

Fork & The Road //

A Cure for What Ails You

Andrew Zimmern profiles three charcuterie masters.



Zimmern hosts *Bizarre Foods on the Travel Channel*.

Rillettes from Publican Quality Meats in Chicago

Today's craft meat movement produces some of the best food in America. From neighborhood gastropubs to fine-dining temples, almost every restaurant I know has jumped on the charcuterie bandwagon. Charcuterie translates from French as "pork-butcher's shop" and is defined as the art of creating cured, smoked and preserved meats. Mastering charcuterie is no easy feat. If you cure a ham, you don't get to taste it for at least a year and a half. That's a long time to wait to see how you did or what the customer thinks. And building a vault of cured meats means sitting on a lot of investment and inventory. Most chefs don't have that kind of patience. Here are three who do.

An all-star in the meat-centric food scene, Cosmo Goss is the resident savant behind Publican Quality Meats in Chicago. His dry-cured sausage collection includes dozens of unique shapes and grind mixtures that remind me of cured sausage in rural Italy.

Goss's latest push is to lighten up the items coming out of his kitchen. "There are so many places where you eat a pork chop or some braised pork belly and need to take a nap afterward," he says. "We're trying to come up with new ways to make pork clean and light. We'll do something really simple like the ham chop . . . and just add Michigan cherries and tarragon."

Andrew's Pick //

Boccalone, San Francisco

This artisan meat business creates insane salumi from sustainably raised, heritage-bred pork that's seasoned with Italian sea salt, then cold cured. The result? Addictive guanciale, capocollo, fennel salame, pancetta and more. boccalone.com



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And then there's Craig Deihl. Raised in Danville, Pennsylvania, Deihl attended culinary school at Johnson & Wales University in Charleston, South Carolina. Since then, he's become a steady force on the Southern food scene, first working at Charleston's heralded Magnolias, then moving on to its sister restaurant Cypress in 2001. As the restaurant's executive chef, Deihl focused on whole animals years before it was popular. He and his team conducted a lot of research when creating their charcuterie program, and the result is stunning recipes such as cypressata (the restaurant's version of soppressata) and a warm, spreadable fennel salami. Another real stunner that I recently tried was a small piece of lardo that was crisp as an apple and melted in my mouth like salt-kissed butter and rosemary.

Like Deihl, Ryan Smith is originally from Pennsylvania and moved South. He ended up in Atlanta more than a decade ago and most recently served as executive chef at Hugh Acheson's Empire State South. The two collaborated on a modern approach to authentic Southern dishes, with a strong focus on the tradition of preserving meats. Customers went wild over his potted and jarred meats, such as pork rillettes, chicken livers and terrines, as well as his cured meats and sausages.

Smith left Empire State South in August to focus on Staple-house, slated to open later this year in Atlanta's Old 4th Ward. The joint venture with his fiancé, brother and sister-in-law will churn out local and seasonal small plates for sharing. The best part? All profits will fund The Giving Kitchen, an initiative aimed at supporting restaurant industry folks who've fallen on hard times.

All of which means that the world's oldest food preservation technique will keep giving back in immeasurable ways. And that's a good food story. //