

# The Caviar Experience

An Interview with Chef Edgar Panchernikov, Caviar Russe



Chef Edgar "Teddy" Panchernikov in the second floor dining room of Caviar Russe on Madison Avenue off 54th Street in Midtown Manhattan

**EDITORS' NOTE** Chef Edgar Panchernikov graduated from the French Culinary Institute in 2010. Following graduation, he worked at GILT at the Palace Hotel and Rucola in Brooklyn. Following his years working in the kitchen, he sought to transition to a front of the house role at his family's restaurant, Caviar Russe. However, in 2016, seeking to present the best possible experience for his clientele, he jumped back into the kitchen and assumed the role of Executive Chef of Caviar Russe.

## Will you highlight the history of Caviar Russe?

Caviar Russe was founded 25 years ago with the flagship restaurant, located in Midtown Manhattan, opening in 1997. To date, we are the only Michelin Star caviar house, holding that honor since 2014. Originally the company was in the wholesale business selling to the trade, but the idea of the restaurant came about as a place where we could showcase and celebrate our caviar directly to the consumer. Over the years, our focus has evolved with the goal of sharing the caviar experience with as many people as possible, whether it's enjoying our caviar at one of our restaurants or at home.

## What have been the keys to the strength of Caviar Russe and how do you describe the Caviar Russe experience?

The strength of Caviar Russe is our commitment to quality and relationships. Unlike much of the caviar market today, we do not source or use caviar farmed in China. Instead, our caviar is single sourced from our exclusive farm in Germany with whom we have worked closely with over the years to develop farmed caviar that resembles what was available in the wild, allowing us to preserve the Caspian tradition of caviar. As for relationships, whether you are a retail customer, buying in person or online, or a diner in one of our restaurants, we strive to make every experience with Caviar Russe as personable and enjoyable as possible, making it our goal to leave a lasting impression.

## Will you discuss the different aspects to Caviar Russe's business and where you see the greatest opportunities for growth?

Primarily we have two areas of our business – retail and dining. As caviar has come back into vogue the last few years, and as younger people now have aged into the times

in their lives when they want to experience and learn about the finer things in life, the potential for growth is certainly there and we are optimistic for the caviar sector to grow significantly and us with it. The only obstacle is educating the new consumer since with the large infusion of Chinese caviar into the market, it can be quite overwhelming and confusing for the first-time caviar purchaser.

## Caviar Russe invested heavily in its New York location with a new bar on the first floor. Will you provide an overview of this space and what guests can expect from this new offering?

The goal of opening the new space was to offer the same luxurious Caviar Russe experience of our main dining room, but in a less formal setting. Our vision was to make a true flagship that would feel like home to our clients. The first floor – the bar and lounge – feeling like their living room, where they can come hangout casually, and then the second floor – the dining room – feeling like their formal dining room for more intimate occasions.

On both floors caviar is front and center. We offer a variety of Caviar types and grades from 25g to 500g. We love to serve caviar the



The entrance to Caviar Russe



traditional way, on ice, with plenty of accompaniments, including homemade blinis, toast points and our signature latkes. Beyond caviar, the bar and lounge feature an extensive raw bar selection as well as an ever-rotating selection of “bites” that put a luxurious spin on traditional bar food, while in the main dining room we offer our chef tasting menu, either three or six courses.

**While Caviar Russe is known for the strength of its caviar offering, it offers a broad menu of the highest-quality food. Will you discuss the Caviar Russe food offering?**

We try to present the best cuisine pairings to accompany the experience of enjoying caviar, a luxurious product that deserves an equally luxurious pairing in a luxurious setting. Our menus aim to celebrate the rich flavors of caviar with ingredients such as foie gras, bluefin tuna, uni, lobster, etc., all playing off of the decadence of the caviar.

**Caviar Russe has a workforce that has been with the restaurant for many years. How valuable has it been to have such consistency in the staff to offer consistent service to Caviar Russe’s guests?**

Impeccable service and hospitality are one of the most important aspects of the Caviar Russe experience, and having a consistent group of servers and chefs throughout the years has definitely helped maintain our high standards of service. We are



*Chef Edgar preparing his culinary art*

also very proud of the fact that many of our customers know our staff on a firsthand basis and vice versa, something that is increasingly rare in the fine dining world.

**Will you highlight Caviar Russe’s capabilities regarding corporate events and high-level private dinners?**

We are extremely flexible in terms of corporate dining and aim to work with the client to deliver an unforgettable experience that isn’t easily replicated at other venues, from the cuisine to the service and care to attention. We can offer a variety of experiences, for example, our private dining room where we can sit 16 at one large table or 20 in total where diners can enjoy the tasting menu experience which will be fully customized for their event. Another highlight is the new bar and lounge, which can accommodate up to 30 in the lounge area for cocktails or upwards of 70 for a full buyout. For cocktail style events in our bar and lounge, we like to allow the guests to curate everything from the food to the music and have a fantastic evening filled with champagne, caviar, and great food.

**Is Caviar Russe focused on building its corporate gifting business and what are Caviar Russe’s offerings in this area?**

This is a relatively new area for us that we hope to continue to grow. Post pandemic many brands

are seeking to create experiences for their clients, whether that is at their homes or at a destination, and we hope to help with this. Caviar is such an unusual gift to give that it makes it an easy way to stand out in terms of corporate gifting. We have really worked hard to design beautiful packaging and offer flexible corporate partnership programs that are responsive to our corporate partners’ needs.

**Did you always know that you wanted to be a chef and what do you enjoy most about the role?**

Caviar Russe is a family business, and we didn’t have a chef in the family so it seemed like a good avenue for me to follow. However, it wasn’t just filling a void for me because I love the art of hospitality in the traditional sense. Hosting clients, seeing them happy and enjoying themselves, is one of the most enjoyable parts of my role within Caviar Russe. I get to interact daily with our customers and every time they come back, I want them saying “wow” topping their previous experience.

**What has made the family dynamic work so well and do you each focus on different aspects of the business?**

I think it’s all about complimenting one another and supporting each other in our main roles, and also

being flexible in understanding that no one has a set position like in a corporate setting. Everyone must be able to help each other out and there are no egos as we all have the same common goals. ●



*Caviar Russe’s new bar and lounge*



*A table in the main dining room*