

盤中鑽石

rough gems



特級松露雖然其貌不揚卻價值連城，到底是什麼原因令亞洲頂級餐廳對意大利白松露趨之若鶩？

Truffles are anything but attractive and yet top specimens have been known to fetch six-figure sums. Just what is it that's made Italy's "white diamonds" such a hot commodity at Asia's top restaurants?

text lisa gerard-sharp

松露被意大利人視為超級無敵的催情聖品，外表如貌不驚人的男士，卻擁有深藏不露的陽剛魅力。在松露拍賣會上，有身穿三點式清涼裝的美后手捧純銀托盤展示松露，但所有人只對盤中形狀醜怪的松露有興趣。白松露被譽為死前必食食物，名廚Giorgio Locatelli形容「松露的味道像人的體味及汗味，包含人生一切甘苦滋味。」

白松露秋天正值當造就專程由意大利北部運到香港，過程卻錯綜複雜，涉及盜竊傳聞、獵人交惡、獵犬被下毒及驚人天價，使意大利「白鑽石」更顯神秘，它不僅是世界最昂貴的食物，撇開壯陽功能不說，吃一顆阿爾巴（Alba）松露，就好像在意大利飯中加入一枚金戒指。

法國Périgord區的黑松露根本無法與意大利Piedmont區的特級白松露相提並論。每年秋季意大利野生白松露Tuber Magnatum Pico採收上市，最令一眾廚師大為興奮。在鄰近阿爾巴松露產區擔任廚師的Carlo Zarri對我們的著迷程度十分驚訝，他說：「30年前，這裡的白松露已非常稀罕，一定要來阿爾巴才吃得到。如今美食家認為曼哈頓或澳門都應該有這道佳餚，售價不斷飆升，而白松露的產量似乎愈來愈少。」話雖如此，Zarri仍對今秋的收成充滿信心，他說：「葡萄收成不佳時，松露就剛剛相反，而今年的葡萄收成只是一般。」

為進一步認識松露，我到Montiglio Monferrato城堡尋覓風靡香港高級餐廳的陣陣馥郁幽香。在城堡內，終於見到世上最醜松露



（上圖起）國際白松露大使岑柏濤，影后蘇菲亞羅蘭及名廚Carlo Zarri
(From top) Chef Umberto Bombana with truffles; Sophia Loren and celebrity chef Carlo Zarri with the Italian delicacy

ITALIANS ARE PASSIONATE about the potency of their favourite aphrodisiac. Truffles exude the sex appeal of a powerful man whose ugliness merely confirms his potency. At truffle auctions, scantily clad beauty queens parade the truffles on silver platters, but all eyes are on the wizened tubers. White truffles are one of those do-before-you-die experiences. “Truffles taste and smell of people and sweat,” celebrity chef Giorgio Locatelli says, “Everything that life tastes and smells of is in there.”

The white truffle trail leads from the autumnal mists of northern Italy to the glitz of Hong Kong. It's a much-mythologised pathway involving tales of stolen truffles, feuding hunters, poisoned dogs and prohibitive prices. It all feeds into the mystique of Italy's “white diamonds”, the world's costliest delicacy. Sex appeal aside, eating a white Alba truffle is like putting a gold ring on your risotto.

France's Périgord region boasts black truffles but they pale into insignificance beside the superior white truffles from Italy's Piedmont region. *Tuber magnatum pico* is the grand name for the gnarled lump that sends chefs into ecstasy every autumn. In truffle country near Alba, chef Carlo Zarri marvels at our love affair with these ugly tubers: “Even 30 years ago, our white truffles were a rarified pleasure – you had to eat them in Alba. Now connoisseurs expect them in Manhattan or Macau. The prices have soared and the truffles seem scarce.” Still, he's looking forward to a decent harvest this autumn: “Normally when the grapes are bad, the truffles are good, and this year the grapes are only so-so.”

It's time for a lesson in all things truffle-related. I'm here at the fortress of Montiglio Monferrato to follow a scent that runs from this remote castle to skyscraper restaurants in Hong Kong. In the castle, we come face to face with the world's ugliest tubers. Truffle maestro Roberto Pisani teaches us to scratch and sniff like truffle hounds: “You can forget a colour, a tone of voice, but never a smell – it's there within you, somewhere.” We may use just 10% of our olfactory ability but we can recall scents by tapping into race memory, our primeval “dogginess”.

的廬山真面目，松露大師Roberto Pisani教我們如何學松露獵犬憑嗅覺尋找及挖掘松露。他說：「你會忘記顏色和聲音，但你永遠不會忘記氣味，我們對氣味的記憶永遠存在，是一種與生俱有的本能。」我們慢慢注意到松露的主要香味是乾草香和蒜香，還有細微胡椒味及阿摩尼亞味。香氣平衡的白松露應有蜜糖、乾草及蒜香味。但我的信心很快就受到打擊，評估最後一輪松露香氣時，我把最濃郁的松露列為最佳，結果卻是經過加工的次貨。Zarri安慰我說這不算太差，曾有一對情侶以為他的餐廳的煤氣洩漏，「他們從沒有吃過松露，不明白這強烈氣味從何而來。」

參觀阿爾巴白松露市集後，我們在Giuseppe等幾位當地人的帶領下，在白楊樹及橡樹叢林模擬尋找白松露。松露獵犬Lillo很快奔向預先埋藏了白松露的其中一個地點，一掘到就停止所有動作。白松露常生長於橡樹、柳樹、榛子樹及白楊樹的根部，松露獵人只靠鋤頭、木杖及一隻獵犬尋找及挖掘，松露獵犬可說是松露獵人最重要的拍檔。

剛被掘出的白松露氣味卻令我退避三舍，空氣中頓時瀰漫著糞便、堆肥、蘑菇、甲烷、麝香及泥濘的氣味。再吸第二口氣卻像純費若蒙，充滿性魅力。我同身邊的松露獵犬都極之喜歡，白松露的氣味總是如此令人神魂顛倒。手拿著白松露的Giuseppe開始大談松露獵人最愛說的性愛生死故事，「我們常說這些『白鑽石』可令女人更溫



（上圖起）在Piedmont區阿爾巴鎮隨獵犬尋找松露，白松露片配佳餚更顯矜貴
(From top) Truffle hunting with dogs in Alba, in Italy's Piedmont region; a few "white diamond" slivers transform a dish

We slowly identify the main notes in truffles, from hay and garlic to the minor notes of pepper and ammonia. Balanced white truffle features a blend of honey, hay and garlic aromas. Just as I come to recognise "boskiness", my confidence is destroyed. In rating the final truffle scents, I mark the strongest one as the best; it turns out to be an industrial fake. Zarri consoles me: it could be worse. A couple dining in his restaurant once worried that there was a gas leak. "They had never tasted truffles and couldn't place the potent aroma."

Then we're whisked off to sniff around the Alba truffle fair before joining a simulated truffle hunt with Giuseppe and his pals. We amble towards the thickets of poplars and oaks, all prime truffle territory. White truffles grow in symbiosis with the roots of oak, willow, hazelnut and poplar trees and are harvested by hunters, each of whom relies on very little save for a hoe, a stick and a truffle dog. The dogs are revered and treated as partners in crime, much as in a Hollywood buddy movie. Lillo scampers off on the scent of one of the planted truffles, but dutifully stops after uncovering the bulbous tip.

My nose recoils from the aroma of the truffles unearthed by the hound. It's akin to being plunged into a farmyard reeking of manure, mouldy compost, mushrooms, methane, musk and muddy clods of earth. The second whiff is pure pheromones, essence of sex – all emanating from this ugly, wizened tuber. I love it, as do the panting truffle dogs beside me. White truffles do this to people – twist your language into soft porn. Giuseppe, as wizened as the white truffle he's holding, launches into the life-sex-and-death theme that truffle hunters adore. "We have a saying that these 'white diamonds' carry the power to make women more tender and men more virile. But the best death for this truffle is on my plate." He conjures up images of steaming *tajarin* (noodles) flecked with truffle shavings. Soon we're "grating gold" over our pasta and agree that this is truly "the best death" for a truffle.

These noodles are Zarri's favourite dish, but he also recommends truffled eggs: "Pour a few drops of extra virgin olive oil in a pan and fry the egg white until well-cooked; add the yolk for 20 seconds, then serve on a warm plate; shave the truffles on top and tuck in." White truffles

柔，令男人更剛強，但這顆松露的最佳結局是成為我的盤中餐。」他建議Tajerin意粉伴白松露片，之後我們就享受「黃金」意粉，完全同意「犧牲」白松露是值得的。

除了白松露配意粉外，Zarri也推介白松露炒蛋，「用少許特級初榨橄欖油把蛋白炒至全熟，加蛋黃再炒20秒，用熱碟盛載，刨幾片白松露就可以大快朵頤。」煮過的白松露會很快消失香氣，一定要生食，以刨片配簡單菜式。而松露主題客棧鄰近盛產Barolo及Barbaresco葡萄酒的酒莊，地點方便。

有一晚同一位友善的廚師對飲，他竟然叫他的松露獵人Paolo帶我一起去找松露，他本身絕對不可以一起去。由於廚師熟悉本地環境，松露獵人擔心廚師知道松露的生長地，就不會付高酬請他們找松露。Paolo勉強同意後，我被蒙上雙眼，與有異味的獵犬同坐汽車後座。到了潮濕的叢林，我才能除下眼罩。Paolo在Leo的耳邊細聲說：「再找一下。」主人和獵犬十分親密。意大利作家Cesare Pavese曾說：「到樹林散步，沒狗相伴總有缺憾，因為不知道地下珍藏著什麼。」Leo在一棵白楊樹下瘋狂挖掘，終於在月光下找到一顆形狀古怪的松露，完成任務。

這次月光行動令我明白松露的產地來源重於一切。名廚Locatelli指很多人都有錯誤見解，「人人都只關注售價，忽略松露的來源，重點應是確保松露的產地及生態環境受到保護，否則自然界會說『夠了，我拒絕再給你們』，接下來20年將找不到任何松露。我們不是要求獲得更多錢，而是要保護我們土地的



（上圖起）阿爾巴城堡地區盛產白松露，專門尋找白松露的松露獵人 (From top) Alba's castle country, a hot spot for truffles; hunters of the treasure Emperor Nero dubbed "the food of the gods"

lose their taste and perfume when cooked so they must be served raw, finely shaved over simple dishes. Conveniently, truffle inns are found near the fabulous vineyards, home to velvety red Barolo and Barbaresco wines.

One night over a grappa, a friendly chef convinces Paolo, his trusted hunter, to take me out truffling, something the chef has never been allowed to do himself. As a savvy local, the chef wouldn't be trusted not to steal these secret spots and save himself a fortune in truffle bills. Reluctantly, Paolo agrees, after which I'm blindfolded and bundled into the back of a car with a smelly dog. Deep in a damp wood, I finally cast off my blindfold and bond with Leo the dog. Paolo whispers endearments in his ears – "*passa anco' na volta*," (try another time) – and I sense the night-time courtship between the hound and his master. Local writer Cesare Pavese once said: "Walking in the woods without a dog would have meant my missing out on life and the secrets below the surface." Leo digs frantically under a poplar tree and a witchy, sea-slug of a tuber emerges into the moonlight. Mission accomplished.

The night's truffling teaches me that provenance is everything. As Locatelli confirms, misunderstandings surround the not-so-humble truffle. "Everybody talks about the price, but the focus should be on making sure you buy from the right people, the guys who are protecting the land and the purity of the eco-system where the truffles grow. Otherwise nature will say, 'Enough, I'm not going to give you any more,' and there will be no truffles for anybody in 20 years. It isn't just a snobbish thing to pay a lot of money – it's about protecting the legacy of the land."

Even so, at Turin airport, my precious Alba truffles are pounced upon by frantic sniffer dogs. The treasure has been discovered not by the canine drugs squad, but by the canine fraud squad, the dogs trained to sniff out cash. Forget memories of my misty night in the woods. The message is clear: my "white diamonds" have been unmasked as dirty, sexy money.

By the time the season's truffles reach Asia, connoisseurs are primed for a party. Truffle fairs culminate in star-studded charity auctions, not just in

寶藏。」

在都靈機場，警犬即時撲向我的寶貝阿爾巴白松露。這些訓練有素的警犬專門搜查商業罪案物件，熟悉錢財氣味。叢林裡的浪漫感覺驟然消失，信息非常清楚——我的「白鑽石」等同污穢而人見人愛的金錢。

當名貴松露送抵亞洲時，美食家們已準備大事慶祝。意大利與倫敦、香港及澳門等城市連線舉行星光熠熠的白松露慈善拍賣活動，吸引國際名廚及一眾名人巨星如Giorgio Armani、Sting、影后蘇菲亞羅蘭及法國影帝Gérard Depardieu參與其盛。意大利的活動於古堡舉行，亞洲則多在米芝蓮星級意大利餐廳進行。最令局外人好奇的是像薯仔、菇菌又有怪味之物竟有這麼多人競標爭奪。

亞洲買家是白松露國際拍賣會的常勝軍。2006年的成功競標者為香港慈善家胡應湘。2007年澳門賭王何鴻燊以US\$33萬天價標下1.5公斤的世紀白松露，2010年又以相同標價奪得兩顆合共重1.3公斤的白松露王與后。2011年則由居港美國商人詹康信（James Thompson）成功投得。

除萬眾矚目的拍賣活動外，一場以松露為主題的華麗盛宴亦會在澳門新葡京酒店的頂級意大利餐廳「當奧豐素1890」，或「香港白松露王」岑柏濤（Umberto Bombana）的Otto e Mezzo意大利餐廳舉行。今年冬季岑柏濤將與意大利Piedmont區連線舉行白松露王拍賣活動，他

Italy but also in cities ranging from London to Hong Kong and Macau. The auctions ally the host cities with celebrity chefs and big-name entertainers, from Giorgio Armani to Sting, Sophia Loren to Gérard Depardieu. In Italy, settings have included a medieval castle but in Asia, fairs tend to be held at Michelin-starred Italian restaurants. Only outsiders marvel at the fact that the focus of bidding wars is a smelly fungus that looks like a rotten potato.

Asian buyers usually triumph at international truffle auctions. Recent years have seen winning bids from Gordon Wu Ying-Sheun, the Hong Kong-based philanthropist and construction tycoon, and Stanley Ho, Macau's pre-eminent gaming magnate. The casino mogul is the owner of the world-record bid for a single truffle, a 1.5kg monster for which he paid US\$330,000 (HK\$2.6 million) in 2007. Ho then equalled his own outlay three years later when he snapped up two truffles weighing slightly less than his earlier acquisition. The following year, Hong Kong-based tycoon James Thompson narrowly outbid Jeannie Cho Lee, Asia's first master of wine, for a prized specimen.

The razzmatazz is matched by an accompanying star-studded truffle dinner, held in either Hong Kong or Macau. The latter is home to Don Alfonso 1890, the city's leading Italian restaurant, which is located at Ho's Grand Lisboa. Hong Kong counters with 8½ Otto e Mezzo Bombana Hong Kong, run by Umberto Bombana, the "king of white truffles" and Asia's top Italian chef. This winter, Bombana will co-organise the White Truffle Auction in Hong Kong, working with representatives of Piedmont. "As usual, all profits go to charity and I'll be head chef, in charge of designing the white-truffle menu." Last year's auction raised HK\$204 million for Mother's Choice, a local charity, with the top bid of HK\$320,000 placed by Mona Hsu for a 358g white truffle. Bombana's truffle-themed dinner clearly did the trick.

松露貼士及聯絡方式

TRUFFLE TIPS & CONTACTS

都靈旅遊局 **Turin Tourist Board**
+39 0115 35181, www.turismotorino.org

阿爾巴旅遊局（松露及葡萄酒區）**Alba Tourist Board (truffle and wine area)** Ente Turismo, Alba Bra Langhe & Roero, +39 (0)173 35833, www.langheroero.it

阿爾巴美食市集 **Alba Food Fair**
這周末美食市集由10月12日至11月18日舉行，提供各式松露佳餚及葡萄酒。
Weekend food fair in Alba from 12 Oct–18 Nov. Gourmet truffle and wine markets and medieval re-enactments. +39 (0)173 361051

尋找松露活動 **Truffle hunts**
可選擇實地尋找或模擬活動，亦可到Profumo della Notte，隨Giuseppe及他的松露獵犬Luna一起尋找。
Real or simulated hunts organised through the above or with Giuseppe and his dog Luna at Profumo della Notte. +39 33 9774 4832, www.profumodelланotte.eu

如何處理松露

TRUFFLE TO-DO LIST

用紙巾將沒清洗過的新鮮松露逐一包藏。保存在密封罐中，避免香氣流失，並放在雪櫃下層或雪櫃門內位置。每日換新紙巾包藏，罐中須保持乾爽。松露一旦變軟，應立即使用。品質好的松露通常介於30至110克，重量會逐日減少，最多減5%，所以應趁新鮮時享用，放在雪櫃最多可保存7日。
Wrap fresh, unwashed truffles individually in paper towels. Place them in airtight containers to seal in the aroma and store on the lower shelf or in the door of the refrigerator. Each day, replace the paper towel with a fresh towel and dry the condensation from the container. When truffles become soft, they must be used immediately. A good truffle usually ranges between 30g and 110g and will lose up to 5% of its weight daily, so it should be eaten while it's still as fresh as possible, though it will last for up to seven days in the fridge.

說：「拍賣所得全數作慈善用途，並由我負責設計白松露菜單。」去年共為本地慈善團體「母親的抉擇」籌得HK\$2.04億，Mona Hsu以最高標價HK\$32萬投得一顆358克的白松露。岑柏濤的精緻菜單果然不負眾望。

身為「國際白松露大使」的岑柏濤最喜歡以白松露片配雞蛋菜式，因為雞蛋溫度可提升白松露的香氣。這位米芝蓮三星名廚認為沒必要特意迎合本地人的口味，他說：「我不會為客人改變我的菜式風格，好味的菜對任何人來說都是一樣好味。」曾用來餵豬的內地廉價松露淡而無味，意大利餐廳絕對不會採用。至於中菜用松露，岑柏濤對港島廳一位廚師曾將白松露配著名賽螃蟹表示讚賞，他說：「蛋白味淡，不會搶走白松露的味道，其原理和意大利菜相似。」

香港La Piola店主Enrico Gili的家族是Piedmont區的釀酒師及松露獵人，其松露菜式以家常菜為主，例如Tajarin蛋麵配白松露、半生熟煎蛋配白松露及白松露意大利飯都很受食客歡迎。Gili非常重視合時當造及來源地，他說：「過去兩三年Piedmont區不會在10月25日之前推出松露，這裡9月就開始賣松露。」一般相信他們是以斯洛維尼亞松露代替真正的（意大利）松露。Gili對非正宗意大利菜煮法亦不贊同，他說：「本地人不喜歡太鹹的食物，因此很多廚師煮意粉的水都不加鹽，但我們尊重傳統煮法。」談到融合菜，他說：「由於松露現在非常受歡迎，連漢堡王都有『松露漢堡包』。一些廚師也在點心加入松露及太多不同味道，效果往往適得其反。」

這與意大利的民族尊嚴有關，相信松露獵人Giuseppe一定會同意。參加尋松露活動的一個人問：「白松露有何特別處？」Giuseppe不客氣地答道：「你問，即表示你沒有聞過松露，亦表示你枉有此生。」■

As an Italian “White Truffle Ambassador”, Bombana is clear about his favourite treat – “white truffles shaved over egg dishes, with the warmth unleashing the unique aroma of the white diamonds”. Famed for his authentic Italian dishes, the three-star Michelin chef sees no need to pander to local tastes: “I don’t change my style according to the clients. If it tastes great, it tastes great for everybody.” Cheap Chinese truffles, once fed to pigs, remain poor cousins to princely Italian truffles. Blander and less perfumed, these truffles have no place in Italian cuisine. As for the Chinese touch, Bombana approves of a chef at Island Tang “who once paired white truffles with the famous Chinese dish crab meat in scrambled egg white. Egg white is a light ingredient and doesn’t overpower white truffles. The principle behind the dish is similar to the Italian way of cooking.”

La Piola is a more informal haunt for truffle lovers in Hong Kong. The owner, Enrico Gili, comes from a family of Piedmontese winemakers and truffle hunters and is proud of his people’s traditions. Diners appreciate “the homemade tajarin with white truffles, or the egg sunny side up with white truffle or white truffle risotto,” he says. But seasonality and provenance are paramount: “In the last couple of years we haven’t had truffles in Piedmont before October 25th, but here they start selling truffles in September.” The assumption must be that Slovenian truffles are sometimes passed off as the genuine – Italian – article.

As a traditionalist, Gili is wary of watering down time-tested recipes: “Many chefs don’t salt the water for pasta here in Hong Kong since the locals don’t like overly salty dishes, but we respect the original recipes.” This Italian standard-bearer is deeply wary of fusion cooking. “Nowadays truffles are so popular that even Burger King has a ‘truffle burger,’” he says. “Chefs use truffles in dim sum and often mix too many flavours – generally the result is ‘con-fusion.’”

In short, Italian national pride is at stake. Giuseppe, my favourite truffle hunter, would agree. “What’s so special about white truffles?” asks a late-comer to our hunt. “If you have to ask, you haven’t sniffed one, you haven’t lived” is Giuseppe’s curt reply. ■

香港松露風味

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意國松露風味

TRUFFLING IN ITALY

全球最重要的白松露產地於意大利北部的阿爾巴，著名的Piedmont葡萄酒區及秋季美食市集亦位於此。除盛產白松露的農村外，都靈的頂級餐廳自秋季至1月供應白松露。

The world’s most important white truffle area is centred on Alba in northern Italy. This is also Piedmont’s most prestigious wine region and the setting for autumn food fairs. Stay in “truffle country” here or in the regional capital, Turin, where the top traditional restaurants serve white truffles from autumn until January.

PORTA DI PO

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