

Caviar - A Small Indulgence

by Barbara Ann Rosenberg



In "Clicking", a new blockbuster book of predictions on what's in store for us today and in years to come, futurist Faith Popcorn and her collaborator, Lysbeth Marigold talk about the necessity for "Small Indulgences." After all, they reason, in our everyday lives we

experience frustration because we can't have everything we want, and doesn't it make sense for us to be able to reward ourselves from time to time in some small but really significant way?

Caviar fits that description. It's small, and its price and reputation make it significant! As long as people don't confuse the "real thing" with the crunchy, salty little whitefish eggs that come pasteurized in jars, we'll be able to discuss the subject with some degree of integrity. And the "real thing" is the delicate, delicious eggs from big, bizarre-looking sturgeon that live in the Caspian Sea, or in the waters near Iran, or near the Soviet Union, or from its close American relative, the paddlefish that swim in the Mississippi River around Clinton/Gore country.

We can even make an allowance for including in our discussion another type of caviar - salmon eggs, orangy-red, round, and translucent. When these little globules are fresh and processed by someone knowledgeable, they have an elegance of their own but never, repeat never, should be confused with genuine sturgeon caviar.

Once upon a time it was generally a "given" in polite society that "nice" girls didn't order caviar in restaurants, except perhaps at New York's Russian Tea Room where it was acceptable for a special occasion treat to have a few grains with an order of the restaurant's trademark buckwheat blini.

So what is it that fostered this relatively new interest in caviar? After all, the high-flying 80's are over, and the more abstemious 90's are nearly over also. So do we credit Faith Popcorn and her "Pleasure Revenge" theory -- or what?

Joel Assouline of Assouline & Ting, is a local purveyor of caviar that he packs under his own label which he also makes available in his own caviar boutique. He doesn't have a definitive answer but ventures the following: "it's difficult to know why caviar has become so popular, but the three 'C's are definitely a trend (caviar, champagne and cigars)". Hossein Aimani, President of Paramount Caviar offers a different spin "it's a measure of our optimism about the economy; and we anticipate that it will continue to grow, so we want to treat ourselves well." "Giving our guests, relatives, business associates, etc., caviar is all part of this optimism."

Gary Blumenthal, President of Tinderbox Internationale (and now presenting Petrossian Caviar in his stores) agrees with Assouline with respect to two of the "C's" - caviar and cigars. As the name implies, Tinderbox is involved with cigars, with emphasis on the more expensive end of the spectrum. He also agrees with Popcorn and her "small indulgences" theory. "But I take it one step further." "Caviar and cigars represent indulgences that deal directly with the human senses - smell and taste." "Their importance is that they are enjoyed on a very personal level, yet can be shared with family and friends, intensifying the pleasure."

So it seems that no matter what the terminology, those wonderful little fresh eggs (infinitely preferred over pasteurized) that come from sturgeon, paddlefish and even salmon are definitely a factor in our current lifestyle, and something that appears to be catching on in more and more circles. Now the only worry is keeping up with the new demand.

Maybe we can get our futurist to let us know so we can start rationing ourselves as befitting the supply. One can never be too prudent, particularly when it comes to caviar!

Some Caviar Myths

1. Caviar is bad for you

Caviar is an amazingly healthy food. It's high in protein, and full of vitamins and minerals. While it does contain a rather high sodium content, it weighs in at a mere 90 calories per ounce.

waters. Available in a light gray, bold tasting Paddlefish, and a light and delicate tasting black Hackleback. Both compare favorably to imported varieties.

2. The bigger and more expensive the egg, the better the egg

With caviar, bigger is simply bigger. Beluga is the largest and the rarest of the caviar-producing sturgeons yields the largest eggs, but the fewest in total number. It cost more because its supply is so limited.

3. The lighter and paler the egg, the better the egg

Color and quality have absolutely no relationship to each other. The egg's color has more to do with the fish's diet than with anything to do with taste. Beluga ranges in color from light to dark gray, while ossetra varies from nearly yellow to brown-black. It's important to note that caviar should never be colored by anything artificial.

And now from the good folks at **Paramount Caviar** in New York City, we present a quick education on what it is, and what it looks and tastes like



Beluga Sturgeon, the largest of all caviar sturgeons. In hues that range from dark pearl gray to black, these firm and uniform eggs come from fish weighing as much as 1000 pounds and take 20-25 years to mature and acquire their smooth taste.



Ossetra Sturgeon. These mid-size, firm, brownish-gray eggs have a golden sheen and strong fruity or nutty flavor. From fish that weigh up to 600 pounds, these appealing eggs take at least 12 years to properly mature in the waters of the Caspian Sea.



Sevruga Sturgeon, like Beluga and Ossetra, is found in the Caspian Sea. The smallest and least abundant of sturgeons, it takes 7 years to reach maturity. The taste and color are similar to Beluga, with smaller eggs.



North American Sturgeon is slightly smaller than Caspian Beluga and found in the waters of the Great Lakes and Canada.



Salmon Roe, the colorful caviar. Ranging from golden amber to reddish orange, these large eggs are known for their distinctive "pop" when rolled between palate and tongue. These domestic eggs have a much sharper and piquant taste than sturgeon caviar.



Golden Whitefish is a small freshwater fish found in all Northern countries including the U.S. Great Lakes and Canada. Its roe is of a fine, pale golden color and almost iridescent appearance. It has an uncommon subtle flavor and fine crispy texture.