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# Duck Sales

What they do behind closed doors in California, we do brazenly, out in the open, in Maine.

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*Y*ou've heard the hype in one version or another: *Portland is second only to San Francisco as America's Foodiest City*. For decades, we've heard about the West Coast's innovations, its smug estate wineries, its smarmy valet parking, its nouvelle-fusion-comfort cuisine.

*Don't even think of measuring up, Clam Diggers*, the message seems to be. *You Yankees should know your place*.

Now that *foie gras* has been banned in California, the tables seem to have turned. As this issue hits the newsstands, the ban that shook the gourmet world is 45 days and counting. And Maine's premier restaurants are feeling the lift as fans flock to taste the forbidden.

## ATLANTIC RIM

How about a Mushroom *Foie Gras* Napoleon at **ON THE MARSH** on Kennebunk's Route 9? Not only has executive chef **JEFFREY SAVAGE** devoted a great deal of care in creating this appetizer, he's taken the trouble to visit the *foie gras* production site behind it to understand the process himself.

"The two sources in the United States are Hudson Valley Foie Gras and La Belle Farms, a spring-off from Hudson Valley. I flew down to New York, talked with the owner at Hudson Valley, and toured their entire facility because there was Maine state legislation to prohibit *foie gras* farming even though there are no *foie gras* production sites here. The anti-*foie-gras* people were going state to state so they could build up momentum to ban it in New York. I was very happy to see how Hudson Valley functioned. I went to Rep. Alan Casavant (D-Biddeford), the state legislator who'd brought the motion forward to ban it at the recommendation of his constituents. Nancy Sullivan (whom I've known from childhood) had Alan Casavant's position before. They were very open to learning about the whole process. The other side basically had nothing to go on. It was shut down immediately."

According to the Artisan Farmers Alliance blog, Casavant's legislation died in committee March 11, 2009, when the Joint Standing Committee on Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry "voted unanimously 'Not to Pass.'"

"We don't serve it every night," Savage says of the Napoleons, "because our menus change twice a week. But the *option* to have *foie* is a positive thing, because if you see how the ducks are raised, they are more humanely cared for than most other animals raised for production. The ducks are fed every eight hours. To reduce the stress they undergo, the same person feeds the same ducks from the time they're born.

Pan-seared New England quail breast and *foie gras* with apricots, cashew butter, and cognac thyme reduction from The White Barn Inn

*Foie is something that's been culturally accepted for so long, in France & Canada.*

—Owner/Chef Krista Kern Desjarlais, Bresca

From top: Bresca's Bittersweet Chocolate Financier with Sauteed Apricot & Foie Gras Ice-Cream is a savory end to dinner; Petite Jacqueline patrons enjoy foie gras al fresco in Longfellow Square.



"Our mushroom *foie gras* Napoleon is very earthy. It has the sense of herbs with fresh thyme. We roast local mushrooms from forager Rick Tibbetts, then create four layers with sheets of phyllo dough, salt, butter, thyme, and seared *foie gras*."

The crown is a "foam with eggs, cream, and *foie gras*, whipping it in a charger to aerate it. In a wine flight, I might pair it with a really nice Sauterne, Chateau d'Yquem. It's sweet but very well balanced; d'Yquem is high-end, but some of the very highest-end Sauternes can go for as much as \$1,000 a half bottle. They're a great companion for desserts and *foie gras*."

### MAINE, THE OLD CALIFORNIA

"Maine cuisine is becoming more and more what California used to be," Savage says. "Without a doubt, there are phenomenal restaurants in California. But I think their political scene has changed that a lot. In Maine, we stay pretty true to what we do. I grew up in Biddeford with an Irish/French heritage—you know, where everything was cooked to death. What can we do with that in today's market? We respond to it creatively by doing a mini pot roast, stewed carrots, then switch it up with sashimi ingredients from Browne Trading—fresh local Gulf of Maine fluke, fresh lime yuzu juice from Japan, chives, a little salt. You can do

an urban New York- or California-style fish, just with Maine's fresher fish and shellfish, our bluefin tuna, oysters, lobsters, clams."

If the world's in search of freshness, you know they're coming our way.

### SHUT THE FRONT DOOR! I CAN'T BELIEVE YOU GUYS GET TO SERVE THAT!

We're not saying Maine's trendy restaurants are spiking the ball, but **BRESCA** serves a *foie gras* ice-cream sandwich [\$10]. Says chef **KRISTA KERN DESJARLAIS**, 2012 James Beard award nominee for Best Chef Northeast: "Our variation is *foie gras* ice-cream with a toasted almond chocolate torte and pan-seared apricots with warm caramel sauce."

Until the ban, Petrossian in West Hollywood loved to serve a *foie gras* ice-cream sandwich, too. According to complex.com's "25 Craziest Ice-Cream Concoctions in the Nation," this lost delicacy consisted of "two pieces of thinly sliced brioche, topped with raspberry jam and a hint of sea salt and honey."

What's it like to have that ripped out of your menu?

When I call Petrossian, a legendary stop dating to the 1920s, a man who goes by "Billy" is either a good sport about it or he's tip-toed into the sixth stage of grief: *resigna-*



Clockwise from right: Petite Jacqueline's seared Hudson Valley foie gras, toasted pistachio butter, cherry compote, and pain de mie; Nosh's Apocalypse Burger; The White Barn Inn's rohan duck and foie gras torchon with strawberry balsamic gastrique; 555's foie gras terrine, New England peaches, crispy house-baked brioche, and mache.

tion. "No one in California can serve that now. It's a state-wide ban."

Yeah, bummer.

As to how she'd react to the ban if she were a California chef, Desjarlais appears already to have imagined what she'd do: "It's twofold because there are some loopholes in the law. Some places are doing it gratis, and there's no law against that. If I were presented with this problem, I'd simply look toward other ways to use offal. I mean, for luxury items, other kinds of offal have not been seen as that...luxurious. You can't substitute it. Chicken liver's not going to take its place. Maybe basting with smoked duck fat can get a beautiful thing to fruit... We're for animal rights, but foie is something that's been culturally accepted for so long, in France and Canada and other places, part of the farming" philosophy.

She likes comparing gastronomic 21st century Maine to old California. "I grew up just outside of San Francisco, so I agree with that. It definitely has that kind of Marin County spirit: old, dirty-cool, not hip cool. Really nice people. Kind of like the spirit of the 1970s when I was there."

Just because we're keeping score, dudes,

that's two big losses:

No foie gras, and in an alternate universe, Bresca might have been located in your state.

Bresca has been listed among the "Top 105 Best New Restaurants in the World" by *Condé Nast Traveler* in 2008, followed by enthusiasms in the *New York Times*, *Bon Appétit*, *Food & Wine*, and *Travel & Leisure's* "The New American Sophistication." Presuming, of course, there was an old American sophistication.

#### FOIE AT 'THE FIVES' & PETITE JACQUELINE

"Right now we're serving foie at 555 with fresh local peaches from Snell Farm," says STEVE CORRY, winner of *Food & Wine's* Best New Chef award and co-owner/chef of 555. "We just slice the peaches with a little foie, which we clean, pass through a sieve, and cure for 24 hours. Then we poach it for 60 seconds in 180-degree water. That breaks and separates the foie. After using an ice bag, we whisk it into a delicious, creamy texture. Then we put it in an aspic with a little tiny bit of duck reduction. I like Hudson Valley's product because it's consistent, always clean,

fresh. In Napa, I got accustomed to using Sonoma foie, but now that that's gone I've come to like Hudson Valley better because it's more versatile for searing." A former northern California chef himself, "I think the whole thing is ridiculous," he says of the California ban. "Traditional French and Italian cuisines have deep roots."

Corry and his wife, Michelle, also own PETITE JACQUELINE, the popular Longfellow Square bistro where Chef IAN HAYWARD tweaks our taste buds with a seared foie gras with toasted pistachio butter and cherry compote with pain de mie. "The pain de mie is French bread, with a little milk," Hayward tells us. "We sear the foie and score it. We take dried cherries, cook them down with a little bit of wine to make a compote, and drizzle some rendered foie fat on the pain de mie until it gets absorbed. We smear the pistachio butter on the plate and add chives for color. And that is that. Very simple. Foie has such a bold, rich flavor, and I like to play off that."

Once again, California's loss is our gain. Petite Jacqueline is a 2012 semi-finalist for Best New Restaurant in America by the James Beard Awards.

#### ENGLISHMAN ON BEACH AVE.

Executive Chef JONATHAN CARTWRIGHT "grew

up in Sheffield." He worked at The Savoy hotel in London. Since becoming Grand Chef, Relais & Châteaux at THE WHITE BARN INN in Kennebunk, he's been an oracle to the elegant-

## Notes From The Underground

So where has banning serving *foie gras* gotten California? Roughly where banning gypsy superstitions got the Ceausescu regime in Romania. It's gone underground.

As midnight June 30 approached before California Senate Bill No. 1520 took effect July 1, they were serving *foie gras* ice-cream cones, just the way people got crazy drunk the night before Prohibition.

Oddly, the ban seems to have ushered in darker pleasures.

In an article for Bloomberg, Alison Vekshin and James Nash describe post-ban "private-events" dubbed "Duckeasies," where people slink in "to savor *foie gras*, California's newest forbidden fruit."

Vekshin and Nash discovered a newly codified language has sprung up in secret, where, "at Café Mimosa in San Clemente... those in the know ask for the 'fancy bread.'" Another euphemism the writers ran into: "complimentary side."

At "the Presidio Social Club," they found Californians gobbling *foie* after dark because "the restaurant, once a barracks in the Presidio of San Francisco, a former Army post near the Golden Gate Bridge that is now a national park, is on federal land and immune from state law."

Only (not) in America! They close their story with a telling insight from a restaurateur worthy of Bob Marley: "It's just like Prohibition. The more you say it's not allowed, the more people are going to want it."

When we contacted Nash, he replied via email, "Well, our research indicated that California is the only U.S. state to ban *foie gras*, so Maine is really in the mainstream while California is the exception. Time will tell..."

ly hungry. Consider his signature New England Quail *Foie Gras*.

"Inside the apricots there is *foie gras* that we cook as we warm the apricot. We sit the seared quail breast on cashew butter, then season and sear a beautiful piece of *foie gras* for the center of the dish which sits on a parsley purée & confit quail leg meat."

The Inn gets its *foie gras* "from Quebec, where they do a very good job raising animals. I like to think of Quebec as a neighboring state."

In their Carpaccio, "we use cured *foie gras*, salt, pepper, brandy, Madeira, and port-cure for 24 hours, then freeze so we can shave it for the top of the chicken terrine. It adds that rich decadent finish to a great dish.

"Our Duck/*Foie Gras* Torchon is cured *foie gras*, and we roll it into a log, wrap it in a fig purée, then roll it in pistachio. We serve it with a couple of slices of duck balsamic macerated strawberries and strawberry *gastrique*. This is a very rich *foie gras* dish that we often adapt for use at cocktail parties. Guests love it."

Regarding the controversy, "I think it's a shame. I don't want to sound barbaric about things, but you can take everything to an extreme. If someone has a conscience where they don't want *foie gras*, he or she doesn't have to order it, and as a result, demand will go down. Should we stop serving Maine lobster? In New England we're much more straight-forward and down to earth than in California, but yes, I do feel sorry

for my colleagues out there. I think it takes a lot away from creative chefs and guests who enjoy *foie gras*; also, my heart really bleeds for Sonoma *Foie Gras* company as it is a small [firm] that has worked hard and made a great name for itself with a fantastic product."

### NOTHING MARGINAL ABOUT MARGINAL WAY

On Shore Road in Ogunquit, at 98 PROVENCE, Chef PIERRE GIGNAC says, "I like Hudson Valley's products. We do several different preparations of *foie gras*. Seared is the favorite with the tourist clientele. We do some homemade brioche that's toasted and served with an apricot and fennel compote and a crisp fennel salad. For a pairing, Banyuls is a wine from the south of France. It's almost a dessert wine, a noble grape. It's lightly nutty, reminiscent of a very good sherry with a darker tint to it."

### SOURCE CODING

For local retail customers interested in creating *foie gras* dishes, "We offer *foie gras* from Hudson Valley," says Nick Grenier of Browne Trading Co. at 260 Commercial Street in Portland. "It's \$17 for 2.5 ounces."

A number of Maine restaurants also use Les Trois Petits Cochons as a connection. This international wholesaler, nestled among the piers of Brooklyn, New York, has views of the Statue of Liberty. Which brings up a good point. 1) How much is all of this about freedom? 2) Does unmetered freedom differ from responsible freedom? And 3) when does freedom collide with ethics?

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ASHLEY BYRNE of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) is happy to open door number three: "If I were to speak to the person preparing to eat a *foie gras* ice-cream sandwich, or any form of *foie gras*, I would urge them to watch PETA's *foie gras* exposé (follow the links from peta.org) so they could see what investigators of every *foie gras* production facility in the United States or throughout Europe have seen. I would ask them to consider whether any of this outrageous cruelty is justified when we know there's such a

*If they don't want foie gras, they don't have to order it...*

—Chef Jonathan Cartwright, The White Barn Inn

thing as faux *foie gras* as an alternative to sick, dead and dying animals that are littered around these farms, very often with bloody wounds in their necks from pipe injuries. I'd urge them to consider the fact that they're eating an animal who has purposely been given a disease, intentionally sickened by the people charged with looking after them."

Has she taken the trouble to tour one of the production facilities? After all, she's calling from New York.

"No, but I've seen the films. And they all look the same."

### THE FINAL COURSE: CALIFORNIA DREAMIN'

No matter your feelings about *foie gras*, isn't it refreshing to think of Californians as being desperate? (Sfist.com calls them the "*foie*-deprived.") Relax, guys. Have a spritzer. Memo to Clint Eastwood: Not only are you not Spike Lee's daddy, you're going to have to head east if you want us to make your day. ■

For more, visit [portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2012/08/hungry-eye-extras](http://portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2012/08/hungry-eye-extras).



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