

New York
RESIDENT

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***Savoring White Truffles at
\$150 Per Ounce***

By Sylvie Bigar



Foodies are waiting for the fall arrival of a coveted and expensive delicacy: white truffles.

"When white truffles are in season, we play," said executive chef Michael Psilakis of Dona.

The underground mushroom grows strictly in the wild, generally in the vicinity of oak or hazelnut trees. They can be found mostly in the Piedmont region of Northern Italy, and have made the town of Alba famous for its white truffle market. The short season runs from mid-October through December. Hunters and their truffle-sniffing dogs—and not pigs who try to eat the truffles they dredge up—roam the countryside by night, for fear of being seen. Since truffles tend to grow in the same spot year after year, the whole picking process is shrouded in secrecy.

Why pay top dollar for an underground stinky root? Atef Boulaabi, who owns SOS Chefs on the Lower East Side said, "It's a rarity, it's expensive and sexy. It's like a dream and it makes you a story teller. 'Oooh I had this truffle dish last night.' It's also supposed to be an aphrodisiac, you know."

Boulaabi's clients include restaurants Per Se and Daniel. This year, she is selling truffles at approximately \$143 per ounce. "The chefs want the bigger ones because they shave them tableside on the customers' plates and they look better, but really the taste is the same," she said.

Miguel Bonilla, charcuterie manager and store supervisor at SoHo's Dean & DeLuca, sells truffles for about \$150 per ounce. "I get them directly from Italy," he said. "I know where they come from and how long they've been out of the ground." The store sells between three and four pounds of them per week either to chefs or people who are planning large parties. Dean & DeLuca also sells the truffle slicer (or shaver), which is a paddle-like mandolin.

The first time Pierre Schaedelin, executive chef at the newly reopened Le Cirque, tasted white truffles, he was 24 years old and working at

the famed Le Louis XV restaurant in Monaco.

"Nobody was supposed to touch them, they were guarded fiercely by the chef de cuisine and the chef garde-manger, so I asked very politely if I could have a taste," he said. "I was surprised something that smelled so strongly could cost so much." At Le Cirque, he serves them the simplest possible way, shaved on homemade fettuccini and sweet Vermont butter. Any dish with truffles costs \$135 and the chef shaves about an ounce on each. "It's a service for the guests," said Chef Schaedelin. "There are really no mark-ups."

"Who took off their shoes?" was the way Chef Alexandra Guarnaschelli reacted the first time she smelled white truffles in the kitchen of Guy Savoy in Paris, where she was learning the ropes. She soon joined the ranks of the truffle lovers. As the new executive chef at Butter on Lafayette Street, she serves them in creative ways, sliced on oven roasted Purple Majesty potatoes with concord grapes, or shaved on a celery root soup with chaource, a French creamy cow's milk cheese.

Eben Cople, executive chef at Jovia on East 62nd Street, said that white truffles should be served raw. He prefers to buy them from Alba, and makes them the stars of the dish. This season, he is toying with the idea of serving them on buckwheat noodles or gnocchi with a robiola fonduta sauce or with a prosecco risotto.

At A Voce on lower Madison Avenue, chef and co-owner Andrew Carmellini prepares truffle specials throughout the fall season. "There's a saying in Italy, 'tartufi sensi di sesso,' truffles have the perfume of sex," he said. "I will serve casserola of polenta with wild mushrooms, country egg and white truffles, and homemade potato gnocchi with white truffles."

RECIPE

Baked Potato With Truffles

By Pierre Schaedelin

Ingredients for 4 people:

4 Idaho potatoes

5 oz. fresh white truffles

2 oz. extra virgin olive oil

4 oz. Butter

salt and pepper to taste

Procedure: Bake potatoes in oven, wrapped in aluminum foil, at 350 degrees until done. Depending on the size of the potato, bake around 45 minutes. Once cool, slice the top off each potato lengthwise so that

you can scoop out the insides with a spoon.

Remove the insides of the potato, mix with 2 ounces of crushed white truffle, and the butter and olive oil. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Stuff potato mixture back into potato skin. Put back in a 350 degree oven for another 10 minutes. Remove from the oven and shave the remaining truffles evenly on top of each potato. Serve.

Rooting Out White Truffles

Restaurants

Dona
208 E. 52nd St.
New York, NY 10022
(212) 308-0830

Butter
415 Lafayette St.
New York, NY 10003
(212) 253-2828

Jovia
135 E. 62nd St.
New York, NY 10021
(212) 752-6000

A Voce
41 Madison Ave.
New York, NY 10010
(212) 545-8555

Markets

SOS Chefs
104 Ave. B
New York, NY 10009
(212) 505-5813

Dean & DeLuca
560 Broadway
New York, NY 10012
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