

FLAVORS

Going Whole-Hog

Chefs are using every part of the pig, from head to tail.

By Jan Greenberg

Wood-grilled flatbread with house-cured salami is on the menu at Cypress.

Lowry McKee Photography

Until just a few years ago, the phrase "eating high on the hog" was a euphemism for wealth and affluence. The rich could afford the more expensive cuts from the back and upper leg of the pig, while the less fortunate had to make do with the less attractive leftovers.

Today, though, parts of the pig that would formerly have been sent to a bologna factory regularly appear on the dinner plates of some of the finest dining establishments in the nation. According to George Formaro, chef/partner at two

Des Moines, Iowa, restaurants, Centro and Django, "Few things excite our chefs more than working with a whole pig. Everybody wants to play with the pig."

Formaro is among the chefs participating in the annual pork cook-off competition, Cochon 555. This is the Super Bowl of pork, a 10-city tour in which five local chefs compete for the title of that city's Prince of Pork. It's all in good fun, but the real goal is to raise public consciousness and support for the small group of hog producers who are reviving endangered breeds and raising

them humanely. Funds go also to farmers markets throughout the nation and, this year, to Farms for City Kids Foundation, based in Port Washington, N.Y.

At the Des Moines competition, Formaro planned to present what he calls a "roadside taco stand," serving hand-pressed tortillas with pig parts simmering in a reverse-hump comal (a pan that allows tortillas/meats to be seared on the hump while broth simmers around the edge), similar to what one might find at a taco stand in Mexico. "This will be, literally, head-



Thomas Schauer

At Blue Hill at Stone Barns, Adam Kaye and his kitchen crew bone out a pig's head to make this paper-thin, crisp face bacon.

From snout to tail

The restaurant for which the whole animal, particularly pork, is part of the daily routine, is Blue Hill at Stone Barns, Pocantico Hills, N.Y. Executive chef/co-owner Dan Barber is not only among the world's best-known chefs, but also one of the most awarded, including being named James Beard Outstanding Chef for 2009. Adam Kaye, who came to Blue Hill in 2000 as the meat cook, is now chef/kitchen director.

to-tail offerings," he says, "keeping in mind that there are limited supplies of some items, like cheeks, eyes, lips, brain and snout. If I'm lucky, I'll get a stomach and uterus. I'll also serve some chorizo, carnitas and crispy chicharone in salsa, and use them in the tacos as a contrasting texture."

The whole hog

But for many chefs, working with whole animals and using each part is not just about finding novel dishes for their customers. Typical is Kelly English, chef/owner of Restaurant Iris in Memphis, who was named one of *Food & Wine's* Best New Chefs of 2009 and nominated this year for a "Best Chef: Southeast" James Beard award.

"It's true that there is no more versatile animal than the pig, but it's important to celebrate the life of the animal by making sure that all of it is used," he says. "When I go to a farm and see 'my' pig alive, to do anything else would be a waste of its life."

Unlike chefs who are putting out what to some may be considered weird cuts of pork, in Memphis, it is a fairly easy sell. "We're lucky to be here," says English. "If we were serving something like veal heart, our customers might be scared. But if pork is on the menu, people will try anything. Don't forget, this is the barbecue capital of the nation, and everyone is familiar with hogs."

He stews the feet and serves them with a vinegar-based sauce, and uses the head, including the tongue, for head cheese. Since English is originally from Louisiana, he makes boudin, using liver, kidneys and most of the pig's innards. "The heart I keep for me," he says. "I take it home, stew it for a couple of hours, slice it up and cook it like a schnitzel."

"We raise our own pigs here, and use at least three a week," Kaye says. "Since almost 90% of our meat comes in the form of whole animals, necessity is the mother of all invention, and we have, over the years, developed a repertoire of products that are born out of the need to use every part of the animal.

"The prime cuts—loin, rack, tenderloin and part of the leg—we serve in a traditional manner, roasting and braising. But then you have all the rest of the animal to work with, and we really go from snout to tail. As you are going down the animal and begin to extract all the different parts, you are generating scrap.

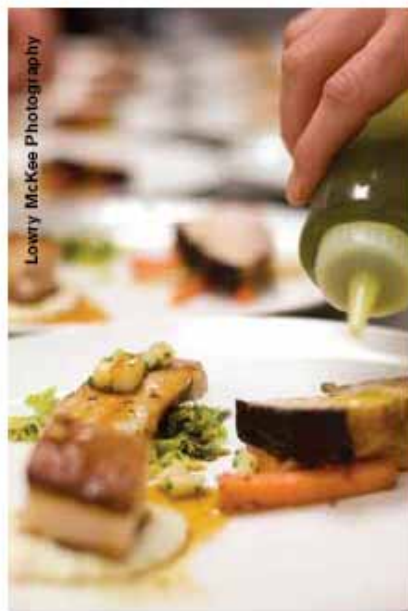
"If pork is on the menu, people will try anything."

—Kelly English

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"In many ways, I feel one of our big successes in the past two years is that each tier of scrap now generates its own product. For instance, if we are going to make a really nice smoked and cooked sausage, we'll use all the scraps from the shoulder and mix it up with the offal. We can make bologna, which we sell in our cafe, and mortadella, by emulsifying all the leftover scraps and trimmings."

Kaye and his kitchen crew brine the hocks and braise the feet, picking out the bones, to make terrines. There are many uses for the head. It can be taken apart, and the jowls, ears, snout and chin cooked separately. The crisped pieces of ear and chin and succulent braised guanciale can be used to accompany a conventionally prepared loin. Sometimes the kitchen bones out the head, brines and confits it, and then rolls it into a torchon that is served as face bacon (as opposed to



Lowry McKee Photography

bacon made from the pig's belly), paper-thin and crisp, an *uber* bacon.

Adding value

In food-savvy Charleston, S.C., Craig Deihl, executive chef of Cypress, a post he assumed eight years ago at the age of 24 just six months after the restaurant's opening, has spread his porcine net beyond the confines of his kitchen. In addition to the Tamworth hogs he sources from Keegan-Filion Farm in Walterboro, S.C., (which gets some of his better kitchen scraps for pork treats), he is helping to revive the rare heritage Guinea hog, working with Gray Moore, owner of Carolina Heritage Farm, Pamplico, S.C.

"It's a lard pig, fatter than a Tamworth or Ossabaw," says Deihl. "The whole carcass only weighs about 80 pounds, so it is easy for restaurants to handle. You don't need special equipment, because they are so small and can be broken down with a cleaver. They will eat rodent pests and can forage for their own food, and at the end of the day, they make some pretty tasty BLTs, as well."

He also initiated Artisan Meat Share in Charleston, the equivalent of a pork CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), which he describes as a win-win situation. Shareholders receive restaurant-made charcuterie, such as coppa, chorizo, city ham, Genoa salmi, mortadella, picante

Craig Deihl's trio of Black Guinea hog is braised shoulder, savory cabbage and honey crisp apples; rye-roasted belly, white grits, celery root and smoked bacon jus; and grilled loin, carrots, orange and cumin.



Diners at Rabbit Hill Inn enjoy Matthew Secich's smoked Waterford pork loin on spinach purée with sautéed local organic chanterelle mushrooms, kale, roasted onions, apples and spinach.

salmi and saucisson sec, and local pork producers benefit from increased demand. Deihl points out that whole animals began entering his kitchen only about three years ago. "When we first started, it was kind of trial and error while we figured out how to use everything. This was not something we were taught in school. We would smoke the shoulders and do an upscale barbecue. But then we moved on to figuring out how to preserve what we had, and began to do salumi and sausage. The more we use, the more added value we get. Now there's nothing we don't use."

In addition to charcuterie and the standard pork chop and loin, Deihl uses the head for head cheese, *porchetta di testa*, guanciale, jowl bacon and crispy pan-fried head. There are trotter tots from the feet, smoked hocks and pork butter—a creamy rilette made from lard to which he adds garlic, chilies, rosemary, fennel and salt, then purées with butter and mascarpone.

"We are becoming known for what we do, but we always have to think about what we are doing in terms of pleasing the guests," Deihl says. "The last thing you want is that one complaint."

Locally sourced

Up north, in what was once the halfway stop between the busy harbors of Boston and Portland, Maine, and Montreal, is the Rabbit Hill Inn in Lower Waterford, Vt. Named as one of *Travel + Leisure's* 2009 best 100 hotels in the world, its visitors go as much for the food that comes from chef Matthew Secich's kitchen as for the many outdoor pursuits the area offers.

Secich's culinary pedigree includes stints in England with Raymond Blanc at Le Manoir aux Quat'Saisons and in Virginia with Patrick O'Connell at The Inn at Little Washington. Before coming to Vermont, the Ohio-born Secich worked in Chicago with Charlie Trotter, leaving, he says, because, "I like to be as close to the farmer as possible."



Christopher Maharry



Lowry McKee Photography

The pigs that provide pork for the menu at Rabbit Hill are raised at a farm in Waterford, where they feast on the excess cottage cheese, whey and cream cheese produced at nearby Cabot Creamery in Montpelier. Secich slaughters many of the pigs himself on the farm, taking them to a U.S. Department of Agriculture facility for inspection. "That way I can keep everything," he says, "brains, guts."

Although it is not pork, one of his most popular pre-dinner amuse-bouche is what he calls "nuggets of knowledge"—fried veal brains. The dish says something about the inn's clientele, who, says Secich, tend to be open-minded eaters. "Hardly anything ever comes back," he says. "It's very rare that we make something we can't sell."

There is pig-head soup made from the head, which has simmered for a day or two and is then disassembled, keeping the jowl

George Formaro offers this Alsatian tart, which features house-cured pancetta, as a special at Django.

Black Guinea hog liver mousse on brioche with pickled red onion is one of the dishes Craig Deihl creates from the rare heritage Guinea hog.

meat, tongue, ears and skin separate, and adding a mirepoix and seasonings. The tongue may be pickled, the cheeks served braised or in a stew, and the ears and skin will become cracklings.

Secich braises the heart with cloves and red wine, and fries the spleen in bacon fat with a coating of flour, breadcrumbs and lard. The kidneys may be braised in brown butter, and the testicles deep-fried and served as little discs with a molasses bread, as an amuse.

From head to tail, Secich uses the whole pig, although the snout gets dried off, hung and taken home for his dog. "I can't eat the snout," he says. "And I don't find the eyeballs all that appealing, either."

Jan Greenberg, author of *Hudson Valley Harvest (Countryman Press, 2003)*, is based in Rhinebeck, N.Y.