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CAVIAR AFFAIR

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New Zealand

Jean Joho

By Scott Rose

interview

For French chef Jean Joho, caviar is a sensual experience worthy of great respect and best savored with little decoration.

Traditional Alsatian fare includes *escargots en cocotte* and various *tartes flambées*—sublime dishes that require meticulous standards. And perhaps no one sets the bar higher than celebrated chef Jean Joho, proprietor of four award-winning restaurants in Illinois, Massachusetts, and Nevada.

At Brasserie Jo's two locations in Chicago and Boston, you'll find impeccable French cuisine and Belgian beers selected with a connoisseur's acumen. Las Vegas's Eiffel Tower restaurant overlooking the Bellagio hotel's dramatic fountain provides a magnificent setting for indulging in a trilogy of imported osetra caviars from Iran, Russia, and Siberia. And Everest, located on the 40th floor of The Chicago Stock Exchange Building, is the towering peak of Joho's gustatory range. Once named Chef of the Year by *Bon Appétit* magazine, Joho is a true *bon vivant* committed to all things caviar.

Caviar Affair: When did you discover caviar?

Jean Joho: I first sampled caviar when I was 5-years-old, though I can't say I understood it. At 13, I feasted on chef Paul Haerberlin's homard Prince Vladimir—caviar atop shelled lobster in a champagne sauce—at L'Auberge de L'Île restaurant in France. It was absolutely wonderful! Later, I attended their Russian-themed dinner; the décor, the waiters' clothing, and the dishes were all done in a grand Czarist style with caviar served with each offering. Caviar was everywhere—I hardly knew where to begin, but certainly, I knew it was a unique and wonderful taste.

CA: Do you have a favorite recipe?

JJ: To experience what caviar really should be, I prefer to have it plain on a spoon. These days, guests who order caviar and possess a true knowledge of and passion for it usually enjoy it best on its own. But in



World traveler chef Jean Joho lets his palate lead the way.

one of my Chicago restaurants, we have a marvelous winter cream of cabbage soup with house-smoked sturgeon and caviar.

CA: What's your drink of choice?

JJ: Champagne! Given the saltiness of caviar, you want something full and round so the caviar doesn't get lost. I enjoy old-style champagne with real depth. In my opinion, a grande cuvée is best.

CA: Do you think caviar can be good for you?

JJ: I can't think of anything unhealthy about it. Dietary moderation is generally paramount to health, so perhaps if you ate a kilo of caviar every day for a month, you'd have a problem.

CA: What do you find most attractive about prized caviar?

JJ: It's sexy, elegant, and women love it. There is invariably a heady sensation when you hold those perfect pearls of sturgeon eggs in your mouth and then pop them on your tongue. That texture, that flavor, that emotion! Above all, though, caviar is unique and worthy of respect.