

FOOD

and dining

Where's the beef?

At John Dewar & Co. in Wellesley, meat is a cut above

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WELLESLEY - Brian Fuller reached deep into the refrigerated meat case and slapped a big hunk of beef down on the counter.

It was a full 2 inches thick, a healthy red beauty interlaced with white, a far cry from the plastic-wrapped pieces of cow flesh called "steak" at a regular supermarket.

"What you're looking for is marbleization," Fuller said, a gloved finger lovingly caressing the thick cut of bone-in tenderloin. "Yes, you can buy Angus beef at any supermarket - but this is platinum, the highest grade. John's pretty much the only one around that sells this type of beef."

"John," of course, is John Dewar, who has spent 26 years building a reputation as the butcher to some of the area's most prestigious restaurants, hotels and caterers. Building on the success of his first store in Newton, Dewar recently opened a John Dewar & Co. butcher and gourmet grocery store in Wellesley at 277 Linden St., the former site of Harrington's of Vermont.

The result is a carnivore's delight. Bright, glass cases are filled with racks of lamb, veal chops, Angus top choice beef in every cut. There's Parma prosciutto, quail eggs, creamy lobes of foie gras, and, at \$49.99 a pound, Japanese Kobe beef.

"People come in just for that," Dewar said. "People come in and say 'Oh, you have Kobe beef.' It's a more delicate flavor, it's got a creamier flavor. It's for the more refined palate."

You don't need a refined palate to buy meat at Dewar & Co. You don't even have to know how to cook it - all the meatcutters, like Fuller, have worked as chefs and they frequently advise customers how to cook their meat to perfection.

Or, if they're Fuller, when he gets invited to parties, he tends to bring the meat himself and then takes over the grill.

Few mind. The man, after all, knows his meat.

"You want to cook 6 minutes an inch per side," he said. "All I ever put on a sirloin steak is kosher salt and cracked black pepper, and generously too, so you can see a little layer of salt. Then it forms a beautiful crust."

Dewar opened the new store at the insistence of Keith Marden, a longtime friend and owner of Captain Marden's Seafood next door, who tipped him off that the space was available. By serendipity, the building's owner was a frequent customer at the Newton store. Dewar was also able to strike a deal with Harrington's, the former tenant, that allows him to continue to offer Harrington hams and other products.

"We completely gutted this space," Dewar said. "A lot of butcher shops - they're old, they're tired, they're just not advanced. Our Newton store is older, but it's as clean as this. I think it comes from my roots as a wholesale business - it has to be clean."

In an area where residents have high income levels, frequently eat at restaurants and care about food quality, there's a place for a good butcher shop, Dewar believes.

He sees an overall trend toward people turning back to a specialist for their meat, reverting back from the trend starting in the '60s of one-stop shopping at supermarkets.

"It's quality of life," Dewar said. "Everything is a rush - I know, I've been caught up in it. I'm at the age where I say 'I'm going to enjoy myself.' When our customers want a really good steak, they're going to pay the money and get the best they can get."

Quipped Fuller, "All our customers have tried the rest but keep coming back for the best. This is the Lamborghini of all steaks."

Fuller piled other examples of meat on the counter - rib eyes, prime rib, filet mignon, well marbled with fat and free of gristle.

"What sets it apart is the flavor," Fuller said. "They're minimally processed. The muscle is soft. Some people tell me you don't even need a knife. It cuts like butter."

Some argue that beef cuts still on the bone have better flavor. Fuller is among those advocates.

"It's sweeter closer to the bone," Fuller said. "Personally, I just like to chomp on the bone after."

Business has been brisk since the shop opened last month and Dewar expects it to only get better as the holidays approach. He's already see-



Head meat cutter and chef Brian Fuller displays some of the cuts of meat he offers.

ing a demand for cuts such as osso bucco and veal racks, fare for cold-weather entertaining.

"If it's anything like our Newton store, we're going to need a detail out front," Dewar said.

It's at the holidays when, surprisingly, it's the smaller butcher shop that can out-do the supermarkets. Dewar has a 6,000 square foot warehouse in Boston that at holiday time will be filled with lamb racks, tenderloins, and rib roasts - everything someone might want for a dinner party. Should a cut run out at the store, all he'll have to do is call for a truck and get more meat within the hour.

"Even the supermarkets can't react as fast as we can," Dewar said.

The store isn't only about meat. Taking center stage is a 30-liter barrel of Greek extra virgin olive oil, where customer's can fill and then return to replenish their bottle. Steel shelves hold pastas, spices, vinegars of all types - including small bottles of premium Italian vinegar aged 25, 50 and 100 years.

In the refrigerated section there are French cheeses of all types, sausage made from wild boar and pheasant, cheesecake from the Carnegie Deli.

"We have everything for a dinner party," Dewar said. "From the cheese and pate platters to the main dinner course."