



ALL CONSUMING AUSTRALIAN TRUFFLES

If you think kangaroo and Foster's are the height of Australian gastronomy, there is a new nugget of gourmet gold that will make you think twice about pantry treasures buried in the land down under.

"Smell this," says Pino Posteraro, as the Vancouver owner of Cioppiono's Mediterranean Grill shaves wafer-thin slivers of black Périgord truffle over a simple watercress salad. The exotic aroma of musty socks and wilted roses laid over damp leaves wafts up from the plate.

"Now smell this," he says, rasping the lumpy mushroom over plump oxtail ravioli in sage butter. With a little heat, the black truffle explodes into a rounder, earthier expression of forest floor soaked in dried-grape amarone.

That's the magic of truffles, the "black diamond" of the kitchen, which, with their intensified fungal flavour, makes meat taste



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meatier, adds savoury depth to risotto and transforms scrambled eggs into something sublime.

What's even more miraculous is that these exquisite Périgord truffles come from Australia, not France, and are available in July.

"Australian black truffles are as good, if not better, than winter truffles from France," says Mr. Posteraro, who's been using the densely grained mushrooms from the Wine & Truffle Co. in Australia for the last two years.

The Périgord truffle is a black winter truffle, harvested in France from December to March. Australian winter truffles are available in our summer, from June to the end of August.

North American chefs have typically used summer truffles (grown all across Europe) to supplement their menus in the off-season. But they have a paler flesh and less distinct aroma.

Australian Périgord truffles are

slightly less expensive than their French cousins – approximately \$1.80 a gram, compared to \$2 to \$2.50. And to their North American fans, which include such famed chefs as California's Thomas Keller and Toronto's Mark McEwan, their smell and taste is indistinguishable.

"You cannot tell the difference," says Vancouver chef David Hawksworth, who is now using them at his haute Hawksworth Restaurant in an English pea risotto, and sliced over gourmet pizza with crudo, bacon, thyme and crème fraîche.

Mr. Hawksworth also notes that the Australian market offers him the highest grade available. "In France, they keep the best truffles for themselves. But these truffles we're getting from Australia are perfect. They're phenomenal."

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