

A Little Lamb

WASHINGTON, D.C. CHEF TODD GRAY EXPLORES
THE POTENTIAL OF **AUSTRALIAN LAMB**

by Kelly A. Magyarics

"Australian lamb has a unique richness and depth of flavor that is not found in other lamb varieties from around the world," touts Todd Gray. "It has tremendous mouth feel and tenderness without being overpowering."

The award-winning chef of critically acclaimed Equinox restaurant in Washington, D.C., which opened in 1999 and recently relaunched after a kitchen fire last fall, highlights Australian lamb in several dishes on his menu. Gray is especially fond of utilizing various guises beyond the ubiquitous rack, including a black olive-crusted Australian lamb saddle with heirloom tomato and lamb jus,

and a duo of Australian lamb with sweet peas, lemon thyme and garlic custard. "The contrast in textures [between the leg and the shank] is exciting for the kitchen," he says.

"Todd really gets lamb. He understands how the meat is produced, that it is sustainable, traceable and has great flavor," explains Stephen Edwards of Australian lamb. "Great chefs like Todd treat great products very simply with minimum preparation."

Lamb from Down Under is grass-fed, free-range and without added hormones, rendering a sweeter, leaner and smaller animal. Those who eschew lamb because of prior experiences with gamy flavor and tough texture should be happy to know that due to genetics and a maximum age of 12 months, today's product has a much milder, more palatable flavor that doesn't need to be masked with sauces (or mint jelly, for that matter).

About 45% of all lamb produced in Australia annually is exported around the world, with about 30% (37,000 tons) destined for the U.S.

And as Edwards points out, an average transport time of 40 days for a fresh—not frozen—product that's wet-aged in vacuum sealed bags means that Americans actually get to experience higher-quality, more tender lamb than the Australians do.

To pair with dishes from lamb gravlax to sliders with harissa mayo, Gray is partial to dry, earthy reds like Côtes-du-Rhône or Cabernet Franc to contrast the richness of the meat. Or he may opt for the vanilla and spice of a big Syrah to complement its full flavors.

www.australian-lamb.com ■

