

taste buds  
chef Larry  
Janes



## Be sharp about knives

With the holidays fast approaching, major retailers are gearing up with promotions, catalogs and in-store demonstrations to entice you, the consumer, into buying new cutlery for gifts.

A simple walk through the cutlery department at any major retailer will reveal numerous displays and cabinets filled with five different paring knives, four different cook's knives, boning knives, fillet knives, bread knives and utility knives, not to mention stacks of sharpeners — some of which would be a total waste of money to purchase.

So how does a novice search out respectable-quality cutlery? Contrary to popular belief, the name doesn't always mean quality. Ditto for hefty price tags. If you or someone you know is shopping for good quality and affordable cutlery this season, check out the following suggestions before you buy.

- Know what the manufacturer has to offer and what you want. You do not need 14 different knives. A basic starter set consists of chef's (cook's) knife, a paring knife, a utility knife (boner/fillet) and a slicing knife (regular or serrated).

- Don't be misled by price. The November issue of Consumers Report magazine rates 21 different knives, with the top two being American-made cutlery with very reasonable price tags. You'll get a better deal if you purchase pre-packaged "gift sets," but more than likely the manufacturer will throw in something useless.

- Imported cutlery with sophisticated-sounding materials are not necessarily better. Surgical stainless is not necessarily better than regular stainless. Molybdenum and Vanadium steel are two of many elements that can be used to make stainless steel. Carbon blade knives sharpen easily and well, but they can stain and will rust without delicate handling. Stainless always looks good, and some of the new lines manufacturers are touting are made of newer alloys that sharpen better than the old.

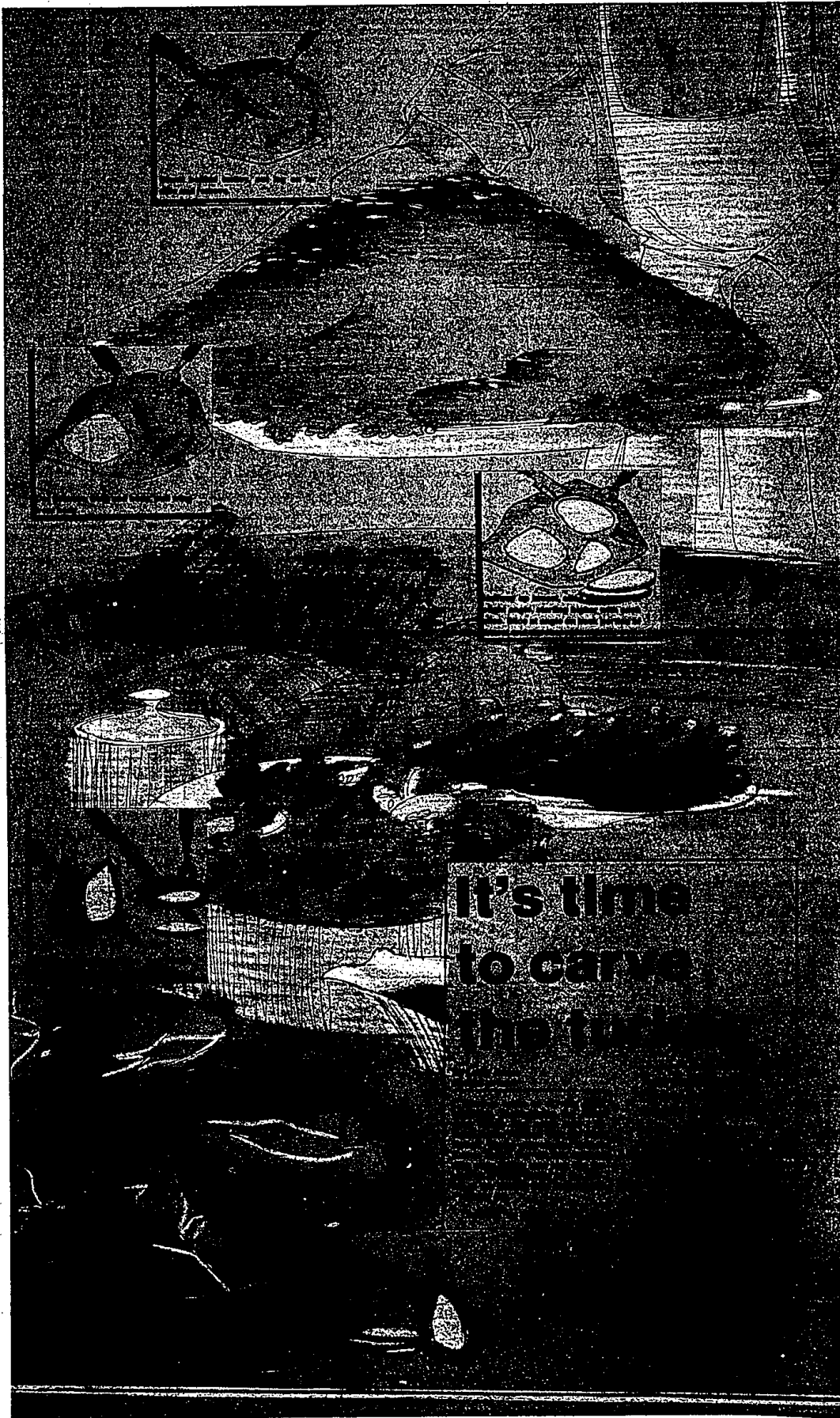
- Unless you plan to learn how to professionally sharpen your knives, using a sharpening steel is complicated, awkward and can give poor results for the novice cook. Better to invest in a good knife sharpener like the Chef's Choice than a steel.

- Almost as important as the knives themselves, consider the purchase of a knife block or storage rack. Knives dull and can be damaged without one.

- Some things to ask the salesperson when purchasing cutlery. a) Can I hold it? A good knife will feel comfortable in your hand and not too heavy or light. b) How is the handle attached? A good knife will have a full "tang" that runs all through the handle (the metal part should extend through the full handle). Look for three rivets. (Full tang gives the knife balance.) As a general rule, full-tang knives will feel balanced and partial-tang knives will feel blade heavy.

- Last, but not least, under no circumstances should any decent cutlery be placed in the dishwasher. After use, wash and wipe dry for optimum results and long-lasting sharpness.

Yours truly has a 10-slot knife rack, and seven out of 10 knives are from various manufacturers. It is not necessary to own a matched set of cutlery. One chef's knife might feel comfortable and another manufacturer's paring knife will feel good. And before I forget, one last word on cutting boards. You can't beat wood for chopping, but purists



## It's time to carve