

The Epicure's Essentials



Speciality pieces of paraphernalia add immeasurably to the enjoyment of some of the finer things in gourmet life.

Peter Swain presents a fantasy home menu, with the all-important matching utensils.

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ourmands have recently faced constraints on many of their favourite pleasures – at least in public. With restaurants still closed across much of the globe, the preparation of certain gastronomic delights now takes place at home, and often requires professional equipment. The connoisseur knows, however, that the accoutrements associated with a passion for the likes of Beluga caviar, white Alba truffles or Cohiba Behike cigars perfectly complement the delicacies themselves.



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1 The Caviar Spoon

Paris-based Mikael Petrossian, doyen of global caviar purveyors, reports that since wild sturgeon fishing was banned in 2008, the caviar his company sells comes from fish farmed in countries as far flung as Italy, the US, China, Poland and Madagascar. Whatever the provenance, though, “the best way to taste our finest Beluga caviar is with a mother-of-pearl spoon. The material is nonreactive and avoids oxidation of the eggs, so allowing you to detect the most subtle nuances in flavour. The pearl doesn’t transfer flavour, so the caviar can be appreciated exactly as intended. Avoid silver, because it reacts with the caviar, but gold is fine.” The eggs slide effortlessly off pearl – but onto a blini or best eaten neat? “There are no rules,” says Petrossian. “Everyone should create their own caviar moment!”

2 The Champagne Stopper

The perfect match for caviar is champagne. Bollinger is James Bond’s favourite, so it seems reasonable to ask the revered Aÿ-based *maison* the best way of preserving the taste and effervescence of its Special Cuvée should 007 be interrupted mid-quaff. “The moment after you pop the cork and pour a glass,” advises Bollinger’s Victoria Carfantan, “use a quality airtight champagne stopper (not a wine stopper or the original cork) to keep the CO₂ inside the bottle, and then store it in the refrigerator, as heat and light are the enemies of the bubbles.” Putting a silver spoon in a bottle may create a “cold plug” in the neck, but oenophiles waiting to toast the much-delayed *No Time to Die* agree the best solution is simply to finish the bottle.

3 The Oyster Shucker

Bond also likes oysters, but whether Belons, Loch Ryan or exotic Kumamoto, they all need fast and careful opening. At the oyster bar up on the sixth floor of the KaDeWe in Berlin, on average 3,500 oysters are consumed a day. “A real expert can open seven oysters

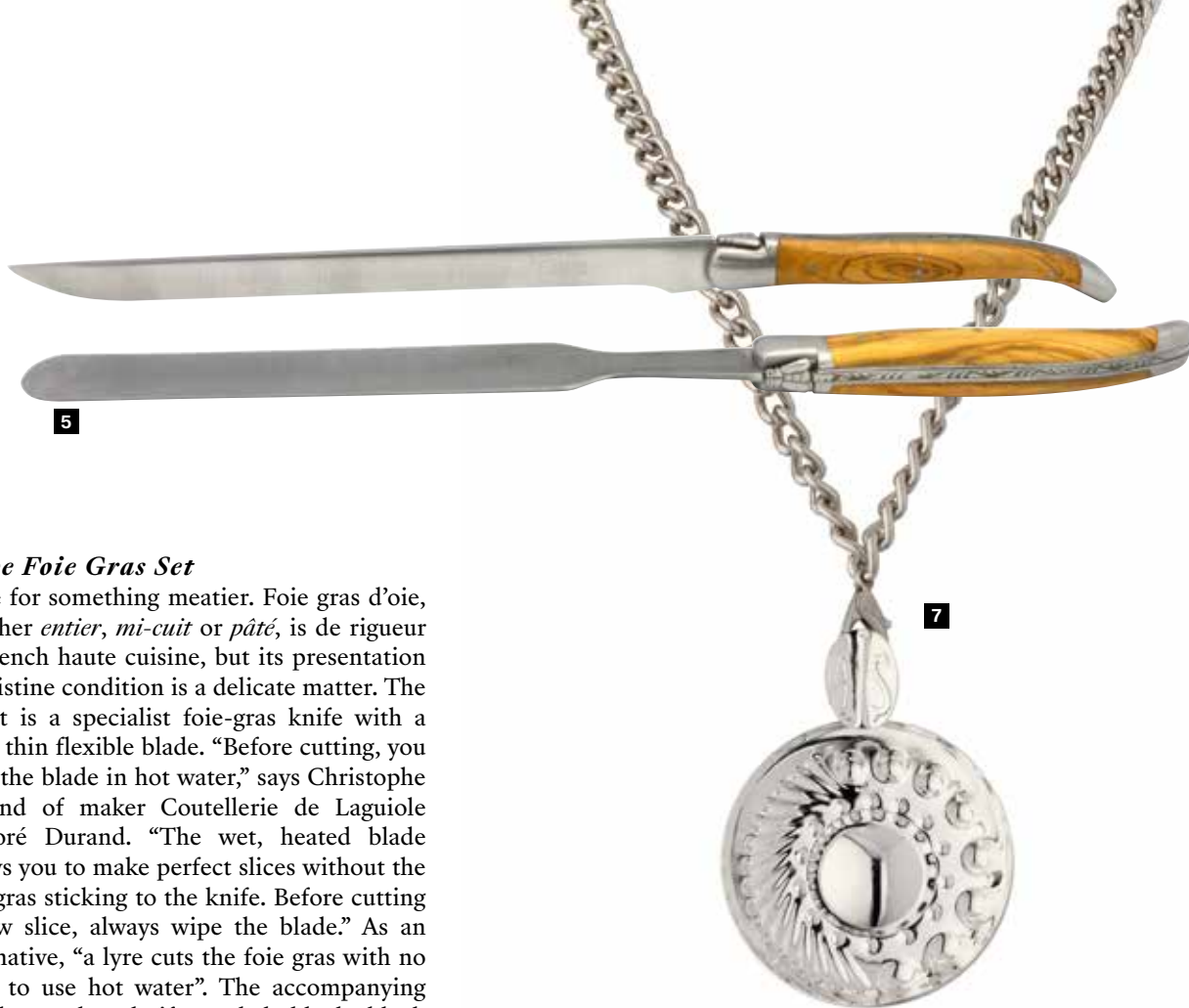
a minute,” reports the store’s Oliver Kramny. “We serve them all year round, with Fine de Claire and Sylter Royal the favourites.” Shucking is the action of prying an oyster open and separating the meat from the shell. “The blade of an oyster knife” – like the Marisco Oyster chucker from Pott – “should be short and sturdy so as not to bend and break, and have a sharp tip, but its exact length and shape is a matter of personal preference.” A steady hand and a protective meshed glove are also useful.

4 The Sushi Knife

Next up on the tasting menu: sushi. Forging Japanese culinary blades is an art practised by master craftsmen often descended from Samurai swordsmiths. “A marriage of the traditional Yanagiba and Takohiki styles,” reveals the Japanese Knife Company’s Jayesh Patel, “this 300mm Sakimaru Takohiki is forged using hard Aogami Super steel on the flat, cutting side and 64-layer patterned Damascus steel on the bevelled side, creating a scalpel-sharp 10-degree cutting edge. “Adorned by a Japanese magnolia handle and water buffalo-horn ferrule, it’s crafted by the two Sasaoka brothers known as Fire (Sasaoka Jr) and Water (Sasaoka Sr), the eighth generation of a knife-making dynasty.” This Sakimaru has a slight bow, like a fighting Katana, “so this small ‘Sword of the kitchen’ is the domain of the highest level of sushi masters.”



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5 The Foie Gras Set

Time for something meatier. Foie gras d'oie, whether *entier*, *mi-cuit* or *pâté*, is de rigueur in French haute cuisine, but its presentation in pristine condition is a delicate matter. The secret is a specialist foie-gras knife with a long, thin flexible blade. "Before cutting, you hold the blade in hot water," says Christophe Durand of maker Coutellerie de Laguiole Honoré Durand. "The wet, heated blade allows you to make perfect slices without the foie gras sticking to the knife. Before cutting a new slice, always wipe the blade." As an alternative, "a lyre cuts the foie gras with no need to use hot water". The accompanying paddle or palette knife gently holds the block in place during cutting, then moves the slice cleanly from board to plate. *Voilà*.

6 The Corkscrew

Foie gras and Château d'Yquem, the only *premier cru supérieur* Sauternes, is a match made in French heaven. But how to draw an old and possibly damaged cork from a priceless 1937 bottle? The answer, says Sandrine Garbay, Yquem's Maitre de Chai,

is a Durand. "It's the ideal solution for preserving the fragile integrity of such an old cork and for pulling it out in one piece." A Durand combines a traditional helix with a two-bladed "ah-so" and its use takes practice: "For such an old bottle, at the very least, you need to be cautious." The best age for an Yquem? "At least 15 years – 2001, 2002 and 2004 are perfect right now, and for those, I would use a simple *limonadier* or double-lever 'waiter's friend'. Less is more!"



7 The Tastevin

For centuries, the shallow silver tasting cup hanging on a chain around the sommelier's neck was an essential accessory. Wine used to be examined in cellars or dimly lit restaurants, and the tastevin's shiny navel or bowl reflected the light from a single candle so the taster could see the wine's colour and purity before assessing it. But times have changed, suggests Lukas Hyner, sommelier at Raymond Blanc's Michelin-starred Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons. "With the advent of the electric light bulb, I prefer a fresh crystal glass and white background to judge a wine. A tastevin is difficult to clean if I'm tasting many wines, and can impart a metallic flavour." Still part of some sommeliers' ceremonial uniform, adding theatre to the dining experience, tastevins are best sourced from an antique dealer.

8 The Truffle Shaver

Next up, *pasta al tartufo*. The pride of Alba in northern Italy, white truffles (*tuber magnatum pico*) are traditionally collected from October to December. Together with the more common but equally pungent black truffle, they

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are a highly prized culinary ingredient, and consequently need precise preparation. In its Lake Como-side factory, Ambrogio Sanelli makes a range of truffle shavers that are essentially mini mandolins that cut paper-thin slices whose thickness is measured in microns rather than millimetres. “Our Xfetta model is perfect for white truffles,” says the company’s Matteo Ganassali. “The thickness of the slice depends on the pressure applied, but we suggest it makes the thinnest possible slice.” Other adjustable slicers (*affettatartufi*) can also be used to shave parmesan cheese to finish off a perfect spaghetti al tartufo.

9 The Brandy Glass

After such a rich repast, time for a digestif, and what better than a Hennessy Paradis cognac. But which glass to use? “Cognac was traditionally served in a ‘balloon’ or ‘snifter’, so the drinker could warm it up by cradling the glass in the palm of the hand,” says Hennessy’s Fabien Leveux. “But now we have central heating, so rather than being stored at 12C, it’s already at 18-20C. When you sniff a balloon, there’s actually more alcohol than essential aromas on the nose: not good. So we recommend a smaller tulip glass for neat cognac – it promotes aromas and limits alcohol evaporation. Crystal glass is preferred because it has a pleasing ring when toasts are made – but balloons are still good for cocktails, as are tumblers.”

10 The Cigar Cutter

And to pair with the cognac, maybe a Cohiba Behike cigar. Nothing destroys the joy of a good cigar like a ragged end, which means the choice of cutter is critical. “Most important is the sharpness of the blades,” says Eddie Sahakian of Davidoff. “The cut should be just above the cap and be firm and determined. A double-blade guillotine like a Xikar Xil cuts



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from both sides in one smooth motion; the V-cut gives a good draw on a tightly rolled cigar, while a punch is ideal for an old, dry one. Our Davidoff Steel Scissors have surgical-grade steel blades, accommodate any ring gauge and have an elegant design, so embellish the cutting ritual.” The hallmark of any superior cutter – and indeed all the best accoutrements – is that impeccable combination of efficiency, style and tradition.