

Fine Caviar Experience

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Caviar is derived from the Persian word, *khav-yar*, which means “cake of strength” – the Persians believed it had medicinal powers. Aristotle, the Greek scholar, described caviar as a delicacy in the 4th Century B.C. even before Oysters, before Champagne, before Truffles could join this league. In Great Britain, the sturgeon was reserved as the “Royal Fish”. But, it was the Tsars of Russia who elevated caviar into an uber luxury space.

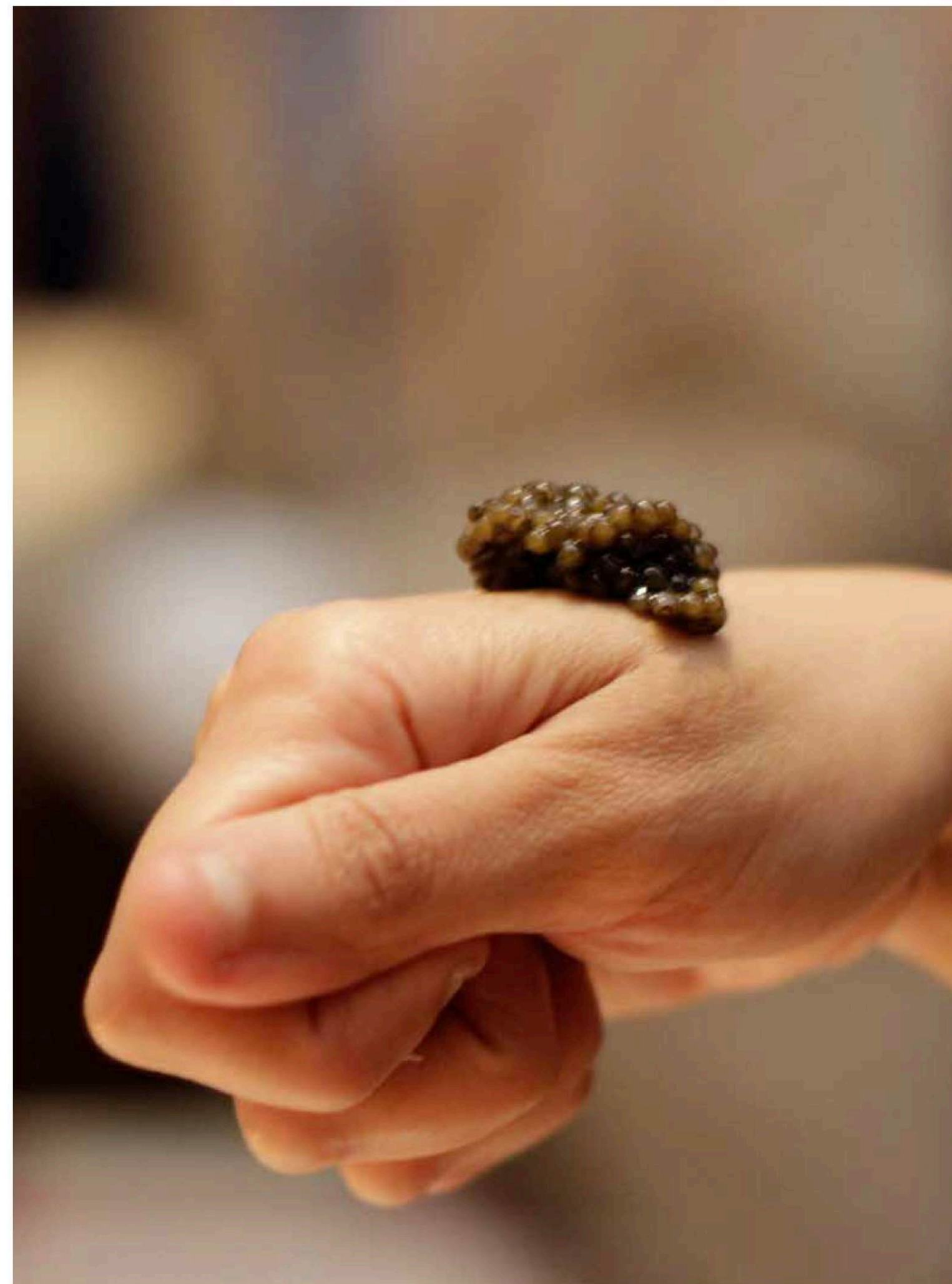


Caviar is revered by the high heeled elite Indian, but perhaps not that well understood. The FINE Caviar Experience was conceptualised by us with the Reunion Islands based *Lux'en Bouche*, who distribute the world's finest gastronomy products that are of the highest quality and integrity. General Manager, Sonia Baeriswyl and her husband Steve, draw down their knowledge reserves to help clients in the Indian Ocean rim discover these precious metallic grey pearls that give them their family name.

This was going to be a first for India, and the expansive water body dotted luxury oasis in the Millenium City, The Oberoi Gurgaon, was a natural choice. Intensive discussions with Chef

Manish Sharma around what was going to be a unique and first-ever-in-India pairing of caviar and Champagne, set the tone for the evening. Impressed by the chef's culinary prowess, the Baeriswyl's readily handed over their booty to his capable hands.

Three types of Caviar – *Baeri*, *Oscietra* and *Prunier Malossol* – and Balik smoked salmon were sent to Chef Manish as a temperature controlled delivery, with the challenge to highlight caviar through the meal. He finalised a five course menu with iterative fine tuning, and adaptation to Sonia's French touch. A stunning table was set with decadent candles and fine chinaware for this special treat at the private dining area of the much awarded 361° restaurant.





The legendary expressway traffic played up that evening, but that did not deter any of our 14 privileged guests that included royals, designers, gourmets and connoisseurs. The dampened spirits, if any, were addressed with a refreshing flute of the Brut Premier from cellars of Louis Roederer. As I introduced the evening to our guests, a trolley was wheeled in, under the veil of dry ice vapour. Seated majestically on a bed of ice in a footed bowl was the first 125gm tin of Caviar – the *Quando Baeri*, surrounded by gold spoons (the expensive alternate to mother of pearl).

Steve donned white gloves, and surely yet gently, knifed open the metal tin to reveal the delicate, shimmering, dark grey pearls. Our host, David Mathews, shared the first glimpse of the perfectly packed grains in the tin with all. Sonia shared her insights about how caviar is very much like a wine, but it should never be smelled – it needs time to reveal the true flavours, and needs to be tasted several times to be enjoyed. “You can eat as much caviar as you want, unlimited... if you can expense it”, Sonia answered a query. Sure, wouldn’t that be lovely!



Baeri

Obtained from *Acipenser Baerii* sturgeon, extensively farmed in the Dordogne in Bordeaux. It appears very dark in the box, almost black. Subtle. It has a rather large grain that separates easily and when held up against light, it is shiny. A little bit salty with a delicate slightly woody flavor and an exceptionally rich taste. No metallic aftertaste. A guest found the *Baeri* fresh and melting in the mouth.



Oscietra

Drawn from the *Acipenser Gueldenstaedti* sturgeon, and a sought after variety of Caspian caviars. It is dark amber in colour. Firm. It is an exceptional full-bodied grained caviar with a lingering nutty flavor. Very consistent texture. A guest found the *Oscietra* to have a more balanced flavour, and it transported her to the sea world.



Prunier Malossol

The master piece caviar. A light metallic grey colour. Very rich in character due to a unique salt content using the traditional Iranian recipe. A pronounced grain. Very intense, complex and overpowering. Distinctively creamy taste with a long and lasting finish. A tad tannic. A guest found the *Prunier Malossol* to be something he could get used to, with flavours that elevate and dominate the experience.

She took charge and began to carefully separate the berries before scooping out the servings into the golden spoon. *Alors*, she revealed the more romantic tasting style of placing it on the webbing of a clenched fist. As it was left on the skin, Sonia encouraged us to hold up the scoop of caviar against the light, admire the size and colour. We learned that the lighter the colour and bigger the size, and if easily separable, the caviar is graded better – colour, size, texture and of course, flavour. As we finally get to place it on the tongue, we are advised “roll it on your tongue and let it hit the roof, the flavours will explode”!

Our goals were set. We were expected to differentiate the types of caviar – *Baeri*, *Oscietra* and *Prunier Malossol* – that were laid out in the Trio of Caviar platter. Champagne Drappier Carte d’Or from the family cellars in the Aube was my choice for this degustation.

As we tasted the different caviars, we cleansed the palate with water. Even if amidst very animated discussions amongst ourselves, we concluded our tasting notes. We all did quite well, maybe due to our taskmaster Sonia.

Our next platter was a selection of Balik salmon with caviar, and I chose that each be presented with a different style of champagne. *Prunier Malossol* topped the foam on the Medallions of Balik Salmon *Sjomga* Orange and was served with the bling bling Armand de Brignac Brut, recently acquired by the rapper Jay Z. *Oscietra* topped the scallops that were marinated with Kombu and Citrus and was served with the zero dosage Pol Roger Pure. *Quando Baeri* topped the lemon ice on the medallions of Balik Salmon *Sjomga* Tradition and was served with the enchanting Laurent Perrier Rose. We approached the pairings as newly certified professionals, and agreed



that the champagne not only complemented the caviar, but also enhanced each other's taste.

The chef gave delicate touches of caviar in the champagne *beurre blanc* around the pan seared Sea Bass which were served with saffron mash potato and roast baby vegetables as the *plat principal*. From the cellars of Champagne emerged Krug Grande Cuvée, which brought a creamy richness to the palate with its powerful oak matured intensity. The slow baked Belgian dark chocolate cake with pistachio nougatine and hazelnut ice cream arrived with the purple

jacketed Taittinger Nocturne Sec, reminiscent of the iconic Studio 54. A perfect match for a delightful sweet ending.

I asked Chef Manish to share his thoughts on the culinary journey, one that he had crafted so well. He acknowledged the task to be very challenging, especially the scallops which could not be hot – his thinking hat went on, and the marination was borrowed from the Japanese kitchen. He, and the team from The Oberoi, took their bow. The evening was a perfect introduction to the treasures of the sea – indeed a FINE Caviar Experience!



Fine Caviar Experience

 <p>89p Louis Roederer Brut Premier Brut NV</p> <p>Colour: Pale lemon</p> <p>Nose: Mild and round white fruit nose with elegant charred toastiness underneath apples, cardamom and oceanic notes</p> <p>Palate: Crisp, light-weight palate with fine mousse</p> <p>Ending: Long and lean with lovely acidity</p> <p>In a nutshell: The perfect palate-refresher</p> <p>Buy or not: Yes</p> <p>When to drink: 2014-2019</p> <p>Food pairing: Seafood platter</p> <p>Final verdict: Polished to perfection</p>	 <p>85p Drappier Carte d'Or</p> <p>Colour: Pale, light, straw-yellow</p> <p>Nose: Fresh, citrus, biscuity, yeasty, apples</p> <p>Palate: Dry, crisp, high acidity, medium-bodied, apricots</p> <p>Ending: Medium-long, mineral, robust</p> <p>In a nutshell: Firm and serious</p> <p>Buy or not: Yes, if crisp and robust is your style</p> <p>When to drink: Now-2018</p> <p>Food pairing: Salmon pastrami</p> <p>Final verdict: Marlboro man of champagne</p>	 <p>90p Laurent-Perrier Cuvée Rosé Brut NV</p> <p>Colour: Pale cherry pink</p> <p>Nose: Pretty, spicy, sweet cherry nose</p> <p>Palate: Subtle, generous, balanced, elegant with an energetic mousse</p> <p>Ending: Medium-long, fresh, compact</p> <p>In a nutshell: Red fruit dominant complemented by aged characters</p> <p>Buy or not: Yes</p> <p>When to drink: 2014-2019</p> <p>Food pairing: Smoked salmon</p> <p>Final verdict: Delivers in its elegance, balance and vibrancy</p>
 <p>89p Pol Roger Pure Extra Brut NV</p> <p>Colour: Medium-deep lemon</p> <p>Nose: Mild, clean, fresh and youthful pear and peach nose</p> <p>Palate: Soft, fluffy and creamy, light-weight and elegant</p> <p>Ending: Long, dry with good fruit purity</p> <p>In a nutshell: Flawless and pleasurable</p> <p>Buy or not: Yes</p> <p>When to drink: 2014-2017</p> <p>Food pairing: Whitefish mousse with aniseed rye bread</p> <p>Final verdict: Pleasant, pure and fresh with a fine balance</p>	 <p>90p Armand de Brignac Brut Gold NV</p> <p>Colour: Pale lemon</p> <p>Nose: Soft, mild, elegant, spicy with overt fruit</p> <p>Palate: Fresh and smooth with medium intensity, a fine delicate mousse</p> <p>Ending: Balanced and fresh</p> <p>In a nutshell: In between styles</p> <p>Buy or not: If price is not an obstacle</p> <p>When to drink: 2014-2018</p> <p>Food pairing: Fried scallops</p> <p>Final verdict: Light-weight, easy-going and elegant but not much complexity</p>	 <p>93p Krug Grande Cuvée Brut NV</p> <p>Colour: Medium-deep lemon-green</p> <p>Nose: Rich, evolving nose of depth, some spicy new oak notes, gunpowder, oriental spice, vanilla and ripe apple</p> <p>Palate: Full, layered, mellow and firm</p> <p>Ending: Concentrated yet with elegance</p> <p>In a nutshell: Highly intense with potential</p> <p>Buy or not: Yes</p> <p>When to drink: 2014-2025</p> <p>Food pairing: Sole Meunière</p> <p>Final verdict: Finely crafted</p>
	 <p>87p Taittinger Nocturne</p> <p>Colour: Pale, light, lemon-yellow</p> <p>Nose: Fresh, apricot, candied, gently toasty</p> <p>Palate: Medium-sweet, vivid, fruity, toasty and medium-bodied</p> <p>Ending: Moderate length, mineral, lemony twist</p> <p>In a nutshell: Perfectly balanced</p> <p>Buy or not: Yes - a safe bet in a nightclub</p> <p>When to drink: Now</p> <p>Food pairing: Fresh berries with whipped cream</p> <p>Final verdict: Very refined and well-balanced sweetness</p>	