

New York Magazine

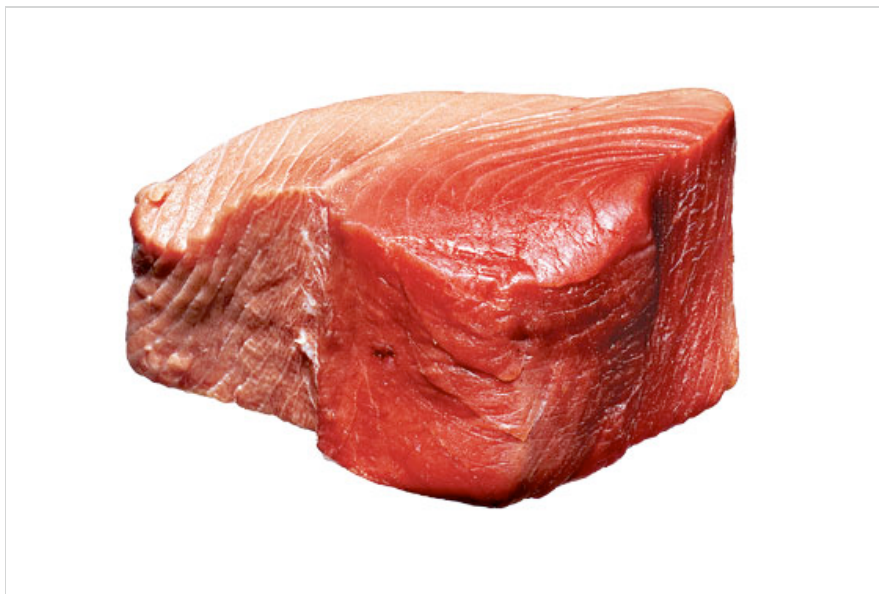
FEATURE

Hot Tuna

From the science labs of a Japanese university comes a farmed bluefin that might save the planet (or, at least, an ecominded piscivore's conscience).

By [Robin Raisfeld](#) & [Rob Patronite](#) Published May 4, 2008

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Farmed bluefin fetches \$60 a pound at Agata & Valentina.

(Photo: Kang Kim)

On recent Wednesday afternoon, all scrubbing, peeling, and chopping in the bustling basement of the Modern restaurant came to an abrupt halt as cooks and captains crowded around a very large fish on a long metal table and started feverishly snapping away with their camera phones. It's not every day, after all, that a 180-pound bluefin tuna, chauffeured straight from customs at JFK, appears in their workaday midst.

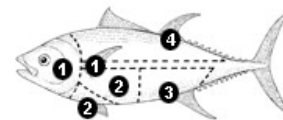
The most striking aspect of this particular specimen wasn't its size but its provenance. The kindai tuna, as it's called, is the product of an aquaculture program launched in 1948 at what would become Japan's Kinki University as a means of creating viable protein in a world where a growing population would soon deplete wild stocks. At the time, no one knew that fringe benefits like a relatively low mercury count and environmental impact would become such tremendous selling points.

Of the five fish flown to America weekly from Japan, one goes to Megu, which, through its Kinki connections, was the first local restaurant to debut kindai, last fall. Three go to the West Coast. And the last one, the one shimmering under the Modern's fluorescent lights, is imported by Andrea Angera of Connecticut's Litchfield Farms Organic & Natural, a meat and seafood distributor focused on sustainability, and divvied up among a handful of high-end restaurant and retail clients, Per Se and Le Bernardin among them.

Angera, who has scheduled this special kindai appearance to demonstrate tuna-cutting technique, believes the university's marketing group chose him to wholesale the fish for one reason: He's mastered the "sustainability story," that comforting bit of narrative that assures consumers (and chefs) they're doing their part for the planet. Kinki even provides physical proof in the form of a "certificate of origin"

Short Division

Besides Megu, here's where one week's supply of kindai-tuna cuts wind up:



1. Kama Toro/ Tempa-Teshin

Gramercy Tavern

2. Sunazuri/O-toro

Brasserie 8 1/2, davidburke & donatella, Mt. Kisco Seafood (Mt. Kisco, N.Y.)

3. Chu-toro

The Modern, Veritas, Agata &

that accompanies each fish like a résumé, documenting place of incubation, date of transfer from hatchery to open-water pen, water density—even its specific diet.

Ultimately, though, what matters most to cooks like Sandro Romano, chef de cuisine of the Modern, is the taste. He compares the kindai’s rich, oceanic flavor to East Coast oysters, and doubts he could tell the difference between a kindai and a very rare, very expensive (and very politically incorrect) bluefin taken from the open seas. “For me,” he says, “this is wild fish.”

Valentina

4. Akami

Per Se, Le Bernardin, Fishtales Seafood (New Canaan, Conn.)

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This approach points to the future of seafood. Wild stocks are at or beyond the limits of sustainable catches. As world population goes to 9 billion and per capita fish consumption increases dramatically across the global income spectrum, aquaculture is the only solution. A marquee product such as this one is a harbinger of things to come. The technologies developed in this sort of luxury production will trickle down to make staple seafood increasingly affordable at that same time that farming's environmental impacts (if any) are reduced. Three cheers for kindai!

BY **AQUACOPIA** on 05/06/2008 at 3:29 pm

That's too high a price for even the best tuna. The entire idea of marketing the poor tuna to only select markets reeks of elitist ...

BY **MYMYMICHL** on 05/05/2008 at 4:59 pm

ocean carnivores ingest mercury via their diet. similarly, humans go swimming in the ocean and, if we don't open our mouths underwater, we don't increase ...

BY **DATRUTH585** on 05/05/2008 at 9:49 am

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