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Outrageously Simple, Extravagantly Expensive, and Totally Worth-It Sandwich



From a tiny acorn grew a mighty sandwich. Photograph by Melissa Hom

Although the Underground Gourmet makes it a practice never to go grocery shopping when beset by a ravenous, goatlike hunger — lest he return home with a king-size bag of Screaming Yellow Zonkers and some Geno's pizza rolls — whenever he's starved for a good sandwich, he ambles over to his friendly neighborhood imported-foods or cheese shop. Some of the best places to get a good sandwich in this town, after all, are where you wouldn't necessarily expect to find one.

We're talking about [Joe's Dairy](#) (for its smoked mozzarella and roasted red peppers on semolina), Kalustyan's (they make a first-rate falafel sandwich upstairs), [BuonItalia Imported Italian Food](#) (for an exemplary meatball hero), and the new Saxelby Cheese shop in the [Essex Market](#) (where you can get a nice hunk of stinky cheese on a raisin-nut roll). New York is full of these incidental sandwich sideliners, and in many cases, their skills outshine the specialists.

Add to this list Despaña Brand Foods (408 Broome St., nr. Lafayette St.; 212-219-5050), the newish Manhattan branch of the [Queens-based sausage-maker](#) and importer of superb Spanish delicacies, where under-the-radar sandwich greatness lurks behind a glass-enclosed cubicle at the back of the shop. The Picante (spicy chorizo, Mahon cheese, and Basque peppers served warm on ciabatta) and the Pescador (oil-packed tuna and boquerones with a smear of aioli) are our everyday picks.

But this week's honors go to the outrageously simple and extravagantly expensive sandwich of Salchichon de Bellota, from the forest-roaming ibérico hogs of Spain, that, before they're turned into ham and sausage, finish out their careers feasting exclusively on a wholesome diet of acorns. Having never eaten an acorn, the Underground Gourmet finds it difficult to say whether the salchichón is properly imbued with the essence of the nut. But it is supremely rich and mellow, with a deep flavor that unfolds gradually, lingering exquisitely on the tongue. As for the price — \$12.50 for what is essentially some meat slapped onto a ciabatta roll that's briefly warmed in a sandwich press — yes, it's absolutely worth it.

— *Rob Patronite & Robin Raisfeld*

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