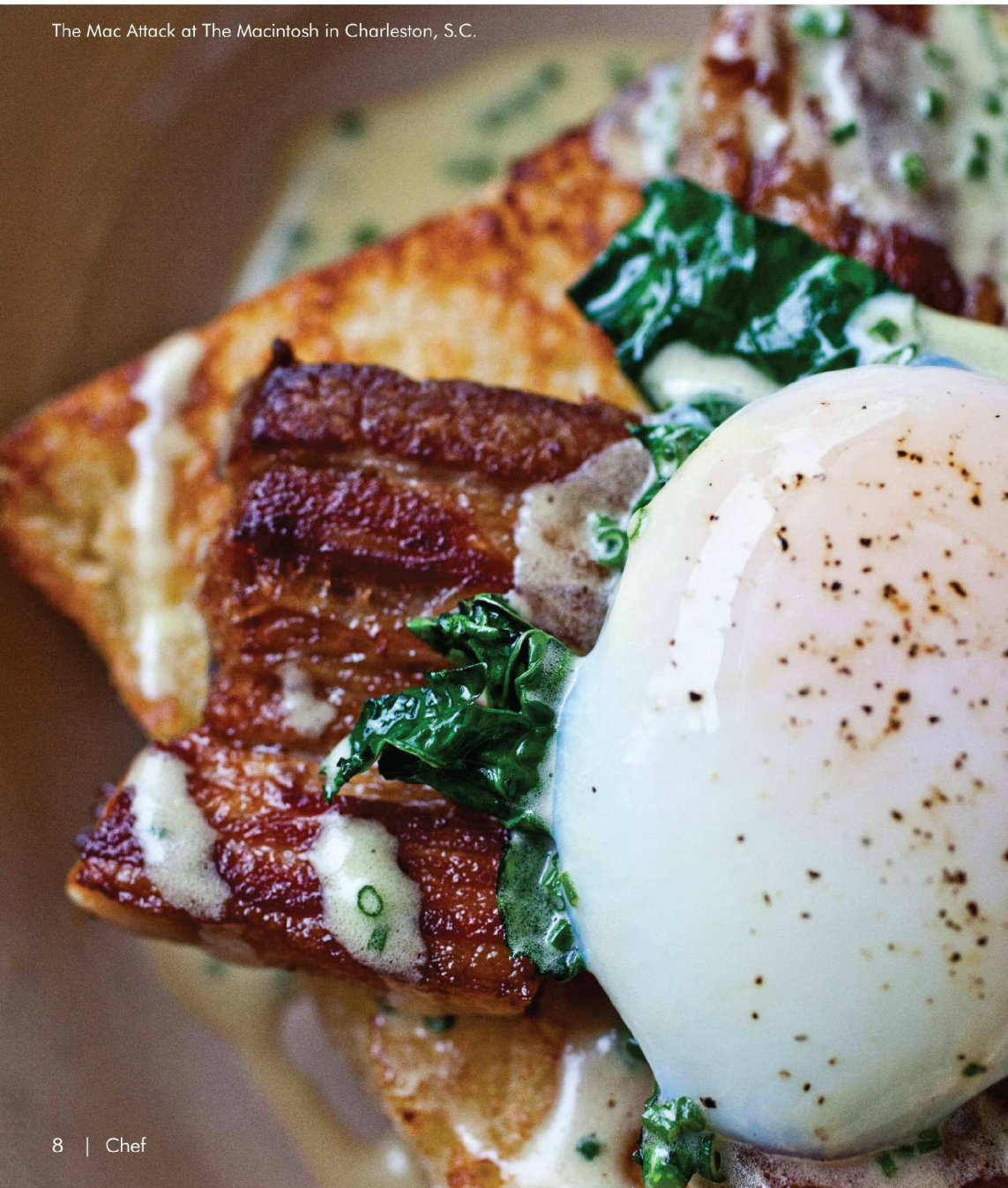


PIG OUT

The Mac Attack at The Macintosh in Charleston, S.C.



Utilizing every cut of the classic meat across the modern menu

By Megan O'Neill & Sam Ujvary

The humble hog has a following, and the proliferation of the pig doesn't play favorites. Chefs are utilizing every piece of this animal for roasts, ribs, chops, and more, approaching the swine with more veneration than ever before. Its place among cultures of the world is never understated, and whether you're south of the Mason Dixon Line, or in the heart of East Asia, the incorporation of pork across the menu is celebrated.

With a surge of popularity among consumers, bacon—that adored piece of cured and smoked pork—is challenging chefs to stray from the fad approach—bacon lip balm exists!—and embrace its versatility in a more reverent fashion. Showing no signs of conceding, this cut of swine is not an of-the-moment fascination, it's become a certifiable alteration of the way Americans eat. According to a report by the NPD Group, U.S. foodservice consumers ate some 1.1 billion servings of bacon in the year ending in April 2014. That's a 6-percent increase from the previous year. The escalation of consumption has been going on for some time now, and many chefs are praising the transition

chefmagazine.com

from craze to appreciation.

“All the sudden we were seeing the world legitimize something that, heretofore, they’d eschewed to a certain degree for its unhealthiness,” says Chef John Currence of Oxford, Miss. City Grocery Restaurant Group. “There was this weird sort of bacchanalian response. ‘Oh, David Chang started buying Allen Benton’s ham and bacon,’ and all of the sudden the world saw it legitimized. America took it on the Disney rollercoaster ride for a few years, but I think now it’s being left alone as far as sensationalizing it goes.” Chef Currence knows it’s all about the judicious use of bacon.

American consumption, sizzling to an all-time high, is driven no doubt by both the innovation of bacon menu items and the popularity of in-house curing and smoking by restaurants. The house-cured Tabasco Brown Sugar Bacon at Chef Currence’s Big Bad Breakfast, an Oxford, Miss. breakfast hotspot, uses brown sugar and the residual mash from Tabasco’s pepper straining in its curing process. With a smokehouse on the premises (smoking 600 pounds per week), and a second location in Birmingham, Big Bad Breakfast is expanding with their own slaughterhouse and production facility in north Alabama, as well as a consortium of heritage-breed pig farmers supplying them.

At The Macintosh in Charleston, S.C., they’re practicing a lengthy in-house curing process as well. There, pork belly is cured in a mixture of salt, black pepper, red pepper flakes and brown sugar for seven days, and depending on how big the belly is, cold smoked for up to four hours at a time for a few days. Then it’s hung in the charcuterie room

for about two weeks to enhance some of the “charcuterie funkiness that comes with the bacon,” says The Macintosh’s Chef de Cuisine, Jacob Huder.

He’s utilizing every bit of the whole pigs that come through the door. In their tomato pie, a traditional Southern tomato and cheddar dish, bacon bits line the bread crust. The beauty is in its versatility. Before its embrace, bacon was either relegated to the breakfast plate or intended simply as a seasoning meat—think beans, peas, and stews.

Bacon fat is a commodity at The Macintosh as well, and they’re using it in vinaigrettes, in drinks at the bar, in aioli sauces, you name it. Think of the piece of pork as a canvas, the possibilities dependent on the artist’s touch.

There is an appreciative bacon audience at The Macintosh—they offer a Bacon Happy Hour Monday through Friday—and with an executive chef by the name Jeremiah Bacon, would you assume otherwise? “I think that customers are starting to accept eating pork—the whole pork—not just the pork chop, or bacon with eggs,” says Chef Huder. “They’re understanding that it’s a great flavor profile that brings saltiness to the table.”

This understanding, along with the scalability, economics and relatability of the product transforms bacon from a craze that’s sprinkled on a donut, to a way of eating. The salty, smoky strip of hog isn’t losing its appeal. At Baconfest Chicago, Chef James O’Donnell of Michael Jordan’s Steakhouse served up a clams casino broth with caramelized bacon, Calabrian chilies and bacon fat bread crumbs. The festival put the multidimensional piece of pork on a pedestal, showing its kitschy and universal qualities by



challenging chefs to expose the dynamic flavors of the meat in a simple, bite-size form. Chef Jesse De Guzman of Sunda dished out an applewood-smoked bacon ensaymada, a light Filipino style brioche with adobo bacon, cheese and creamed sweet butter.

And all though all eyes are on the swine-type, varieties like duck, turkey and beef bacon have all seen growth. At The Macintosh, Chef Huder makes the Mac Attack, a phenomenal brunch specialty, to mimic the texture and taste of bacon. The Mac Attack features a bone marrow bread pudding

baked over a brioche, topped with a poached egg and, the star of the show, a chunk of pork belly that’s condensed in an immersion circulator over night and deep fried to mimic the crispiness of bacon. Sure the rich nugget of pork belly hasn’t been smoked, but it’s mimicking the saltiness of bacon and the sweetness of the fat.

Peppered, thick cut, thin cut, applewood smoked, cherrywood smoked, the sheer selection of bacon has lent a hand to its popularity in the market.

Pork is the most frequently eaten meat in the world. People

An advertisement for Sodir EQUIPEX infrared cooktops. The top half features a photograph of a chef's plate with a roasted pork shoulder, garnished with green vegetables and a sauce. Below the photo are three different models of the cooktop. The text reads: "THE PERFECT WAY TO FINISH OR BROIL WITH PRECISION CONTROL". Below that, it says "A CHEF'S FAVORITE TOOL" and lists features: "Super heat your plate - finish delicious and delicate foods", "Infinitely adjustable moveable top offers maximum flexibility", "Chef-friendly open sides and pull-out bottom shelf", and "Ideal for melting, browning, glazing and cooking". It also lists "Appetizers, entrees and desserts". Below that, it says "ALWAYS READY FOR ACTION" and lists features: "Quartz infrared heat: up to 535 F on work surface", "Vitre-ceramic infrared heat: up to 1060 F on work surface", "5 different models: 24" and 32" wide", and "Table top, wall or range mounted". At the bottom, it says "FOR MORE INFORMATION, CALL 800.649.7885 OR VISIT EQUIPEX.COM" and "Copyright © 2013 Equipex, Inc. All rights reserved." The Sodir logo and EQUIPEX logo are also present.

PIG OUT

devour it. Websites are devoted to sharing everything you can do with it. Across the globe, all parts of the pig are being prepared in so many ways, just as they have been for centuries. After years of utilizing every part of the pig from snout to hoof, chefs have yet to maximize the ways in which this salty slice of heaven is prepared.

More than 10 years ago, pork accounted for 38 percent of worldwide meat production. Since then, its popularity has consistently risen thanks to the pig's versatility and chefs' willingness to experiment. Around the world, it's incorporated into a number of signature dishes specific to the flavors of those regions. In Mexico, carnitas and al pastor are frequently used. Cuisine from Germany and bordering countries consists of mostly pork, and most often in sausage form (wurst). Although pork is so often used across cultures, the signature dishes greatly differ in taste. And over centuries, each region has found its preferred style, continuing to prepare it based on tradition. In a Pork Food-service trend report, the modern incorporation of pork into classic dishes was a large topic of discussion. "This isn't about reinvention," the article says. "Chefs are remaining true to the original, without compromising their modern sensibility of smart preparation and quality, seasonal ingredients."

Traditional wiener schnitzel is made with veal, but restaurants are finding new ways to incorporate the pig. Wirtshaus in Los Angeles offers a pork cutlet, finished with a garlic cream sauce and fried egg. The same way they change out beef for pork, Charley G's in Lafayette, La., has developed a Surf and Turf dish with pork belly as the turf,

pairing nicely with an Abita barbecue shrimp (the surf). The wonderful thing about pork—aside from the multitude of cuts available for consumption—is that no matter where you're from or where you travel, there's so often a style of pork you've never sampled.


Tony Scruggs, executive chef of Old Crow Smokehouse in Chicago, has brought his own creativity to their heavily pork-based menu. Among the pulled pork, baby back ribs and pork chops, lie some hidden gems. Their Grilled Barbecue Wrap is made with pulled pork, bacon, a house Worcestershire cheese sauce, beer-BBQ sauce and french fried onions, all wrapped in a flour tortilla. Often referred to as Professor Piggy, Chef Scruggs likes to see how creative he can get with the hog. For instance, Old Crow's Pulled Pork Egg Rolls bring a piece of Eastern culture to the Midwest. "I hate getting rid of day-old coleslaw when there is nothing wrong with it," he says. "I found a solution by mixing our pulled pork with coleslaw to make a filling for these egg rolls."

Pork is a protein that can take on so many different flavors, and that's something Chef O'Donnell remembers when he wants to be audacious in his pork endeavors. "Running restaurants that focus on beef, I know pork will never be the star," he says. He has, however, used that to his advantage. "It gives some flexibility to be more adventurous on pork dishes." He pairs a pork chop with caramelized peaches, prosciutto, arugula and saba.

According to Chef Scruggs, pork, in most places, is more plentiful and cheaper in the fall when farmers don't favor keeping livestock around for winter. In other places, like Cincinnati, Ohio, how-

ever, pork dishes remain steadily ordered throughout the year. "In Porkopolis, pork is in season all the time," says Jackson Rouse, executive chef of The Rookwood in Cincinnati's Mt. Adams neighborhood. Cincinnati was, at one time, the leading hog-packing city in the country. Having been settled by a heavy population of Germans when it was founded, the city takes their swine pretty seriously. A 20-year veteran chef, Rouse serves a fully loaded Pork Belly sandwich at his restaurant. It consists of bacon mayo, crispy pork belly, pickled onions, kale, and is finished with a sunny side

up egg. Chefs everywhere are trying new dishes using pork. Some are classic with a twist, and others are completely outside the box.

The pig was one of the first animals to be domesticated for livestock. It's a descendent of the wild boar. And it's downright delicious. It's the guest of honor at certain social gatherings (pig roasts) and, as history has shown, pork is one of the most versatile meats being utilized today. While sticking with classic dishes that have stood the test of time can prove successful, don't be afraid to shake things up a bit. 

JAMAICAN PORK ROAST WITH CARAMELIZED ONION AND FRUIT

Recipe and image provided by the National Onion Association

- 2 medium onions
- 1/3 C. apricot jam
- 1 T. soy sauce
- 1 T. lime juice
- 1 large or 2 small tenderloins, (1 1/4 to 1 1/2 pounds)
- 1 C. mango, papaya, or peach cut into large pieces
- 1/4 C. chopped fresh cilantro
- Lime wedges

Preparation: Peel and trim the onions. Cut crosswise into 1/2-inch thick rings. Combine the apricot jam, soy sauce and lime juice to make a glaze. Grill the onion slices and pork tenderloin over medium heat, and after they've been on the grill for 10 minutes, brush them with the glaze and turn as needed for even cooking. Cook the pork until internal temperature reaches 160 degrees. Transfer the grilled onions to a bowl, separating them into rings. Add the fruit and cilantro, slice the pork, and serve with the onion and fruit mixture, squeezing lime juice over all.

