

This Little Piggy . . .

A growing market for tasty, fatter, older breeds of swine bodes well for chefs and diners who revere pork.

By Jan Greenberg

Michael Clampffer visited Austria in October 2008 to study the Mangalitsa breed of pig. He spent a day with chef Manfred Stockner at Zum Weissen Rauchfangkehrer in Vienna, who features this Mangalitsa lardo with marinated mushrooms, crispy bread and baby frisée on the menu.

What's crisscrossing the nation on a 10-city tour and playing to packed houses? No, it's not a Broadway musical, Springsteen or Madonna. It's Cochon 555, and—you should excuse the expression—it's a pig-out, if ever there was one.

Presented by Atlanta-based Taste Network, each Cochon 555 event features five chefs, five pigs and five winemakers. The purpose? To garner attention for endangered heritage breeds of swine (and to raise funds for

local charities, as well). About a week before each event, each participating chef receives a 75-pound porker raised at a local farm and, in true nose-to-tail tradition, creates a brain-to-butt menu. A panel of judges picks the winner, who is declared that city's Prince of Pork.

That Cochon 555 has been such a success is indicative not only of pork's popularity but of the burgeoning interest and growing market for tasty, fatter, older breeds of swine. In the late 1970s, these older breeds were replaced by genetically created, ultra-lean pork. At the same time, pigs, until then almost exclusively raised on small- to medium-sized farms, entered the commodity marketplace from industrial pork operations often described with the acronym CAFO (concentrated animal feeding operation). The vast majority of the 105,000,000 million pigs that go to market each year in the United States come from these industrial operations.

It wasn't until 2001, when Heritage Foods USA was founded as the marketing arm for Brooklyn, N.Y.-based Slow Food USA, that attention again focused on older, often endangered breeds. Since then, it is more



common than not to see a pork breed, usually Berkshire, named on the menu of a fine-dining establishment. This, coupled with the growing public consciousness about food sources, has seen a return to small pig farms, most raising specific breeds. According to Mark Boggess, Ph.D., director of animal science for the National Pork Board, Des Moines, Iowa, it is difficult to count the number of these farms, as they are only 1% to 2% of the market. But, he points out: "There is definitely more interest in these niche farms, and they are holding their own, even in this economy."

Lard or bacon?

Pigs are traditionally classified as lard or bacon breeds. Lard breeds, which are thick and compact, fatten easily. They were used to produce lard for cooking and mechanical lubricant. In contrast, bacon pigs are long, lean and muscular. They grow more slowly, and put on more muscle than fat. Before World War II, most American pigs were lard types. Only the Yorkshire and Tamworth were classified as bacon. During the war, most lard went to the army to be used for explosives, and consumers began to use

Vitaly Paley competed in Cochon 555 in Portland, Ore., in March, with a menu that included *testarosa* (rolled head sous-vide). He was named the city's Prince of Pork.

vegetable fats for cooking. After the war, petrochemicals replaced lard for industrial and military uses, but people continued to prefer vegetable fat for cooking, so farmers switched to the leaner breeds, selecting for muscle rather than fat. Berkshire, Duroc, Hampshire, Poland China and Yorkshire became the most popular breeds in the U.S.

Thomas Schneller comes from a family of butchers and restaurateurs, and is the author of *Meat Identification, Fabrication, Utilization* (Cengage Learning, 2009). He teaches meat identification and fabrication at The Culinary Institute of America (CIA), Hyde Park, N.Y., and says it is possible to differentiate among breeds on both visual examination and taste, particularly between lard and bacon breeds (although, he points out, very few swine are actually true genetic breeds anymore). Berkshires tend to have back fat on the loins, and produce a juicy meat, whereas the meat from a Red



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Wattle is a bit darker and very tender. The Duroc is high in marbling, and mild-tasting, whereas the Tamworth, considered the best bacon hog, is lean and muscular.

"Breeds accumulate fat differently," Schneller says. "Lard pigs have a thick multilayer of fat, whereas the bacon breeds have more marbling and a richer, more rounded pork taste."

Pork princes

Portland, Ore.'s, Prince of Pork, fittingly crowned on March 1, 2009, National Pig Day, is Julliard-trained pianist turned chef Vitaly Paley, who, with his wife Kimberly, owns and operates Paley's Place, recognized by *Gourmet* in 2006 as one of America's Top 50 Restaurants. Paley moved to Portland in 1995 after stints

The menu that won Anthony Hubbard his Prince of Pork title in Seattle included bourbon/bacon ice cream in a fried bacon cone.



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in the kitchens of Chanterelle and Union Square Cafe in New York. He gets his pigs from small producers in the Portland area, and is more concerned about feed and handling than breed. He says he regularly works with a hazelnut farmer who raises pigs to eat the hazelnut shells as part of a recycling program. "She calls me, and says, 'Take this thing off my hands.'"

"Recently," he continues, "that thing was a black pig, and it was gorgeous, glistening with fat and marbled like a piece of great beef. We took a leg and made a prosciutto out of it. Fourteen months later, I thought I was eating Ibérico."

For the event, however, the Cochon organizers couldn't come up with five different breeds of locally raised pigs at the correct weight, so Paley got what he calls a "mutt." But out of it, he made a winning menu of *testarosa* (rolled head sous-vide) and a five-day cedar-smoked prosciutto; consommé royale garnished with bacon and truffle custard, cured ham and chervil; crispy black pudding and bacon hollandaise; pig in a sausage blanket (pork loin wrapped in bacon, then in sausage and then in caul fat) served with a hock trotter; and apple and



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onion stew topped with a salad of crispy cider syrup, glazed pork skins, apples and rocket, finished with elderflower jus.

Seattle's Prince of Pork is Anthony Hubbard, executive chef for Chow Foods, a consortium of six neighborhood restaurants in the city. They source all their beef, pork and poultry locally, and dairy products are from local farms, as well.

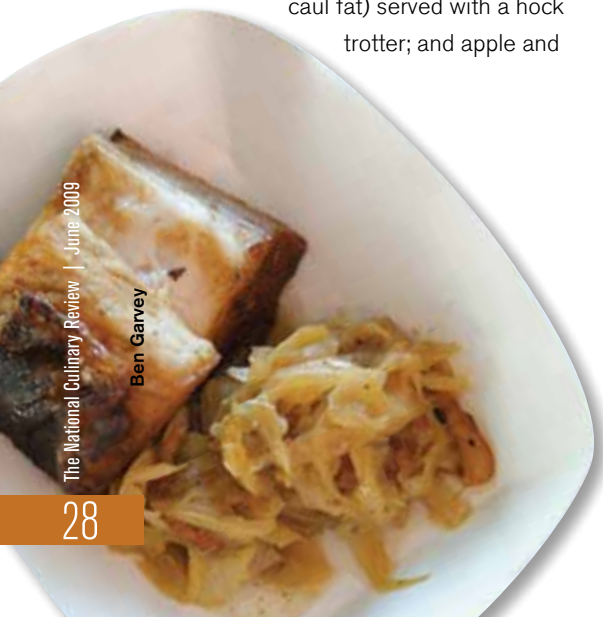
"The pig, from Craig and Amy Good's farm [Good Farm, Olsburg, Kan.], was delivered to one of our restaurants, eviscerated and cleaned, but heart, liver and head left intact," Hubbard says. "We had an informal recipe contest, but it was when

Anthony Hubbard shows his expertise with pork: center, pork belly consommé with brain mousse; right, terrine de tête; and back, pork maki roll.

we started breaking it down and seeing the properties of each part of the animal that we got our inspiration."

His winning menu included a chilled pork belly consommé with brain mousse, heart and liver skewers with ras el hanout and cucumber/celeriac salad; terrine de tête, a raw-milk-braised pork leg with dolce Gorgonzola mousse; hard-cider-braised pork belly with Guinness molasses and choucroute; pork maki roll with smoked pork tenderloin, rillettes, braised pork belly fat and roasted pork shank meat all rolled up sushi style; and bourbon/bacon ice cream in a fried bacon cone.

Hard-cider-braised pork belly with Guinness molasses and choucroute was part of Anthony Hubbard's Cochon 555 menu.



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Mangalitsa—the next breed

By far the most unique breed, and the one that Schneller predicts will be “the next Berkshire in popularity,” is the Mangalitsa, an incredibly fatty, red-meat, curly haired breed native to the former Austro-Hungarian empire, and, until recently, on the edge of extinction. Today, Hungarian animal geneticist Peter Toth is reviving the stock and overseeing production in Emod Istvánmajor, Hungary. These are expensive pigs, almost double the cost of other breeds. Optimally slaughtered at 300 pounds rather than the usual 175-200 pounds, the feed costs are greater and the carcass has twice as much fat as it has meat. In addition, Mangalitsas give birth to only half the number of piglets of more commonly raised breeds. Nevertheless, demand is outstripping supply, with practically every European-raised pig finished and sold as Jamón Mangalica, rivaling pata negra hams.

Three years ago, Auburn, Wash.-based Wooly Pigs started breeding Mangalitsas from 25 sows and boars brought from Europe. Further imports have been restricted, but Wooly Pigs is beginning to sell neutered piglets to farmers, including Michael Clampffer, who participated in New York Cochon 555. Clampffer, a CIA graduate, works as a personal chef, but also manages his employer’s Mosefund Farm in Branchville, N.J. He traveled to Hungary, and spent a week seeing, eating and learning all about the breed.

“The meat on these pigs taste more like steak than pork,” says Clampffer, “and the

fat quality is unique. The thing about them is that they are slow in every way—you grow them slow, and you cook them slow.

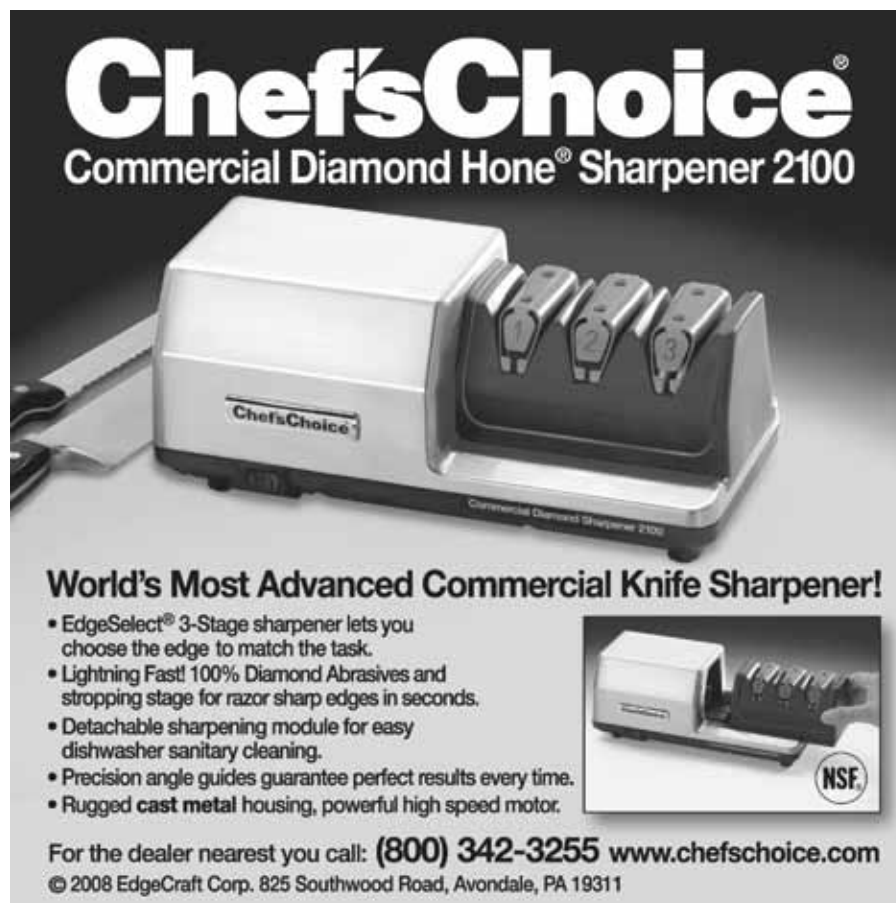
“The closest breed to them is the Ossabaw, but the Ossabaws don’t grow as large, and they can be wild and mean. These Mangalitsas, on the other hand, are docile and happy. They are just nice animals. At one of the farms I visited in Hungary, the pigs knew the farmer and the farmer knew them. Many of the European farmers believe that the more personal contact between farmer and pig, the better the intramuscular fat.”

Clampffer’s menu included a dirty pig martini with a fat “olive”; Mangalitsa consommé with dumplings made from the

meat of the head and feet; roasted loin stuffed with homemade sausage; tamales made with slow-roasted leg, lard and stock; beer-braised belly; whipped lard with liver pâté; and a heart-and-liver bread pudding.

At present, few restaurants are serving Mangalitsa, but it can be found on the menu at The French Laundry, Yountville, Calif., and The Herbfarm, Woodinville, Wash. Recently, April Bloomfield at New York’s The Spotted Pig served the belly and trotters with Agen prunes. By 9:30 p.m., it had sold out.

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



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