



BY JEFF ALLEN

Going Whole Hog

Charcuterie Cravings Cured
with Chef Craig Deihl

PHOTOS BY BEN WILLIAMS



CHEF CRAIG DEIHL IN HIS
CYPRESS MEAT LOCKER

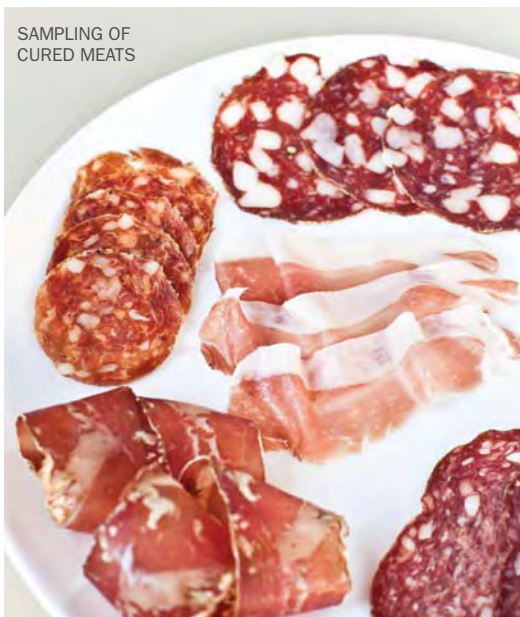
Charcuterie is an alchemical process, spinning gastronomic gold from stuff that most would deem fodder for the garbage can.

THE MOST FASCINATING PART OF Cypress restaurant lies tucked away up an anonymous back stair. I pass dribbling coffee machines and slick rubber floor mats, navigate a maze of meat grinders and stainless steel tables, and duck behind an insulated door guarding a refrigerated room through which I must pass to gain access to a second chamber that flutters with the whir of numerous box fans continuously churning the cold musty air. The first thing I notice is how cold my ears are, then the intoxicating smell of a thousand pounds of pork, inoculated months ago with molds and spices and hung to dry from every available stanchion. Here I found Chef Craig Deihl's most valued possession, a massive collection of fine charcuterie awaiting his guests.

The charcuterie present themselves in assorted shapes and sizes, most bearing the familiar downy snow of mold so evocative of dry-cured sausage. But others are different. "This one's a culatello," Deihl tells me, gingerly holding a football-sized chunk of meat aloft while smiling like an expectant father. It's a special cut, traditionally the main muscle of the famed prosciutto ham, or any ham for that matter, tied up in a particular pear-shaped manner and cured all on its own. In its Italian birthplace they regard it as the most opulent of cured meats; the making of it means destroying the possibility of a whole cured ham from that particular leg of pork, and that necessitates that other avenues be found for the leftover pieces and parts. It is in this pursuit, that of respecting and utilizing the whole animal, that Deihl distills the magic of charcuterie onto a delicious plate. His art is an algebra of efficiency.

His explorations into the mysterious realm of cured meats are anything but run of the mill. It took but a single bite of 'nduja, a silky smoked spread of pulverized pork fat and incendiary capsicum peppers, for me to understand why. Served smeared across a piece of charred bread, it evokes the culture of Southern Italy and nods to the necessities of a place stricken with poverty for ages. Like the more popular lardo, a piece of thick back fat cured with garlic, herbs, spice, and sliced translucently thin, the 'nduja makes use of the remnants, the trimmings left over after the more mainstream cuts have been culled for fresh eating. It is simply a poor man's food from Calabria, but one that demonstrates how the greatest culinary traditions often arise from the most humble of beginnings. Charcuterie is an alchemical process, spinning gastronomic gold from stuff that most would deem fodder for the garbage can.

Deihl's journey began in 2007 when his kitchen



SAMPLING OF CURED MEATS

crew asked him to source a whole pig. He easily found an animal. Cutting it up was not too difficult, but determining how to maximize its utility presented quite a challenge. Once the loins and chops of a whole hog are relegated to the frying pan and the hams laid into cure, the rest of the animal awaits. Complicating these matters are the various breeds now locally available, which can be roughly divided into "meat-types" and "lard-types," the latter often being so interlaced with fat that even the leanest portions are only suitable for sausage. And so Deihl spent five years learning, through research and experimentation, the true art of butchery and the delicate task of profitably incorporating that practice into a working restaurant.

Much of that pursuit meant diversification and preservation—freezing fresh cuts vacuum-sealed in brine for later use and offering cured products not only at the dining table, but also through his popular Artisan Meat Share program, which operates much like a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project. It also meant branching into other forms of preservation that attend the charcutier's

art, and I watch Deihl busily prepare jars of fermented mustard and pickled vegetables to accompany the meats. Today he's sharing recipes accessible to home cooks lacking specialized fermentation chambers, cold smokers, and bacterial inoculants.

The 'nduja takes weeks to prepare, but rillettes, he explains as he works up a batch, can be cooked up in a matter of hours. We learn that with a stand mixer and some quality pork shoulder, a home cook can prepare a spread that rivals those of fancy downtown locales. Deihl dices some pork belly, renders it down in a sauté pan, and later blends the whole in a stand mixer until the mixture resembles butter striated with fine strands of caramelized pork. He packs it into a small ramekin, pairing it with pickled preserves and mustard. "To cut the fat," he declares and makes it all look easy.

The rillettes, a distant cousin of 'nduja, are soft and dark brown. Deihl's non-traditional stove-top method speeds the required cooking time and adds a layer of caramelization that he finds particularly appealing for its deep, meaty flavor. Smeared on rustic bread, rillettes are not unlike a country pâté, albeit much easier to produce, and the presentation could find itself equally at home on a fishing trip as at a black tie affair. It is the depth of flavor and unctuous mouth feel that set rillettes apart from—dare we say—an "ordinary" pork chop? That's quite a feat for a lowly pile of scraps chased with a pickled green bean.

To truly sample the art, you need to take in a full range of Deihl's offerings. The menu at Cypress brims with the outcomes of the kitchen's longstanding experimentation. On any typical visit, one might enjoy various salamis, 'wursts, ham, coppa, head cheese, even lamb bacon, sliced paper thin and served raw. And true to his hospitable reputation, Deihl presents our team with a sizeable plate of cold cuts. We dive for the lamb salami, and oohs and ahhs abound. Suddenly, our photographer Ben has gone missing, and I spy him slinking behind his umbrella flash, hoarding a sizable stash of the 'nduja between bites. Such is the power of charcuterie, a mish-mash of leftover parts often more desirable than the whole hog.





WHOLE GRAIN MUSTARD,
FINISHED PRODUCT ON LEFT

Charcuterie Recipes

Craig Deihl

Executive Chef, Cypress

LARD BISCUITS

5½ cups all-purpose flour
3 tablespoons baking powder
½ tablespoon fine sea salt
2 tablespoons sugar
12 ounces very cold lard
1½ cups buttermilk
1 egg, beaten

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. If using a convection oven, turn it on low or off.
2. In a large mixing bowl combine the flour, baking powder, salt, and sugar. Use a whisk to combine. Add the lard to the flour. Using your hands, a pastry cutter, or two butter knives, cut the lard into the flour. There should be pea-sized lumps of fat scattered evenly throughout the flour.
3. Combine the buttermilk and egg and add to the flour-and-lard mixture. Mix just until it holds together.
4. Dust a wooden cutting board or the counter with flour. Place the biscuit dough on it. Fold the dough over itself two or three times until it becomes smooth and firm. Dust the dough lightly with flour and roll out to a thickness of ¾ of an inch.
5. Cut the biscuits using a 3-inch biscuit cutter and place 2 inches apart on a sheet tray. Mix the leftover dough into a ball and roll out again and cut remaining biscuits. Discard any remaining dough.
6. Bake for 15 minutes, until golden and puffy.

Yield: About 2 dozen biscuits

PICKLED OKRA

2 cups apple cider vinegar
1 cup water
½ cup sugar
3 tablespoons salt
1 tablespoon mustard seeds
4 allspice berries
1 tablespoon celery seeds
½ teaspoon crushed red pepper
2 bay leaves
2 cloves garlic
3 cups okra, washed

1. In a non-reactive pot, combine all ingredients except the okra. Place over high heat and bring to a boil.
2. Add the okra and boil for 4 minutes. Remove from heat and shock the pot in ice water to cool rapidly.
3. Transfer the pickled okra to glass jars and store in the refrigerator for at least 1 week before using. The pickled okra will keep for about one month.

Yield: 1 quart

WHOLE GRAIN MUSTARD

¾ cup black mustard seed
1½ cup yellow mustard seed
1½ teaspoons chili flakes
3 garlic cloves, whole
1 teaspoon caraway
1½ tablespoons black peppercorn
1½ tablespoons white peppercorn
1 quart apple cider vinegar
1½ quart water
¾ cup sugar
3 tablespoon salt
1 cup white wine

1. Combine all ingredients in a non-reactive mixing bowl and incorporate evenly.
2. Place equal amounts of the mixture in quart-size mason jars. Place the lid and ring on and tighten.

3. Allow the mustard to sit at room temperature for a minimum of 4 weeks.
4. When the mustard is ready, add it to a blender and puree to desired consistency.
5. Remaining mustard can be refrigerated for up to 1 month.

Yield: 2 quarts

PORK "BUTTER" RILLETTES

2 pounds pork belly, cut into 1-inch cubes
2 pounds boneless pork shoulder, cut into 1-inch cubes
3 tablespoons salt
1½ teaspoons crushed red pepper
1 teaspoon cracked black pepper
6 cloves garlic, peeled and trimmed
6 fresh bay leaves
4 sprigs fresh thyme
2½ cups water

1. Combine all ingredients and incorporate evenly in a heavy-bottomed pan.
2. Place over high heat and bring to a boil.
3. When the pan comes to a boil, reduce temperature to a simmer and cook until the water has evaporated (about 35-40 minutes).
4. Reduce the temperature to medium-low heat after water has evaporated. Fry the pork out in the pork fat until it is lightly crisp and tender enough to fall apart with a fork.
5. Remove thyme and whole bay leaves and cool the pork until room temperature.
6. When cool, place pork and fat into the bowl of a stand mixer with paddle attachment and beat until the pork is finely mixed and spreadable.
7. Place the pork rillettes into small ramekins or glass jars and keep refrigerated until ready to use.
8. When ready to serve allow the pork rillettes to come to room temperature for about 1 hour and serve with biscuits mustard and pickles.

Yield: 2 quarts

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CHARCUTERIE SPREAD
(CLOCKWISE FROM TOP CENTER)
PICKLED OKRA AND CUCUMBER,
LARD BISCUITS, SUMMER SAUSAGE,
DUCK PATÉ, HEAD CHEESE, CANADIAN BACON,
CITY HAM, WHOLE GRAIN MUSTARD,
HOME-MADE HOT DOG, PORK RILLETTES,
LAMB BACON.



FOR A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE ON HOW TO MAKE RILLETTES,
PLEASE VISIT: THELOCALPALATE.COM/RECIPES.HTML