

{FOOD}

21st-Century Sausage

Found around the globe and throughout much of mankind's history, sausages are a culinary staple that modern chefs are elevating to artisanal masterworks. | By Jeanette Hurt



THE CALIFORNIA CULINARY ACADEMY TAUGHT CHEF RYAN Hardy to follow recipes and use precise measurements, especially when making sausages and charcuterie. All that went out the window when Hardy spent the day in famed Italian butcher Dario Cecchini's Panzano shop.

"Dario would take these giant bowls of meat and unlabelled jars of seasonings, and he'd throw in a handful of this or two sprigs of that. Then he'd season it again, taste it raw and send the mixture off," Hardy explains. "There were no recipes, no exact percentages. It was extraordinary. Dario taught me not to be afraid, that to make good sausages, seasoning is all in the eye—and that it's OK to drink red wine at 10 o'clock in the morning."

Though Hardy doesn't regularly consume wine before noon, he has become a serious sausage-maker, and his handcrafted sausages, including the lamb, fennel and grappa sausage inspired by Cecchini, will be on the menu of his new restaurant, which will open in New York City late this year. "The greatest food traditions in the world are peasant traditions that have been elevated, and that includes sausage-making," Hardy says.

Rudimentary sausage-making dates back to as early as 9000 BC. Wherever animals were domesticated, sausage-making took place. Homer wrote about sausage-

making in the *Odyssey*, and the earliest mural of the process was painted in the Han dynasty in China (206 BC to AD 220). These early sausages were simple creations: leftover bits of meat, salt and local spices combined in a container of sorts to preserve them. But those humble meat pies have evolved into sophisticated cultural icons. Every culture that consumes meat has put its own culinary signature on sausages, from German bratwurst to Thai rice sausages, and today's chefs and butchers are elevating this centuries-old tradition.

Chef Benito Plasschaert is one such chef. Plasschaert is a third-generation Belgian butcher who took his award-winning culinary skills across the globe to teach chefs how to make more than 100 different kinds of sausages. Today, he divides his time between Thailand and Portugal (where he runs a small cooking school), and his sausage recipes are used in venues such as Four Seasons Hotel Mumbai and Four Seasons Resort Maldives at Landaa Giraavaru.

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A Shared Tradition

After learning from famed Italian butcher Dario Cecchini, Chef Ryan Hardy inspects handcrafted sausage in the curing room.

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“A good sausage, like most things in life, is about great ingredients. It’s about traditional skills, love, care and attention.” –STEPHEN “SAUSAGE KING” PLUME

each piece is the same colour and size,” Plasschaert says. “The same is true with factory-made sausages. If you see sausages of different sizes, you know it’s homemade.”

Plasschaert’s favourite Asian sausage hails from the northern provinces of Thailand. The Isaan sausage is made of 60 percent rice, 30 percent pork and 10 percent herbs. “It’s about the size of a golf ball, and it contains herbs, including parsley. It has an amazing taste,” he says.

Sausages are so entrenched in German culture that they’re featured in several folk sayings, including “*Jemanden die wurst vor der nase halten*,” or “to hold a sausage in front of someone’s nose,” meaning to tempt someone, and “*Es ist mir wurst*,” or “It’s sausage to me,” meaning “It’s all the same to me.”

That’s not surprising for a country where more than 1,500 different kinds of sausages are made. “The most difficult thing for a sausage lover visiting Germany will be to decide what to eat and what to miss,” says Gero Jentsch, spokesman for the German Butchers Association. “We tried to boil down the number of sausages that were absolutely essential, and we ended up with 120.”

The most essential tasting would be a local variation of bratwurst. The two most famous are the *Thüringer rostbratwurst* from Thuringia and the *Nürnberger rostbratwurst* from Nürnberg. “The best place to try any kind of sausage would be the local craft butcher shop, or a good restaurant to which the local butcher delivers,” Jentsch says. And with 26,000 local butchers in Germany, it should be easy to find one.

Stephen Plume has spent the past decade in a quest to find a perfect sausage, or in this case, a “banger.” This English gent, nicknamed the “Sausage King,” is touring the U.K., visiting traditional sausage-makers and farmers, and writes about his exploits on www.sausagefans.co.uk/sausage-king-adventures. Though Plume hasn’t yet discovered the ultimate British banger (a sausage so named in World War II because the quantity of water in sausages during rationing made them “bang” when you fried them), he has compiled a list of 20

Sausage Sampler

Chef and butcher Benito Plasschaert recommends these sausages to taste while you’re travelling.



♦ DRIED OR SALAMI-STYLE

Abruzzese: spicy Italian sausage made from pork cheeks

Boulogne Salami: Belgian horse-meat specialty

Jésus de Lyon: dried French pork sausage made with red wine

Lomo Embuchado: dried Spanish sausage from the famed Ibérico pigs

Salchichón Ibérico: cured Spanish sausage from meat of Ibérico pigs

♦ FRESH OR UNCURED

Boudin Blanc de Liège: Belgian pork sausage made with milk and herbs

Debrecziner: small, delicately smoked sausage of pork and beef in Austria and southern Germany

Isaan: spicy Thai sausage made with rice, herbs and fish sauce

Morcela de Pão: Portuguese sausage made of breadcrumbs, with a touch of pork to bind

Morcilla de Burgos: Spanish blood sausage, made in Burgos with rice

Paardenlookworst: Belgian sausage with horse meat and garlic

best sausages, including those made by Croots Farm Shop in Duffield and the Bristol Sausage Shop. “A good sausage, like most things in life, is about great ingredients,” he says. “It’s about traditional skills, love, care and attention.”

Ségué Lepage, chef and owner of Le Comptoir Charcuteries et Vins wine bar in Montreal, agrees with Plume’s assessment. Every Tuesday morning, Lepage and his staff butcher drive half-pigs from a specialty farm in Quebec to make sausages. “I only use the perfect meat, and it’s a lot more work, but it’s better,” he says.

Going the whole hog got James Beard-nominated chef Craig Deihl into sausage-making. “I bought a whole pig, and from that point, not only did I buy the whole pig, but I had to make use of the whole pig,” says Deihl, of Cypress restaurant in Charleston, South Carolina.

The fresh sausages he made with leftover pork bits evolved into a well-known charcuterie and sausage menu, including a sort of CSA (community supported agriculture) called Artisan Meat Share, in which local gourmets receive a share of sausages and charcuterie. He makes everything from *lop cheong*, a sweet Chinese sausage, to bratwurst. Lately, one of the most popular items is a spreadable Italian salami made with a Korean pepper blend called *nduja*.

Deihl is always developing new recipes. “We have our signature favourites, but we always want to make new sausages from around the world,” he says. And no matter where you travel across the globe, if you look for an artisan butcher or chef, you’ll no doubt encounter some remarkable sausages. **AS**

Jeanette Hurt is an award-winning writer who specialises in travel, wine and food

(www.jeanettehurt.com). Her latest book, *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Sausage Making*, was published earlier this year.

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