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The Life of a Post-Season Truffle

We took a trip to the new Rainbow Room at 30 Rock, just as chef Jonathan Wright sealed up truffle season.



Courtesy of Rainbow Room

BY JESSIE KISSINGER MAR 25, 2015

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≡ On Tuesday, March 17th, a 60-pound shipment of black Perigold truffles arrived at the kitchen of the recently reopened Rainbow Room on the 65th floor of 30 Rock, where Chef Jonathan Wright and his staff, immediately began inspecting, weighing, and cleaning the bounty with toothbrushes. 🔍

Truffle season runs from November through March, and Wright wanted to preserve one of winter's few yields for the warmer months ahead, so he secured the massive cargo from J. Gaillard, a truffle hunter who sells his findings at the Marche de Richerences in Provence, a winter market dedicated exclusively to truffles. (The market takes place on Saturday mornings on the Avenue de la Rabasse—the Provençal word for truffle—where even after the market closes, the fragrance pervades the village.) Gaillard traveled across the Atlantic with the precious load to ensure its safe delivery.

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By the following Thursday, the kitchen at the Rainbow Room smelled like thawing earth, cured black olives, and a tinge of sulfur. Over the course of two days, Wright and members of his staff prepared a bouillon nature with Port and Madeira, then added the truffles to cook briefly, infusing the broth with their potent scent. Chilled, the broth formed a truffle jelly, exquisitely gelatinous from beef and veal shins, and the bones of chickens and turkey legs and thighs. The whole endeavor—truffles and jelly—filled two clear plastic tubs, each large enough to fit a kindergartener.

≡ Around 3 p.m., dots of jelly clung to the tubs' sides and Wright had  ladled most of the glistening black orbs into 60 glass jars, soon to be sealed in a hot water bath, each jar gently surrounded by cardboard to prevent the glass from shattering and ruining its precious insides. So pungent are the truffles raw that when stored with eggs in the refrigerator, their scent permeates the shell imbuing the white with flavor. Preserved, they should last the kitchen twelve months.



Chef Jonathan Wright. And 60 pounds of black Perigold truffles.

Courtesy of Rainbow Room

Throughout the afternoon, Chef Wright was spry. His salt gray hair defied gravity, and he moved quickly, directly, happily around his kitchen, enamored with the whole process. He had learned to preserve truffles as a demi chef de partie at the illustrious Manoir

≡ Aux Quat'Saisons under Ramond Blanc in Oxford. Now helming the kitchen at the iconic Rainbow Room, he's carrying on traditions from his classical training, expressing the elegance (and opulence) of the Whitneys, Rockefellers, and Astors that first swirled on its revolving dance floor. 🔍

Wright poured warmed bouillon into champagne glasses and distributed small servings of truffle jelly layered with truffle cream. York Ast, Director of Operations for Rainbow Room and SixtyFive, the adjoining bar, tagged along for the sampling, unable to resist the smell wafting through the kitchen. "If you love truffles," he said, "this is incredible."

The jelly was deeply fungal, but well rounded, the slightest dip of a spoon overtaking all gustatory sensation. The amber bouillon lit up against the pre-plating area's window, which revealed an expansive view of upper Manhattan. And between the lookout and the chef's devotion to process, the scene had a certain romance to it—like all the crystals refracting rainbows in the dining room—even in the wings, the Rainbow Room possessed an old school glamour that only a true legacy institution could carry.

Looking out the window, a fellow taster noted, "You can see all of central park. You can't see that from the Empire state building. 30 Rock blocks it—that's intentional."

"This is the first day that the park actually looks green." The chef replied. "The last time I looked out the Hudson was frozen."

The Hudson had thawed a few days before, and most of the snow had melted away earlier that week. But even if the kitchen has one of best perches in the city, with all that's going on at the new



Rainbow Room, at least for the people who work in the kitchen,
there's not much time to dwell on the view.



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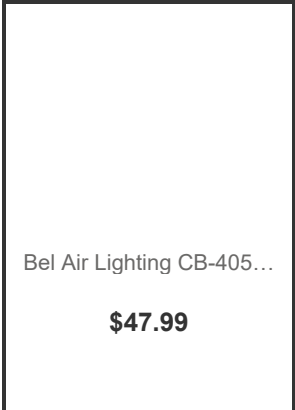
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