



falling for

CHARCUTERIE

BY KAREN WEISBERG

Celebrate the cooler weather with charcuterie, a chef favorite that's popular with guests.

If your menu is crying out for pâtés and terrines, rillettes and galantines, for head cheese and a variety of sausages, as well as cooked, cured or air-dried salamis, then you're ready to enter the age-old world of charcuterie.

When fabricating a pig nose to tail, be prepared to go whole-hog, advises Mark Elia, who has been making sausage for 40 years. "I recommend that any chef wanting to do nose-to-tail just bring in the whole animal and fabricate to the hilt," he says. "Work with someone who knows what they're doing, plus, there are plenty of videos out there. Forty years later, I'm still learning."

Make YOUR OWN

As an assistant professor of culinary arts at The Culinary Institute of America, Hyde Park, New York, Elia teaches Meat Identification and Fabrication. He is also proprietor/chef of Elia's Catering Co. & Hudson Valley Sausage Co., Highland, New York. During the past two or three years, he says he's seen more chefs producing and menuing their own charcuterie.

"They want to be involved, not only for the profitability that comes with the maximum utilization of product, but for safety, because you can control the ingredients, almost eliminating the E. coli risk with ground products," he says.

Think "charcuterie," and it's usually pork that comes to mind. It's the most popular and the most profitable of all species to fabricate. Because it's mass-produced to such a great extent, it's relatively cheap—a 200-pound hog at slaughter sells for about \$2.50 per pound. Heritage breeds can run to \$5 per pound.

For anything that's going to be dry-cured, the Mangalitsa with its extremely high fat content is the No. 1 heritage breed to choose, in Elia's opinion. "And thanks to the growing demand, it's easier to find today than even two or three years ago," he says.

For fall's traditional beer-and-sausage pairings, wursts are popular. "You can prepare bratwurst, knackwurst, weisswurst (white sausage) and bockwurst (a small velvety sausage that's a mixture of veal, pork, raw egg and seasonings)," Elia says. "These are the heavy-hitters, as well as soppressata, an Italian dry-cured salami." He makes seven different soppressata, including salami nola seasoned with clove and allspice. He serves it on a charcuterie platter with a variety of mixed salumi, coppa and Genoa salami.

Add ACCOMPANIMENTS

Charcuterie, which is evolving from being an interesting and unique menu item to a staple, is continuing to grow, says Stephen Gerike, director of foodservice marketing and innovation for the National Pork Board, Des Moines, Iowa. He's been educating chefs for the past several years on what to do "when you've got a lot of animal there, and you obviously don't want to waste what you've spent money on."

Gerike says dedicated chefs in restaurants in major cities worked with local health departments to clear obstacles to charcuterie production. When they were questioned about hanging raw meat in a high-humidity controlled environment at 40°F-140°F, they explained that the salt plus high humidity cures the meat. "They wrote a HACCP (Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point) plan for every single recipe they were going to make," Gerike says. "It was a challenge. It goes against everything the health department expects. They want you to receive and handle everything below 40°F."

He suggests offering a meat and cheese plate or a ham sampler, a fit with today's shared appetizer trend, or perhaps a Vietnamese-style banh mi sandwich that's traditionally made with pâté. But, "It's not about what you're serving in charcuterie, but more about the accompaniments," he says.

Housemade pickles might be an obvious choice, but there's also mostarda to complement a salty, fatty piece of meat. Gerike suggests boiling a simple syrup with mustard seed and fresh horseradish, then pouring the mixture over crabapples or other fruit and letting it sit overnight. Strain the liquid, boil again, and repeat for about eight days until you have translucent sweet/sour fruit with mustard overtones.

ARTISAN MEAT SHARE

What to do when you're curing more meat than you can sell in your restaurant? Taking a leaf from the CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) playbook, about five years ago, Craig Deihl, executive chef at Cypress, Charleston, South Carolina, offered the public a \$250 annual membership in the newly created Artisan Meat Share. Four times a year, about a hundred members received an assortment of cooked, cured and smoked charcuterie products.

"After the first year, there was growing buzz, and that allowed us to make more," Deihl says. Also, more people were buying charcuterie items at the restaurant.

Two years later, in 2014, believing his charcuterie would do well at retail, he opened Artisan Meat Share as a brick-and-mortar venue. "We're in a 'newer' area of town, with numerous hotels yet to open—that was part of the business plan," says Deihl.

Artisan Meat Share does triple duty as a charcuterie shop with 28 seats, a butcher shop, and a sandwich shop offering beer and wine in the afternoons and evenings.

Opposite: Crispy Pork Terrine on the fall starter menu at Cypress.

PHOTO CREDIT Opposite: Peter Frank

Pâté, PLEASE

Vijay Sadhu, chef at Cook Hall, Dallas, located in the W Dallas—Victory hotel, admits to being “a very big fan of charcuterie.” His knowledge is a blend of what he picked up during culinary training in Sydney and his experience in various hotel and restaurant kitchens in India. And when it comes to creating pâté, the bold flavors of India are at one with his Australian culinary training.

He takes lean pork spiced with galangal and turmeric, and adds a bit of saffron. He roasts walnuts and almonds instead of the more common pistachio, and blends with the pâté. “I even add curry leaf to the mix—it has a strong fragrance,” says Sadhu. “I fry it to make it crunchy.”

He cooks the pork mixture with clarified butter, then puts it in a mold in the cooler to solidify for a few days. He slices it—not too thin—onto bread, and adds a sprinkle of pork spice (cumin, cardamom, smoked paprika, Madras curry powder, garlic powder, salt and dark chili powder). He serves it with a small crunchy salad of baby arugula dressed with ground cardamom/lemon vinaigrette.

For a charcuterie plate, Sadhu sets out an array of housemade ingredients, including salami, pickles, mustard and fried pork balls, and serves with rustic toast. Mustard spread provides a simple counterpoint to the charcuterie meats. “I take green mangoes and black and white mustard seed, and grind them with hot vegetable oil, chili powder and a lot of salt,” he says. Pieces of cut mango soak overnight in the mixture. “Once this mixture is done—when oil is floating on top—all fragrance is now in the mangoes. Take a small spoonful to place on the charcuterie plate and also spread some on the board to complement all the different types of meat.”

Pick THE RIGHT PIG

On the menu at Cypress, Charleston, South Carolina, a Hospitality Management Group venue, there’s a selection from executive chef Craig Deihl’s award-winning in-house-made charcuterie. And while he doesn’t purchase many American Guinea Hogs each year, he’s a fan of this small specialty pig. “It fits the superior fine dining menu, because it has a high level of intramuscular marbling for a pig that size,” he says. “It’s a fit for a trio of prep on a dinner menu.”

Although he can ask for a 55-60 pound pig with a ratio of more meat to fat, he tends to request a 120-130 pound mature



PHOTO CREDITS Clockwise from top: 1) & 2) H. Alesse Nielsen 3) Toni Elia 4) Rick McKee 5) Toni Elia 6) H. Alesse Nielsen; opposite: left, The National Pork Board; right, Rick McKee

Guinea Hog with more fat to meat. “That’s a truly good old-fashioned lard pig,” he says. “We’ll use it as lard for making biscuits, for lardo for all our salamis and pâtés. The flavor of the fat is far superior to that from other hogs out there.”

Typically, he salts and cures the fatback for a year before producing his salamis. “Using it at a later date is my way of allowing the pig to shine,” Deihl says. Diced lardo—teamed with pistachios and peppercorns—is also used in the mortadella served at the restaurant.

Under Artisan Meats, the Cypress menu offers The Motherboard, an assortment of house-cured meats and charcuterie. On the bar menu, there’s banh mi with pork pâté, ham, kimchi, carrots, cilantro and ciabatta. But Deihl says it’s always easier to introduce charcuterie throughout the rest of the menu during the fall. For example, Pork Sauerkraut is a 4-ounce piece of pork loin pounded thin and brined overnight, then coated in flour/breadcrumbs and fried. It’s plated over mustard sauce that’s been pickling in a whiskey barrel throughout the summer, and sauerkraut, which contains three or four different types of pork.

During the fall, guests at Cypress will find Crispy Pork Terrine on the starter menu. If they ask, Deihl will detail the ingredients: head, trotters, tongue. “It’s basically a crispy head cheese with a poached egg,” he says. To prepare, cured, braised and chopped ingredients are pressed into a hotel pan. “It’s done like a croquette. We’re basically breading and deep-frying our head cheese, setting that crunchy shell outside.”

Aware that the color of the product must be appetizing—in fact, it needs to look like ham for someone to want to eat it, Deihl says—he incorporates two batches into one product. The first batch is allowed a weeklong cure for better flavor, the second, a short cure of only two or three days to retain the color.

To serve, Deihl quickly sautes kale or collards with onion and garlic, then tops the terrine with a poached egg. ■

ABOVE LEFT: Charcuterie from Stephen Barber, executive chef of Farmstead at Long Meadow Ranch, St. Helena, California. ABOVE RIGHT: Craig Deihl fabricates a pig at Cypress.

NEW YORK-BASED AWARD-WINNING JOURNALIST KAREN WEISBERG HAS COVERED THE ISSUES AND LUMINARIES OF THE FOOD-AND-BEVERAGE WORLD—BOTH COMMERCIAL AND NONCOMMERCIAL—FOR MORE THAN 25 YEARS.