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Foie Gras Comes To America

Groundbreaking importer D'Artagnan turns 20 BY JOHN MARIANI

Gather 'round while I tell the story of a time not so long ago when you couldn't find a fresh seared-foie gras appetizer or truffles at any fine restaurant in the United States. This story has a happy ending. A tall woman from a far-away land and a mustachioed fellow from the wilds of Texas teamed up to change all that.

Ariane Daguin and George Faison were innocent and fervent enough to believe they could convince Americans to eat fattened duck liver. They named their company D'Artagnan, after the fourth musketeer—the one from the same region of southwestern France as Daguin—and parlayed an initial \$15,000 investment in 1985 into a \$40 million a year business by 2005, now with 148 employees, 23 trucks, seven bicycles, five forklifts and one skateboard.

"D'Artagnan changed food in America by introducing high quality products to the American market," says chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. "As chefs, we can only create great food with great

ingredients; something D'Artagnan has always supplied us with."

Now celebrating its 20th anniversary, D'Artagnan is the leading purveyor of domestic foie gras and more than 700 gourmet products, ranging from duck confit and fresh game to imported truffles and wild mushrooms. Without D'Artagnan, American chefs and restaurateurs might still be using French foie gras in tins and canned truffles soaked in brine.

"Montrachet and D'Artagnan share a happy anniversary," says Drew Nieporent, head of New York's Myriad Restaurant Group, which owns Montrachet, Nobu and Tribeca Grill. "When we opened Montrachet in 1985, our dream was to have a

Above: D'Artagnan's founding partner and now sole owner Ariane Daguin has foie gras in her genes; she comes from the epicenter of production—Gascony in southwest France—and her father is a skilled chef. Opposite: D'Artagnan sells a range of French country food products, including a wide selection of pâtés.

