

Restaurants & Bars

The best unsung food shops

Reconsider your usual standbys for some overlooked winners. By Rachel Wharton



One-stop shop

Agata & Valentina

Beyond the dozens of Sicilian specialties imported exclusively for owners Joe and Agata Musco and Louie Balducci—like tough-to-find Southern Italian olive oils, jams, tomato sauces and coffees—this immaculate supermarket boasts outstanding groceries. Gasp at the stellar local and heirloom produce, a sparkling fish and caviar counter, a station dedicated to a wealth of house-made pastas, and more. There are also prepared foods: A 35-member kitchen creates top-notch takeout, from wild-mushroom risotto to roasted duck.

Must-tries: Sicilian pizza *alla Nonna*, \$2.99 a square; house-made mozzarella, \$6.99/lb; *taramasalata* from the caviar counter, 8oz for \$4.99. 1505 First Ave at 79th St (212-452-0690)

Meat

Lobel's Prime Meats

Italian pork stores and hipster meat counters seem to be garnering most of the attention these days, but the Lobel family has been carving fine quality meats for 170 years. If the seasonally inspired sausages, dry-aged American Wagyu rib steaks, and racks of hormone- and antibiotic-free veal don't draw you in, the picturesque interior, with mounted stag's heads and cleavers on display, just might. Lobel's has developed a thriving online business as well, peddling inventory available on the Web only (like grilling packs featuring snappy hot dogs).

Must-tries: Dry-aged 16-ounce Wagyu rib steak, \$71.98; 14-ounce veal porterhouse chop, \$35.98; Lobel's natural-casing beef hot dogs, six for \$15.98. 1096 Madison Ave between 82nd and 83rd Sts (212-737-1372)

Pastry

Mansoura

Patriarch Isaac Mansoura started this bakery with recipes that migrated with his family for generations, from Syria to Egypt to Paris, and finally to Brooklyn in 1961. The quality of the Middle Eastern confectionery is unsurpassed. Baklava, filled with fresh walnuts or moist pistachios, are sticky yet crisp, each layer of phyllo pastry miraculously distinct. *Mamoul* cookies are precious packets—barely sweet pastry filled with date puree or pistachio sweetmeat. The shop itself, with an iconic cursive sign and wood-paneled interior, may be a trek for some. Luckily, you can order the treats at mansoura.com.

Must-tries: Baklava, \$20/lb; *mamoul*, a dozen for \$12; apricot roll, \$20/lb; Turkish delight, \$20/lb. 515 Kings Hwy between 2nd and 3rd Sts, Gravesend, Brooklyn (718-645-7977)

Grains, seeds, nuts and dried fruits

Whole Foods Market Tribeca

The Tribeca branch of Whole Foods offers something we never expected from a mainstream market: 115 ingredients sold in bulk. An entire aisle is filled with items such as 14 types of organic beans and lentils, seven organic varieties of rice, plus granolas, flours, sugars, spices and three grind-your-own nut butters—all at prices well below what you'd find in bags and jars.

Must-tries: Green-chili sugar, \$8.99/lb; Lundberg organic wild-rice blend, \$3.99/lb; grind-your-own peanut butter, \$4.19/lb. 270 Greenwich St between Murray and Warren Sts (212-

Produce

Integral Yoga Natural Foods

Yoga guru Manu Dawson's city-hippie grocery stocks a broad array of organic fruits and vegetables. From May till the end of fall, almost everything is grown locally, and the nearly 100 items—including up to 15 types of greens alone—are fresh and well cared for. Heads of lettuce are crispy and bushy, sharp-edged dandelion leaves practically quiver as you pass, and Fair Trade bananas sport barely a speckle of black.

Must-tries: Meyer lemons, \$3.79/lb; Fair Trade bananas, 99¢/lb; Lady Moon Farm dandelion greens, \$3.29 a bunch. 229 W 13th St between Greenwich and Seventh Aves (212-243-2642)

Fish

P.E. & D.D. Seafood

Unless you've caught it yourself, there's no fresher seafood to be found in Manhattan than what brothers Phil and Wade Karlin sell every Saturday at the Union Square Greenmarket. The fishermen head out to sea from Riverhead, Long Island, a day or so before they come into the city to peddle their haul. Beyond whole fish and fillets of flounder, sole, monkfish and porgy, there are supersweet scallops, squid, clams, conch, and when they're in season, one of the best deals on lobster in town.

Must-tries: Lobster, \$8–\$9/lb live and \$9.50 cooked; sweet sea scallops, \$15.50/lb; briny littleneck clams, a dozen for \$5.50. *Union Square Greenmarket, Mondays and Saturdays (631-727-0523)*

Coffee

Dean & DeLuca

Most coffee geeks scorn chains, but in the past few months, New York's nine Dean & DeLuca cafés have earned some cred. All stores have started exclusively carrying the top-quality java from indie favorite Counter Culture. Previously, the North Carolina roaster's beans were sold only at a handful of city coffee shops. Dean & DeLuca has also tapped into Counter Culture's training center, which means that staffers can pull espresso shots and pour latte art as skillfully as any Williamsburg barista.

Must-tries: 12-ounce bag of Dean & DeLuca's house blend, \$14; 12-ounce bag of Buna Ababa beans from Ethiopia, \$14; 12-ounce bag of Gayo beans from Sumatra, \$14. *560 Broadway at Prince St (212-226-6800) and eight other locations citywide (deandeluca.com)*

Cheese

Formaggio Essex

Two years ago, Turkish expat Ihsan Gurdal—owner of Formaggio Kitchen, the premier specialty-foods store in Cambridge, Massachusetts—brought his curatorial prowess to this outpost in the Essex Street Market. The tiny space showcases an impressive array of cow's, goat's and sheep's milk cheeses imported from at least 15 different European countries. Ihsan seeks out many himself on dozens of annual foraging trips (earning him the title of Chevalier dans L'Ordre du Mérite Agricole from the French government for his support of the country's artisans).

Must-tries: Three Formaggio exclusives: Belgian sheep's milk Beringse Gouda, \$30.96/lb; aged Pecorino di Pienza Morchiato, \$20.95/lb; Mille Trous de L'Ariege, a raw-milk cheese from France, \$30.95/lb. *Essex Street Market, 120 Essex St at Delancey St, 212-982-8200*

Bread

Orwasher's Bakery

When Keith Cohen bought this bakery from its founding owners a few years back, he wanted to expand on the century-old kosher spot's old-world reputation by producing cutting-edge artisan breads. While he still makes Orwasher's famous Jewish rye, Cohen has remodeled the tiled-floor shop into a sunlit café, and now sells crusty European-style loaves and rustic "Artisan Wine" bread made with natural yeasts found on the grapes at Long Island's Channing Daughters Winery.

Must-tries: Jewish rye pullman loaf, \$3.99; Artisan Wine chardonnay dark rye and whole wheat miche, \$4.25; Ultimate 100 percent whole wheat loaf made from local grains, \$7.50. *308 E 78th St between First and Second Aves (212-288-6569)*

All-purpose ethnic

Trade Fair Supermarket

This Queens grocery chain serves the international mix of folks that call the borough home, with a butcher shop selling halal meats, a wall of rices used in Indian and East Asian cooking, aisles overwhelmed with cans and bottles (everything from Spanish chili pastes to Croatian potted meats) and much more. Trade Fair's produce alone is worth a trip, thanks to perky Chinese long beans, okra for Indian curries, Mexican epazote, bitter Greek greens and chillies used for cooking on every continent.

Must-tries: Dende oil used in Brazilian and West African cooking, 140ml for \$3.49; Beirut brand Lebanese tahini, 32oz for \$5.99; halal leg of lamb, \$3.99/lb. *30-08 30th Ave at 30th St, Astoria, Queens (718-728-9484) and ten more locations in Queens (tradefairny.com)*

Additional reporting by Gabriella Gershenson

[PREVIOUS](#)

1 | 2

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