

THE GOURMET RETAILER

Special Supplement



The Traditional Foods of

North America

by James Mellgren

Pâtés and Terrines

James Beard said that a pâté was simply a fancy meatloaf. That may be an over simplification, sort of like comparing Thunderbird wine to a Grand Cru Bordeaux because they are, after all, both fermented grape juice. And while meatloaf remains very popular with large segments of the population and is frequently made at home, pâtés and related terrines have become staple foods in specialty shops across the U.S. and Canada. The word pâté is a version of the French term for pastry or dough (*pâte* means “paste”), and in this case refers specifically to a kind of pie. Back in medieval times, it would have referred to basically anything baked inside a pastry crust, including four and twenty blackbirds. At fancy dinners, it was common practice to mark the various pâtés by placing the head of the animal used (usually birds) on the top of the pastry in order to know which pie was which.



Terrine has its roots in the earth, literally, for it is based on *terra*, meaning “earth” and refers specifically to an earthenware vessel used to cook meat mixtures. Technically then, what we think of today as pâté is actually a terrine, for in order to be a pâté, it would have to be encased in pastry, or what we would call today a *pâté en croûte*, a redundant term on par with “pizza pie.” Confusing, isn’t it? It’s

okay because, in fact, the two terms are virtually interchangeable today. What’s important is that we have a great many of them to choose from today and they have become part of our tradition. In addition to meat-based versions, there are seafood and vegetable pâtés, and we buy them for picnics, parties, buffets, and all manner of informal dining. There are several excellent manufacturers of pâtés and/or terrines around the country; companies such as Alexian, Trois Petit Cochon, Fabriques Délices, and Marcel et Henri to name a few. They all make classic pâtés that have become an indelible part of our culinary landscape.