

# Your Place in the Sun!



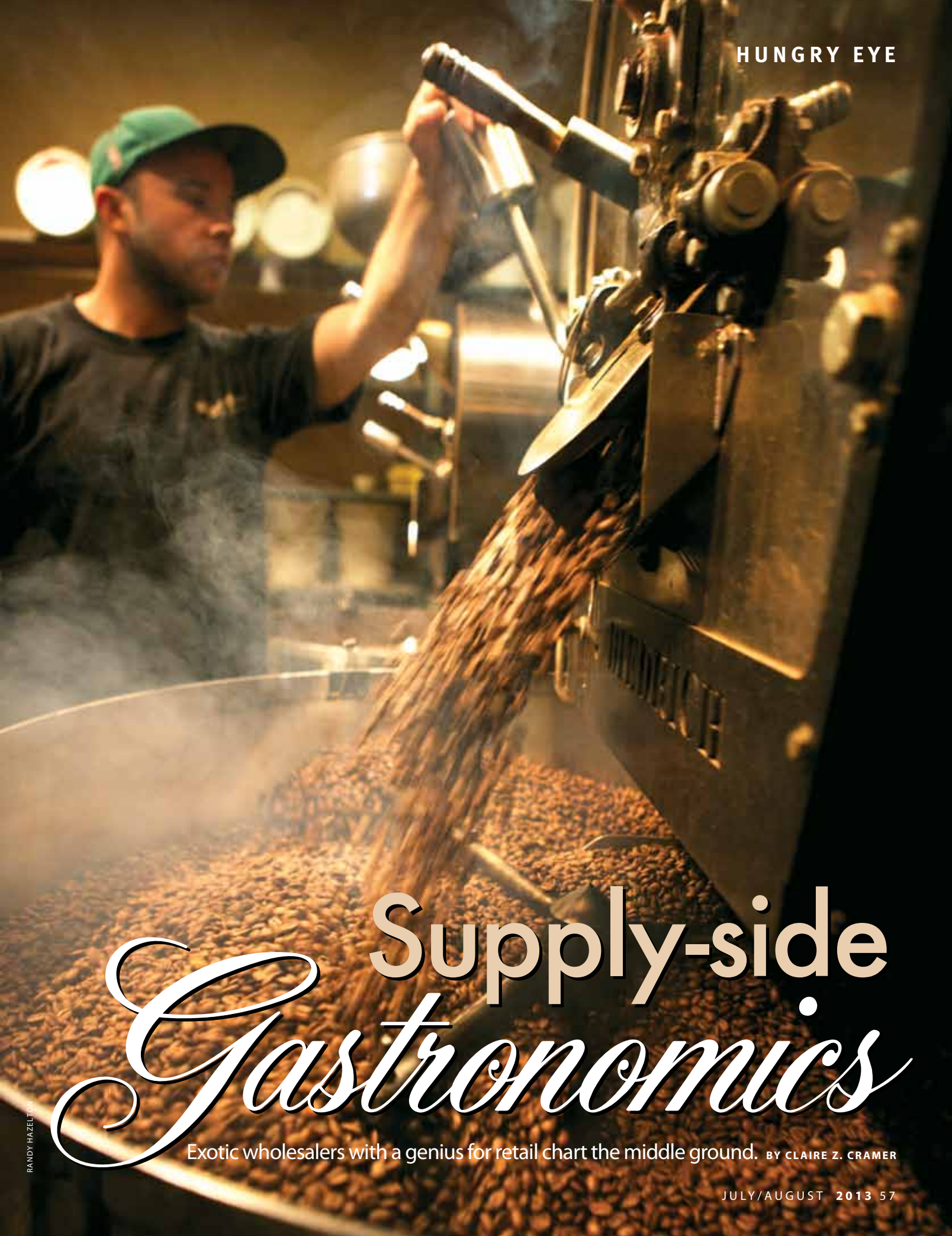
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# Supply-side *Gastronomics*

Exotic wholesalers with a genius for retail chart the middle ground. BY CLAIRE Z. CRAMER



The Rosemont Market on Munjoy Hill may be small, but it's got the goods. Previous page, an avalanche of coffee beans are roasted every week at Coffee by Design.

### In food-crazy Portland, where do the restaurateurs get *their* food?

It's no secret that one of the best things about Maine's biggest city is our food. Portland is a distribution center for fresh seafood and locally raised meat, eggs, dairy products, and produce. We're a hub of imported specialties. We're also home to a lot of food-crazy citizen-gourmets. We love our restaurants but we also love to cook and we want the best ingredients. We have exceptional access to great ingredients at the retail level. We can buy just-off-the-boat seafood, Maine-raised chicken, foraged mushrooms, and haricots just like the chefs do. And if we want imported caviar, pasta, or cheese, we can have that, too.

#### A DECENT CUP OF COFFEE

Mary Allen Lindemann and Alan Spear are celebrating their 19th year of Coffee By Design in Portland. "When we opened our first CBD on Congress Street, there was 40 percent vacancy downtown. No L.L. Bean, no MECA. We're so lucky to have been there for all that followed. The State Theatre was renovated, Bella Bella opened. We are co-founders of Portland Buy Local."

Nineteen years have not even begun to

A little bite of luxury: picking up a jar of caviar and a bottle of wine at Browne Trading.



dim Lindemann's enthusiasm for the coffee business. "We buy coffee from all over the world—Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Sumatra, Ethiopia. Our decisions are all based on what we sample and 100 percent traceability of the farming practices. Coffee is an agricultural product. Taste may vary."

Later this year, the roastery operation currently within the Washington Avenue retail store will move to a larger warehouse space in Portland's latest hot frontier, East Bayside.

"It'll be the first time we can really display and demonstrate equipment for our wholesale customers to buy," says Lindemann. A restaurant "really has to have a good machine. And you really have to have a grinder." CBD supplies many restaurants. "Fore Street Restaurant was our first account—way back when. We were so thrilled, so honored to work with a chef like Sam Hayward. But you know, there are chefs out there who are very big coffee drinkers with very particular tastes: Sam, Rob

"In late 2013, we're moving our roastery to a larger space" in East Bayside.

—Mary Allen Lindemann

Evans [of Duckfat, and former chef/owner of Hugo's], and Stephen Lanzalotta when he had his restaurant Sophia's on Market St. He knew exactly what he wanted. We roast proprietary blends for restaurants, decaf, too. We hear over and over that customers don't believe it's decaf because it tastes too good. Decaf is good!"

The company has no wholesale sales force. "It's literally word of mouth. Restaurants come to us. We're not the perfect coffee for every account, and that's fine. We're firm believers that there's a bean for everyone, and it's not always us. There's room for all of us. Maine has real coffee quality."

Word of mouth put Coffee by Design in all the *Rí Rá* pubs around the country, and in Cardullo's specialty foods in Cambridge, Mass. Many Portland offices run on CBD.

"And we're in a good number of churches. They tell us people stay longer for coffee hour after the service if the coffee's good."

#### STARS OF INDIA STREET

"We're an old school Italian supplier... a local family business," says Rick Micucci of the Micucci Grocery Co. and Micucci Wholesale Foods on India Street. The store was opened in 1965 by his parents, Leo and Iris Micucci. "We were pretty well known in the Italian community—people knew they could find exceptional products here."

Today, everyone knows it. Home cooks never tire of what Rick Micucci calls "Italian staples and specialties"—gleaming bottles of olive oil from Italy (and Greece, Portugal, Spain, and Lebanon); canned San Marzano tomatoes and imported tuna in olive oil; anchovies, neatly rolled around capers in jars; cheese and salumi in the deli case; and many brands of imported pasta at every price point. There's a selection of produce such as tomatoes, broccoli rabe, onions, lemons, and fresh basil. It's just the place to dream up something

fabulous to make for dinner, because the ingredients—from the prosecco to the biscotti and espresso—are all right there. Micucci's wholesale operation delivers all over the state, but the grocery store—with Iris Micucci often right there at the cash register—remains a friendly neighborhood treasure.

### SEAFOOD CENTRAL

The Alfiero brothers—Ben, Nick, and Mike—at Harbor Fish Market are another founding family of Portland's food landscape. Opened in 1969 by Ben Sr. on Custom House Wharf, Harbor Fish was supplying seafood to the original Porthole and Boone's restaurants then as it is today. "We've been reminiscing lately about the growth of the restaurants over the years," says Nick. "There used to be just a few decent ones. Now!" He laughs. "And we handle almost all of them." For home cooks, Harbor Fish's strengths are in the variety available—and the friendly service. Anyone you ask offers useful information about the fish and even suggestions on cooking.

"In our early days we owned two fishing vessels, but we realized that's not our principle expertise." The market's first cookbook debuts this summer. *Harbor Fish Market: Seafood Recipes From Maine* (Down East Books \$29.99) contains recipes from the Alfieros and others, with narrative and stories.

### FRIENDLY NEIGHBORS

"Pat's Meat Market opened on Stevens Ave. in 1951," says Elliot Vacchiano, 27. "My great-grandfather Pat and his brother Sam. Then Pat's son, Joe—my grandfather—ran it. Now my brother Nick and I are here with my father, Jamie. We're all butchers."

The market is a retail institution for dis-



Monument Square's Public Market House is the home of K. Horton's comprehensive international and local cheese selection.

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## HUNGRY EYE

cerning seekers of good steaks, lamb, and veal shanks, and they make eight popular varieties of sausages "almost every day." The comments you hear most often from Pat's legions of loyal customers run along the same line: "They sliced my steaks / ground my beef / cut my tenderloin right then." The mark old-fashioned charm is sincere, and it's irresistible.

The butcher shop is an all-male enclave, but the deli side of Pat's is Frances "Cissy" Conley's territory. Included are sandwiches and prepared food like homemade soups and lasagna to take home for dinner. Cissy makes all the deli chicken, potato, and slaw salads, too.

The wholesale meat includes "just about every burger place in the area. We even supply the Fisherman's Grill with their burger and chicken," says Elliot.

### THE LITTLE MARKET THAT COULD

The Rosemont Markets on Brighton Ave., Munjoy Hill, and in Yarmouth evolved from the old Portland Greengrocer that we all used to take for granted 10 years ago on Commercial Street, run by Nick Witte, John Naylor, and baker Scott Anderson. After the Greengrocer closed, Naylor and Anderson started the Rosemont in 2005 in a small storefront on Brighton Avenue. Despite the tight quarters and tricky parking, the place was a hit. The excellent local vegetables, produce, eggs, cheese, fresh bread and pastries, squares of pizza for lunch, delicious locally raised meat and chicken that really tasted like chicken, thoughtful wine selection, wine tastings, and still-warm baked goods at the cash register that the Greengrocer was known for were back, and bigger and better. Eventually, the market outgrew the space and jumped across Brighton Ave. to a much larger space, with the bakery operation remaining in place. Even now, with three Rosemonts and the Rosemont Produce storefront on Commercial St., the business seems to just keep growing: a bank of new fridge cases and butcher, fish, deli meats, and cheese counters on Brighton; wine advice from Joe Appel and regular wine tastings; never-ending seasonal surprises like ramps and fresh fava beans; artisanal linguica and andouille; shiny salt-flecked pretzel burger buns; the best pizza dough for home cooks; and an expanded catering business. "I love it," says Naylor. "I'm working like six days a week and I don't even care. It's great."

### SMILE AND SAY CHEESE

Kris Horton opened K. Horton Specialty

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A Saturday wine tasting at Browne Trading Co.

Foods when the bygone Portland Public Market debuted in 1998. The original intent had been to sell smoked seafood from her father's smokehouse. Cheese and crackers were included as other appetizers. The cheese took off, and today Horton is the go-to expert and source for many Maine cheesemakers like Silvery Moon, Sunset Acres, and Nezinscot Farm, and she stocks a fascinating imported selection. When the Public Market closed, Horton was the organizer who got the Market House going in Monument Square, where there are now nine food and drink businesses on two floors. She still carries smoked seafood and meat, house-made spreads, and other select goodies. She does a bit of trade with restaurants. "Fore Street has the same commitment we do to Maine cheesemakers."

#### CAVIAR CENTRAL

Rod Mitchell's successful wholesale seafood business, Browne Trading Co., which supplies some of this country's most famous restaurants, opened a retail shop on Commercial Street in 2000. It was and is, in a word, deluxe. Beautiful seafood, including house-smoked offerings, cheese, pâté, fine wine, carefully curated condiments, and caviar and roe. A line of Scottish salmon smoked on the premises is labeled as French chef Daniel Boulud's brand. The store dispels any perception of elitism by offering a takeout menu for lunch, holding free wine tastings twice a month and sometimes even free caviar tastings.

Rod Mitchell got ahead of the dwindling available supply of wild-harvested caviar and started sampling and researching the traceability of farmed caviar. "Right now we have Alaskan salmon roe for \$10 an ounce, freshwater hackleback caviar for \$20 an ounce, and spoonbill caviar for \$30 an ounce," says Keith Hebert, at Browne's seafood counter. The most expensive caviar? "Right now, imperial caviar, farmed in China. A 20-gram jar is \$130." ■

➤ For more, visit [portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2013/07/hungry-eye-extras-4](http://portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2013/07/hungry-eye-extras-4).

RANDY HAZELTON

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