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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.
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

IN 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 remember 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 (Italian...
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 Birthday Boy. Starters are wild white shrimp with harissa or mango-lime sauce and smoked salmon roulade 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 creme 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-
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Old Port Wine & Cigar
223 Commercial Street
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Whether it is a hot and healthy lunch for your Board Members or an elegant Holiday Party, Our Town Catering & Events is your corporate and personal catering resource. Our event designer can assist with venue selection, rental needs, entertainment and any special requests.
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 gryfonridge.com website is a great place for low-cost, high-flavor ethnic recipes like
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.


To see a showcase of more Maine food & drink visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2015/9/party
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As the snow begins to fly and the magic of the season begins to take hold, we wish you and yours good times and glad tidings surrounded by those you love.