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THE GLOBE AND MAIL 

Caviar dreams fulfilled: Ethical, delicious and even Canadian

ALEXANDRA GILL

VANCOUVER— From Wednesday's Globe and Mail

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How did this caviar change so dramatically? It was oxidized, having likely been exposed to too much air when transferred from its original packaging or not resealed tightly enough.

Repackaging is common and necessary for selling smaller quantities (caviar is often imported by the kilogram). But it also offers nefarious opportunities for producers and distributors to lose track of a caviar's origin. Though not always legally required in Canada, repackaged tins should be stamped with a CITES import code. (Our beluga, osetra and repackaged Siberian baerii weren't.) The Canadian caviars showed exceptionally well. Among the three judges, we all had a different favourite. Although we had initial doubts about including Acadian Premium, a legally harvested wild product from New Brunswick that was almost past its best-before date, the fatty roe was so bracingly strong and pleasingly fresh, some of us (okay, it was me) considered it Canada's best.

The initial tastings were interspersed with 2002 vintage Dom Perignon, allegedly the best champagne pairing for caviar. But much to our surprise, sake and vodka pierced through the saltiness and worked better at cleansing the palate. We were also somewhat shocked to see how drastically the caviar flavours changed when paired with unbuttered blinis and crème fraiche. Most, but not all, were enhanced by its traditional accompaniments, which mellowed their natural salt and metallic bitterness.

All in all, this is good news for discerning bargain hunters. Sure, farmed beluga may cost a fraction of the price of the original wild species. But with a little sake and crème fraiche, even the cheapest farmed caviar will please your inner tsarina.

The taste test

Beluga (*Huso huso*)

Imported by The International House of Caviar from United Food Technologies in Fulda, Germany; \$275 for 30 grams

Age: Three months

Appearance: Big, glossy grey grains

Aroma: High-grade sea salt

Texture: Super creamy, not much pop

Taste: Fatty almonds, long rich finish

Panel says: "Crème de la crème of caviar." "Pure."

Score: 8.3/10

Siberian Baerii (*Acipenser baerii*)

Imported by The International House of Caviar from United Food Technologies in Fulda, Germany; \$75 for 30 grams

Age: Two months

Appearance: Small, shiny, dark black grains

Aroma: Ocean fresh

Texture: Firm, mild pop

Taste: Sharp saltiness, subtle nuttiness

Panel says: "Shows well in all categories." "Premium caviar."

Score: 7.5

Acadian Premium – Wild Atlantic Sturgeon – (*Acipenser oxyrinchus*)

Acadian Sturgeon and Caviar, Carter's Point, N.B.; \$75 for 30 grams

Age: Nine months

Appearance: Tiny dark grains

Aroma: Strong fishiness

Texture: Firm, creamy, melts in the mouth

Taste: Clean and briny, hint of walnut

Panel says: "An intensely flavoured caviar that will please traditionalists." "Not for wimps."

Score: 7

Northern Divine – White Sturgeon (*Acipenser transmontanus*)

Target Marine Products, Sechelt, B.C.; \$99 for 30 grams

Age: 12 months

Appearance: Small grains, inconsistent colour (dark grey to black), lucid sheen

