (or *Acipenser transmontanus*) caviar to clients like Manhattan's Restaurant Daniel. The product is sourced from a Sacramento, Calif., farm that is something like a sturgeon spa, where the fish live in sparkling well water and eat a diet of wild fish, and it is distributed in glamorous and unlikely places: Bergdorf Goodman, the jewelry shop LJ Cross, the boutique Five-story. The brand ages its Caviar Avancé a minimum of 90 days and up to a year, rotating the caviar in its

tin so that it absorbs the oil more effectively. The medium-size gray eggs have a delicate consistency and slight sweetness. White Sturgeon Caviar Avancé, *from \$35 for approx. .4 ounce, pointysnout.com*

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