

LEFT: A salad Niçoise with sardines at Maiden Lane in NYC.
RIGHT: The interior of Maiden Lane.

tinned seafood—and, yes, most people use the British word *tinned* over the American tradition of *canned*. “We say tinned seafood instead of canned seafood,” says Nialls Fallon, a co-owner of Maiden Lane. “It’s a conscious differentiation between the American concept of canned versus the English concept of tinned. For many decades now in the U.S., the canning industry has been all about thrift and industrialization, about getting a can of tuna for 99 cents. The European mindset has never been about thriftiness; it’s always been about preserving fish at the peak of their season.

“We’re more familiar with season in this country [as it relates to] produce—if you want a perfect heirloom tomato and it’s not August, you need to have frozen it, canned it or have preserved it in some way,” Fallon says. “That’s the way it is in Spain with fish.” Maiden Lane is not just serving tinned seafood to New York barhoppers, it is also now direct-importing Spanish, French and other European tins of fish that weren’t previously available in the U.S. and working with canneries on new labels and products. “We’re

working with a cannery in Bristol Bay, Alaska, [and it’s] hands-down one of the most sustainable salmon fisheries in the world,” he says. “Canned salmon is crucial to Alaska fishery; there’s a six-week run only, in June and July, and there needs to be a way to preserve it. But the Spanish way of doing things, with olive oil, might not make sense in Alaska—there are no Alaskan olives. That’s part of what makes this an exciting time, coming up with a new piece of the future for sustainable fishing.”

Natalie Webster is a member of one of the six fishing families in San Diego that banded together to start the company American Tuna, because they also believed the future was in high-quality tins. “We started this out of sheer survival,” Webster says. “Everything we do is sustainable, we catch our American albacore with line and pole, but when we brought in our catch, we were treated like a commodity. There was no value placed on our fishery, the quality of our fish, our sustainable method of harvest.” So they started working with a microcannery on a line of high-quality American tuna, some smoked, some with flavor-

ings (garlic, sea salt); now it’s used in the high-end tuna sandwiches on offer at Tom Colicchio’s sandwich chain *wichcraft*.

Needless to say, tinned fish is not a new product in America. Erik Anderson is opening his Champagne-focused restaurant Brut in an early 20th-century Minneapolis building that once held an American seafood cannery, the Kildall Fish Co. “I have their product list from 1939,” says Anderson. “Anchovies, sardines, caviar—they were eating really well from Minneapolis cans. Who knew?” Not Anderson, who didn’t experience high-quality tinned fish until he visited a market in Barcelona, where they call tinned fish *conservas*.

“There was this one store, a little tiny shop, with walls stacked high with *conservas*. I talked to the guy and he said canned fish is not a bad word there. They take the best fish and can it. The best fish. Not the stuff they can’t sell,” Anderson says. “The razor clams were what blew my mind instantly. They’re insanely delicious. I didn’t realize anything out of a can could taste that good. I went crazy. I tried so much. Now I almost



LEFT: Guests at Bar Vivant.
RIGHT: Canned baby eels at Bar Vivant.



have the same mentality of a kid collecting baseball cards, I want to collect it all. I have this kilo of canned bonito from Ramón Peña. They age it for years before they even sell it, and only produce a certain amount of it, and the can is hand-numbered. Who

needs a kilo of canned fish? That's why I need to open my restaurant."

If all this talk of high-quality tinned fish has you curious, Portland chef Cheryl Wakerhauser of Bar Vivant has some advice. Most people know Bar Vivant because it has

twice been named to the "World's Best Champagne & Sparkling Wine List" from the London magazine *The World of Fine Wine*, but Bar Vivant also has one of the country's greatest selections of tinned fish. "The main thing to get Americans to think tinned fish is good is just to open the can and let them taste it. It sells itself," she says. "The *ventresca*, the tuna belly, is the easiest sell of all. You don't have to do anything to it to make it amazing—just open the can, take a fork and add some crusty bread. Actually, when I have a long flight, I will take a tin of *ventresca*, a tiny bottle of olive oil, some salt, chili pepper because I love spice and a loaf of bread—it's so good." Is this the future of travel, Americans popping lids on tuna belly at 30,000 feet? Lots of American restaurant folk say yes—and please remember, it's not a can, it's more than that. It's a tin. ▽

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