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November • December 2008

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A swine
romance



**BELLY UP TO bacon cocktails
reinventing THE BLT
DISCOVERING bacon's sweet side
sauces rendered TO PERFECTION**

BACON CUTS BACK

LEANER CUTS AND MEATS OFFER LIGHTER ALTERNATIVES

by Chandra Ram

Serve a fatty, thick-cut piece of pork belly, and you'll likely see chunks of fat left on the plate as diners try to get to the meat. Sure, much of the magic of bacon comes from its fatty richness, but chefs are working with back bacon and even leaner turkey bacon for flavor without the fat.

"Wherever I am defines how I cook and what I cook," declares Chef Paul Lynch of St. Paul, Minn.'s Firelake Grill. It fits, then, that his Minnesota back bacon is a stand-out on his menus from brunch to dinner. A meat better known as Canadian bacon, Lynch's Minnesota back bacon is cut

from locally-raised Duroc hogs, per Lynch's specifications.

"The original white meat was a cross breed between Berkshire and Duroc. Duroc hogs have longer loins, with nice marbling," he says. "Their loin size allows for better portioning. They are the perfect hog for this application."

Lynch cures the meat for four days in a sweet cure with bay leaves, spices and curing salt, then smokes it in-house.

"We try to match the flavor of the wood with the flavor of the meat, like you would [approach] pairing wine," he says. "We choose an apple- and maplewood blend, because it works well with pork.

We air-dry the meat for one day, so the smoke can penetrate the meat, and you get that wonderful smoke ring that tells you that you have a real barbecued item."

The resulting rich, sweet, smoky meat is a far cry from the rubbery slices of Canadian bacon most people are familiar with, and a mainstay of Lynch's brunch menu, where it's a popular component paired with eggs (\$9.50, recipe, plateonline.com). "We were so successful with the flavors that we use it in place of ham," Lynch notes. "It has a much more interesting flavor and a deep pork flavor."

Early retail versions of turkey bacon likely turned off as many people as did poor renditions of Canadian bacon, but Chef de Cuisine Christian Sieck of Enotria Restaurant & Wine Bar in Sacramento, Calif., has taken turkey bacon back to the kitchen to create a flavorful dish that defies conventional wisdom on turkey bacon. He wraps turkey medallions with turkey bacon and marinates them in apple cider and bourbon, then serves them with bourbon sauce (recipe, p. 101).

"It's a surprise for people who think of turkey as a dry meat you have on Thanksgiving, not a rich, smoky bacon," says Sieck of the dish. "It's lighter, and tastes just as indulgent as a steak or traditional bacon."

Lynch agrees, noting that flavor can be found in somewhat unexpected cuts of meat. "There's enough marbling for flavor," he says. "You need fat; you just don't need a lot of it."

Chandra Ram is the editor of *Plate*.

* For recipes from this article and more, visit plateonline.com.



Bacon-wrapped turkey medallions, Chef de Cuisine Christian Sieck, Enotria Restaurant & Wine Bar, Sacramento, Calif., RECIPE, p. 101.