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Ducktrap has come a long way since 1978, when Des Fitzgerald built a humble seafood smokehouse in Lincolnville, Maine. The same high standards established back then are still passionately followed today: premium grade seafood, custom brining recipes, and a time-honored smoking process using local hardwoods and fruitwoods. Today, our eco-friendly, state-of-the art smokehouse in Belfast continues this proud tradition where our roots began on the coast of Maine.

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# Party. Party.

When it comes to fabulous parties, there's the extravagant whole-hog approach and then there's the clever value-hunter's strategy. Both succeed with local bounty.

BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER

**I**N MATTERS OF CAVIAR, "You want a great experience straight from the spoon," says Jay Simcox, behind the seafood counter at **Browne Trading Company** on Commercial Street. Jay knows his caviar.

We're planning two fantasy parties, one where money's no object, and another with a thrifty budget. Both will offer delicious food, all locally sourced from a showcase of Maine providers.

"We recommend and sell a lot of the German Osetra, because it tastes fantastic by itself. It's the lowest price for best quality." A 20-gram jar is \$65. If you remem-

ber your metric conversions, there are 28.3 grams in an ounce, so we're talking about a very petite jar. But compared to other kinds of caviar in stock, helpfully listed on a big board above Simcox's head, it's a steal. For our ritzy party, we select the 125-gram tin of the German Osetra.

Salmon is smoked in-house here, too, and it's too tempting to pass up. There are traditional, citrus-basil, and other lightly smoked finishes. We choose a 16-ounce package (\$20.99) of the scotch whisky-cured salmon, which Simcox recommends for its subtle charm.

You can really go to town fantasizing gourmet dishes here. A lobe of *bottarga* (Ital-

# HUNGRY EYE

ian cured mullet roe), delicious when shaved onto buttered fresh pasta, is \$22.40. A dozen dainty quail eggs (have you had them sizzling in the little chambered cast-iron frying pan at Boda?) is \$9.99.

Then it's upstairs to consult with wine maven Chris Miller about a Champagne worthy of the caviar. He endorses Alma Bellavista Italian sparkling wine (\$35). "My absolute favorite is this Pol Roger 'Sir Winston Churchill' Champagne—they only bottle it in exceptional years." It's \$310, and the exceptional year was 2002.

Stop also at **Sweetgrass Farm Winery and Distillery's** tasting room on Fore Street for a bottle of their Back River Gin (\$27.45). This super-smooth white lightning makes a sensational martini that pairs up like a dream with smoked salmon.

## HITTING STRIDE

Once you buy into spending freely, you may be surprised to discover just how fast your tastes head uptown. You might not even feel like cooking.

"Sunday I'm doing an 80th for a good client," says Evalin Stearns, who's been a caterer since leaving a successful restaurant career in 1991. "It's eight people, and I'm serving filet of beef from **Fresh Approach**, au gratin gold potatoes from the farmers' market, and asparagus vinaigrette because it's the favorite vegetable of the

### Roe, High & Low

Pictured: Domestic salmon roe caviar from Browne Trading Co. is \$10 per ounce. A 20-gram jar of German Osetra caviar is \$65. Domestic caviar weight is measured by the ounce, imported in grams. There are many more caviars, domestic and imported, to be found at this seafood, gourmet, and wine shop on Commercial Street that includes tony Manhattan restaurants among its clients.

Birthday Boy. Starters are wild white shrimp with harissa or mango-lime sauce and smoked salmon roulette using Browne's salmon."

What time shall we be there?

At **HOME Catering Co.** on Spring Street—known to Portlanders as the little sandwich shop with exceptional Reuben sandwiches—you can order food to pick up for your holiday feasts, or you can have co-owner chefs Matt Chamberlain and Brian Kowtko come to your house. "Fancy events are generally what we do," says Kowtko. "We both have a lot of Portland restaurant experience"—including Fore Street for Matt and Congress Bar & Grill

for Brian. "We just did a birthday party for six women friends, regular clients. One of them is always turning 40, so they're always getting together. They asked for a French theme, so we started with *moules frites*, then braised local lamb shank *cassoulet*, and *pots de crème au chocolat* for dessert. These kinds of dinners run in the \$60 to \$80 range per person, so it's a lot like a restaurant."

You might roast your own turkey or ham at home and pick up the sides from the experts like HOME catering or **Aurora Provisions**. Aurora's fall and holiday menu options include maple horseradish Brussels sprouts and sherry-creamed cipollini onions (\$9.95 each per pound), and potato gra-

### Smoked!

Pictured: Ducktrap River Spruce Point Pepper & Garlic smoked salmon. The 4-oz. package is available at Harbor Fish Market for \$7.99, as is the 4-oz. package of Sullivan Harbor smoked salmon. Browne Trading smokes and cures salmon in-house—a pound of Scotch-cured smoked salmon is \$20.99.



### Fizzy

Find ultra special-occasion Pol Roger champagne for \$310 at Browne Trading and \$12 La Luna prosecco. Prosecco may be the best value among sparklers; it goes for as low as \$6.99 at Trader Joe's.



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## HUNGRY EYE

tin with aged gruyere (\$7.95 per pound). Aurora can roast your turkey or turkey breast, too, unless you'd prefer grilled swordfish loin steaks with tomato caper aioli (\$15.95 each).

### THRIFTY, NOT CHEAP

Local and delicious is not just for the Prius-driving well-heeled crowd, so brush that chip off your shoulder. Just because you're on a budget doesn't mean you have to head for the mega-packs of frozen chicken breasts at the big-box stores. You just have to keep your eyes open. There are plenty of good ideas to be stolen from the fancy set.

For example, we recently sampled Union restaurant's divine mussel bisque. It involved a silky, pureed winter squash soup base with plump whole mussels, garnished with a swirl of *crème fraîche* dotted with truffle oil. Definitely party quality but rustic and simple enough to replicate affordably. A two-pound bag of plump, local Bangs Island mussels from **Harbor Fish Market** (\$7.99); an organic winter squash and a fat fresh onion from the farmers' market (\$1 each per pound); and a

**No Trifling Matter**

Desserts count! Make an irresistible and easy Brownie Trifle using two boxes Stonewall Kitchen Traditional Brownie Mix (\$11.95) and one jar of Stonewall Kitchen Sea Salt Caramel Sauce (\$6.95) plus a few other pantry staples. Recipe is at [stonewallkitchen.com](http://stonewallkitchen.com)

Or pick up dessert. Fancy tortes at Falmouth's European Bakery start at \$22.95 for the six-inch. Pies at Two Fat Cats Bakery on India Street start at \$15; cupcakes start at \$2.50. Standard Baking has beautiful sugar cookies and other confections; the Rosemont Markets have cakes starting at \$9.99.



bit of cream and sherry, and a first-course bisque is on its way.

And did you think we weren't having caviar? The secret bargain treat at Browne Trading is a one-ounce jar of domestic salmon roe—stunningly shiny orange globes bursting with sea flavor—for \$10. Toast slices of rustic bread, top each with a smear of *crème fraîche* (\$6.99 a pint at **Hannaford**) and a dab of roe, and set one afloat on each bowl of your bisque.

Another value from Browne: a 5-ounce package of creamy duck liver mousse is \$6.50. Surrounded by baguette toasts, it's just the thing with a glass of La Luna prosecco, \$12 per bottle. "For great values in sparklers, you almost always want to choose prosecco," says Chris Miller.

"Super thrifty is usually a chicken braise or a main-course pasta," says Evalin Stearns. "I do an eggplant dish where the slices are stuffed with ricotta salata, breaded and sautéed, and then baked with fresh tomato basil

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sauce [and] fresh mozzarella and reggiano.”

We have access here to spectacular local chicken. Pick up whole birds or parts at the **Rosemont Markets** or **Portland Food Co-op** or from the farmers’ market. These may cost you over \$4 a pound, which is nevertheless still a good value.

Not up for chicken? Braise lamb shanks or beef short ribs or a porchetta-seasoned pork roast in your slow-cooker. For inspiration, head for the wonderful butcher shop at the **Farm Stand** in South Portland for local meat. As with the Rosemont butchers and the Vacchianos at **Pat’s Meat Market**, these are people who like to cook as well as eat excellent meat, and they’re all friendly and forthcoming with cooking suggestions. Another tip—they all make their own natural sausages.

Layer your braise with lots of deep flavors with spices from the Mediterranean or Asia. The Rosemonts and **Whole Foods** carry the Maine-based and fantastic **Gryffon Ridge** line of organic herbs and spices. The gryffonridge.com website is a great place for low-cost, high-flavor ethnic recipes like

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## HUNGRY EYE

chicken curry and Vietnamese braised pork with caramel sauce.

For main-course pasta, it's off to **Micucci's** for a look at imported pastas, or to South Portland for **Terra Cotta Pasta's** line of fresh pastas (\$3.99 per pound) that includes linguini, angel hair, and whole sheets. They carry a fresh ricotta that's much creamier than supermarket (about \$4 per pint). Everyone loves homemade lasagna, and it gives you the option to make it vegetarian if you like. Everyone loves spanakopita, too, and you can pick up phyllo pastry and feta at Micucci's, not to mention Kalamata olives.

Mediterranean peasant feasts call for red wine. "Scaia, definitely," says Jacques DeVilliers, owner of **Old Port Wine and Cigar**. "It's from the Veneto, everyone loves it, and it's \$10.99. Great value." A little fancier: "We've got a Greek red—Oenos, a xinomavro from Naoussa (\$21.99) that John Regas at Emelitsa raves about."

## SWEET RETREAT

**G**orgeous desserts are made in and around Portland every day. If you're not a great baker or confectioner, you're in luck. You can leave it to the pros.

Because you're feeling extravagant, you order a Black Forest Kirsch torte from the **European Bakery** in Falmouth. The six-inch version is \$22.95, which serves six to eight, and the 12-inch is \$49.95. With a smaller budget but equally high standards, choose the chocolate stout cake from the Rosemont's bakery. "We use Allagash Black stout," says baker Erin Lynch. "It's chocolate cake with chocolate chunks and chocolate ganache frosting. The other favorite since the very beginning is the ginger molasses with lemon drizzle frosting." The six-inch bundt cakes are each \$9.99 and serve six to eight. Add a scoop of **Gifford's** award-winning vanilla ice cream (\$5.29 a quart at Hannaford), and you're set. Or how about a bourbon pecan pie from **Two Fat Cats**? The nine-inch is \$22.50.

Maybe all you need after a feast is a hot cup of Alanzo's Double Dark fair-trade from **Coffee by Design** (\$14.50 per pound) and a chocolate truffle from **Dean's Sweets**. An assortment of 16 is \$29.50, and flavors include Hot Coffee (espresso/cayenne), Maine Sea Salt Caramel, and Moxie. ■

To see a showcase of more Maine food & drink visit [portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2015/9/partyparty](http://portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2015/9/partyparty)

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