

Back in the 20th century, when most Americans still thought of jerky as a truck-stop snack—a chewy distraction for long road trips—plain-old beef jerky was enough. In recent years, however, as jerky has evolved into the carnivore's snack of choice—protein-rich and low-calorie—the jerky game has changed. You need a hook. You need to do something different. One approach? Switch out the meats.

At Artisan Meat Share in Charleston, Craig Deihl marinates slices of Denver venison hind leg in a wet rub of red wine with juniper, Worcestershire and other spices, skewers them and hangs them from the top rack of his oven, cooking them with the door slightly ajar for eight hours (recipe, [plateonline.com](#)). "You get a lot of that gamey iron-rich flavor out by using a wet rub," says Deihl, "which allows you to taste the richness of the venison underneath."

At Three Degrees in Portland, Ore., Thomas Dunklin prefers applying a ginger-cilantro brine to mild-flavored alligator loin—"it holds up to the drying process better," he says—drying it in the oven and then sprinkling on a dash of jalapeño-lime salt, made by blending together dehydrated peppers and sea salt (\$8, recipe, p. 78).

"Jerky is a great bar snack," says Dunklin. "And a great way to bring the flavors of local ingredients and regional traditions into the spotlight."

water as he goes to keep everything lubricated. He then uses a one-inch grind and stuffs the mix into 32mm pork casings, creating five-ounce sausage links.

Smoked or cooked to an internal temperature of about 151 degrees F, the sausages are then shocked in ice water and warmed in a sauté pan in order to toast up the curry and cinnamon flavors (\$8, recipe, [plateonline.com](#)).

Diners then have a choice to either eat them hot dog-style on a cornmeal sausage roll topped with sauerkraut and caramelized onions or on a platter with whiskey-infused mustard. "On the one hand, it's recognizable, but on the other, it's a flavor they've never tasted before," says Younggren.

At Biker Jim's Gourmet Dogs in Denver, Jim Pittenger takes a similar approach, carefully balancing new flavors with a commitment to healthy ingredients. His reindeer sausages, made from surprisingly sweet-flavored farm-raised Alaskan caribou, are antibiotic- and nitrate-free (\$8.25, recipe, [plateonline.com](#)).

Blended with beef, pork shoulder and pork jowls—and then spiked with everything from smoked paprika to celery powder—the links are Pittenger's attempt to re-create the sweet-spicy sausages he used to enjoy at diners across Alaska. His links, sheathed in traditional hog casings, are cold-smoked from 90 minutes to two hours at 170 degrees F. Butterflied and then charred on the grill, the sausages are then topped with a Coney sauce inspired by a 1950s recipe.

"The sauce isn't spicy at all," says Pittenger. "You got smokiness and pepperiness and the sweetness of the dog and then this tangy tomatoey bacon sauce. It's just different. It really trips people out. And they remember that."

Peter Gianopoulos loves jerky but believes that ostrich *biltong* may be the single greatest snack food on the planet.

digestif

WHAT IS YOUR SPIRIT ANIMAL AND WHY?



I ASKED MY WIFE, AND SHE SAID I WAS A WILD TURKEY.

When I asked her why, she replied that wild turkeys are easily domesticated, like me.

— Ryan Nelson, Late Harvest Kitchen, Indianapolis



My spirit game animal has to be the wild boar, because they're highly intelligent and driven. That, and they don't take any crap. They have no problem getting into a fight for what they want. Oh, and they give you boar bacon... and braised pork shanks... and a good grind for chili... now I'm hungry!

— Sarah Wade, Lulu's Allston, Boston

Lulu's Allston



CLAYTON HAUCK

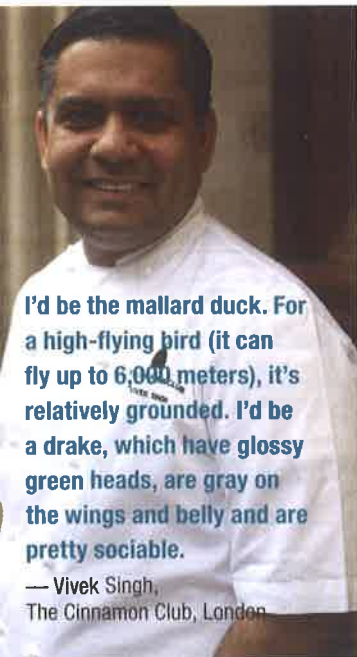
My spirit game animal is the BEAR. It's strong, cunning, has the ability to eat anything and is stealthy like a ninja.

— Jared Wentworth, Longman & Eagle, Chicago



A wild boar because it's the only game animal I can think of that eats meat. I could never be a vegetarian!

— Craig Deihl, Cypress and Artisan Meat Share, Charleston



I'd be the mallard duck. For a high-flying bird (it can fly up to 6,000 meters), it's relatively grounded. I'd be a drake, which have glossy green heads, are gray on the wings and belly and are pretty sociable.

— Vivek Singh, The Cinnamon Club, London

I would have to go with an aoudad. The aoudad has just recently been introduced to North America. They love the mountains and hardly ever drink water. They get their liquid necessary for survival from other sources, like their food (or in my case, tequila and wine). They are very nimble and smart, nomadic creatures, usually led by one dominant male.

— Tim Love, Lonesome Dove Western Bistro, Fort Worth and Austin



I would be a raccoon. They're extremely intelligent, and always wash their food before eating. And, who doesn't crave a smoked raccoon gumbo?

— John Folse, Restaurant R'evolution, New Orleans