

A growing appetite for quality food has prompted gourmet shops to sprout up

Rebecca Lynne Tan

Singapore's gourmet food market scene has never been bigger. The latest purveyor of artisanal and speciality products to join the local epicurean scene is American gourmet food retailer and cafe Dean & DeLuca.

Its new cafe and retail store opens at Orchard Central tonight. (See facing page)

Indeed, the hunger and demand for all things gourmet has grown over the last five years.

It has been fuelled largely by rising affluence and the increasing number of sophisticated diners with discerning palates, coupled with the slew of new upscale restaurants offering premium food items.

The market has, in turn, responded accordingly, sprouting new stores and expanding product lines.

Gourmet food items available in Singapore now range from truffle oil and fleur de sel, a French sea salt, to speciality olives, artisanal preserves and boutique pastas.

No fewer than 11 standalone gourmet food retailers and chains that stock anywhere between 100 and over 2,000 products each exist today.

These stores exclude supermarkets, organic markets and online retailers that also offer gourmet items.

Stores such as Oh Deli in Telok Kurau, Jones the Grocer in Dempsey Hill and Le Bon Marche, which started in Tiong Bahru and later moved to the Bukit Timah area, opened in 2007, and have been increasing their offerings since.

At Le Bon Marche, for example, the number of products has increased by more than 70 per cent since it opened. It now has over 600 products from France, Italy and Spain.

More stores have joined the scene in the following years. The year 2009 saw the opening of new entrant Little Provence in Tanglin Mall and Jones the Grocer's second outlet in Mandarin Gallery.

Last year, Cut The Mustard in the Greenwood Avenue area off Bukit Timah Road set up shop, while Huber's Butchery, a meat specialist, doubled its gourmet food retail section at Dempsey Hill.

Gourmet and speciality food purveyors say they welcome more players - it makes foodies more aware of the myriad items in the marketplace.

Of the increased competition, Mr Aldo Molinaro, assistant general manager of fine food supplier and retailer Culina, says: "As with most industries, when there are more players in the market, consumers benefit with more product choices and selection."

The gourmet supplier, which is now owned by luxury fashion retailer Club 21, was one of the first to open a gourmet food retail outlet here.

Its now-defunct Park House in Orchard Boulevard opened in 2000. Its main outlet is currently located at Dempsey Hill.

Having more players in the market also keeps existing ones on their toes. Mr Andre Huber, 32,



The latest upmarket food store and cafe is Dean & DeLuca, which opens its doors at Orchard Central tonight. ST PHOTO: ASHLEIGH SIM

Gourmet appeal

executive director of Huber's Butchery, says: "Competition is getting stronger, which is good as it motivates one to improve."

Competition is one thing but each gourmet food shop says it has its own identity.

Huber's is a one-stop shop for meats, groceries and gourmet products, while Le Bon Marche is an intimate store and bistro.

Shops such as Cut The Mustard, are more like a "mom and pop" speciality food store, says owner Lim Hui Chern, 34.

The main idea behind these shops is to make gourmet products more accessible to diners so that they can replicate top grade dishes at home. The items are

also an alternative to the mass-produced and more commercial products found in supermarkets.

But supermarkets, too, have been beefing up their gourmet product sections in recent times.

ThreeSixty at Ion Orchard, for instance, offers a selection of imported fine foods including those under labels such as Heston's by famed Fat Duck chef Heston Blumenthal and UK brand Hale & Hearty.

A spokesman for the supermarket, which is owned by Dairy Farm, says the chain saw a need to cater to a growing demand for more international gourmet products. He adds: "The Singapore scene has become more cosmopolitan and consumers'

tastes have become more sophisticated. People are well travelled and are very knowledgeable about gourmet produce and products."

Restaurants and bistros have also started stocking gourmet items in addition to their menu offerings.

Bistro-store SPR MRKT in McCallum Street sells some of the gourmet products it uses in its cooking, such as vine-ripened tomatoes and the organic soymilk it uses to make coffee.

Casual restaurant Preparazzi in Boon Tat Street offers items such as truffle salt by famed Australian chef Tetsuya Wakuda and mustards flavoured with ingredients such as raisins and champagne.

Its chef-owner, Mr Jeremy Nguue, 31, says: "It is about eating well and eating gourmet ingredients. Offering these ingredients and products is an extension of our service."

With quality products now available everywhere, from restaurants and supermarkets to boutique stores, one thing is for sure. Singaporeans are spoilt for choice when it comes to gourmet and artisan food items.

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Where to shop



Artisanal products and more stock the shelves of Cut The Mustard (above left) and the Huber's (above right).

Cut The Mustard

What: The specialty food shop stocks imported and local artisanal products sourced mostly from the United States. It also carries items from the United Kingdom and other parts of Europe. Items range from jams and hot sauce to preserves, oils, vinegars, pickles, dips and salsas.

Where: 1, Greenlane Avenue, #01-118A and #01-118B

Open: 10am to 7pm (Monday to Thursday), 10am to 8pm (Friday and public holidays), closed on Saturday

Info: Call 6737-1588 or go to www.cutthemustard.com

Culina

What: The gourmet food supplier has a retail store in Dempsey Hill. It stocks items from Europe to the United States. Most items are gourmet items ranging from pasta, sauces, vinegars, oils and more from great chefs at home.

Where: 18A & 18B Dempsey Road, Dempsey Hill, #01-11

Open: 10am to 7pm (Monday to Thursday), 10am to 8pm (Friday and public holidays)

Info: Call 6737-1588 or go to www.culina.com.sg

Jones the Grocer

What: The multi-line specialty food store offering everything from hand made and hand-dipped chocolates to vinegars and oils, gourmet and artisanal pastas to pasta sauce, olive oil, and more. It also stocks other items from gourmet producers around the world and has an extensive cheese range.

Where: Two outlets - 18A & 18B Dempsey Road, Dempsey Hill, #01-11, and Mandarin Gallery, 100A Orchard Road, #01-11

Open: 10am to 7pm (Monday to Thursday), 10am to 8pm (Friday and public holidays), closed on Saturday

Info: Call 6737-1588 or go to www.jonesthegrocer.com

Huber's Butchery

What: The butchery is a one-stop shop for meat and groceries. It offers different types and cuts of meat as well as complementary items such as fresh vegetables, sauces and spice rubs. There are pastas from boutique producers and other items such as pickles and other condiments.

Where: 18A and 18B Dempsey Road

Open: 9.30am to 8pm (weekdays), 9.30am to 7pm (weekends and public holidays). Closed on Christmas Day, New Year's Day and Chinese New Year

Info: Call 6737-1588 or e-mail info@hubersbutchery.com.sg. Go to www.hubers.com.sg

Le Bon Marche

What: The multi-line specialty food store offers everything from hand made and hand-dipped chocolates to vinegars and oils, gourmet and artisanal pastas to pasta sauce, olive oil, and more. It also stocks other items from gourmet producers around the world and has an extensive cheese range.

Where: 100A Orchard Road, #01-11

Open: 10am to 7pm (Monday to Thursday), 10am to 8pm (Friday and public holidays), closed on Saturday

Info: Call 6737-1588 or go to www.lebonmarche.com.sg

Oh Deli

What: The butchery and gourmet retailer offers a range of fresh local Australian and New Zealand lamb, beef, pork, chicken, and more. It also stocks other items from gourmet producers around the world and has an extensive cheese range.

Where: 100A Orchard Road, #01-11

Open: 10am to 7pm (Monday to Thursday), 10am to 8pm (Friday and public holidays), closed on Saturday

Info: Call 6737-1588 or go to www.ohdeli.com.sg