

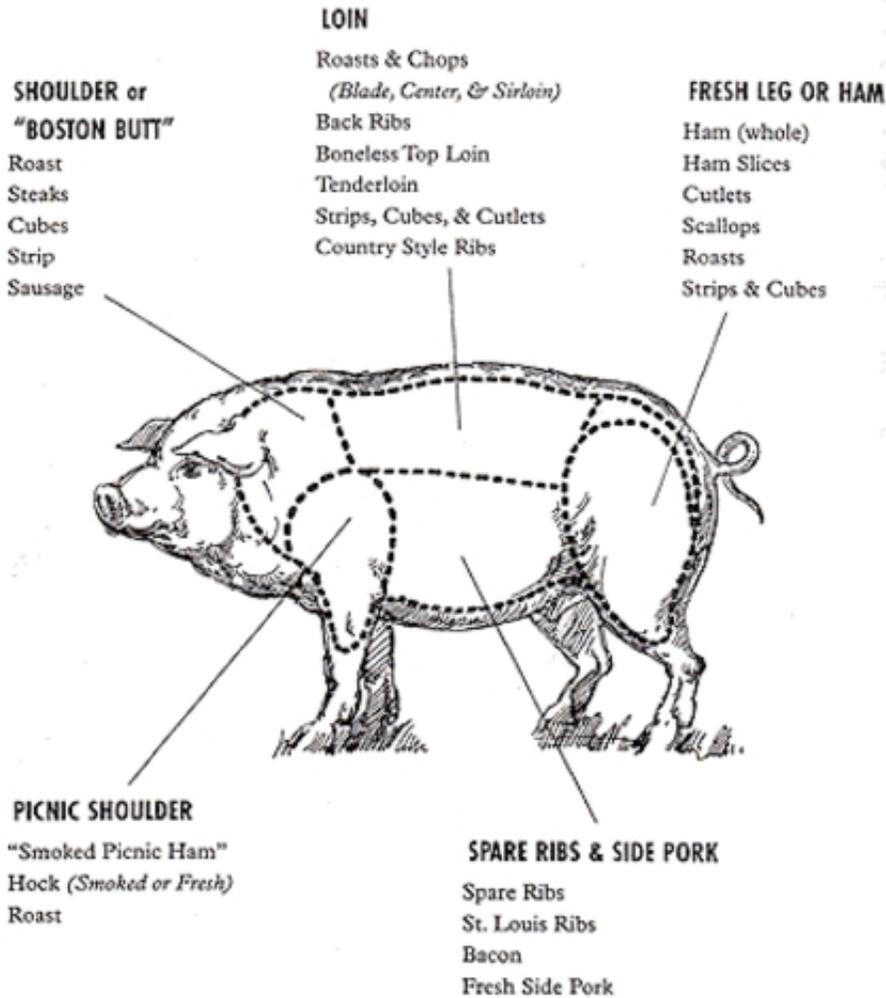


## Hog wild: Portland's top pork dishes

Published: Thursday, October 22, 2009, 4:30 PM Updated: Tuesday, October 27, 2009, 2:56 PM



**Special to The Oregonian**



Contrary to the late-1980s marketing slogan, pork isn't really "the other white meat."

That was merely a misguided, health-inspired effort to equate the divinely diverse palette of pig products to the vastly less versatile chicken. The campaign was an insult to hogs everywhere and those who love them.

The truth is that pork has recently captured the enthusiastic attention of restaurateurs, chefs and the dining public

because of its amazing versatility and fantastic taste. Here in the Willamette Valley, artisan ranchers including Sweet Briar Farms and Tails & Trotters feed a steady supply of choice cuts to provision the porcine bandwagon. And hungry diners can't seem to get enough.

For the pork-curious and the already converted, the following selective list of dishes we've scouted exemplifies the pleasures of the pre-eminent pink meat. Now get out there and pig out!

-- **Michael C. Zusman**, Special to The Oregonian

### **Appetizers**

**Pozole at La Bonita:** When the weather turns cool, the soup gene fires up, and nothing satisfies the craving like a bowl of pozole, the Mexican staple pork-and-hominy soup. Here they serve pozole rojo, which begins with pork broth revved up with a sweet-hot guajillo chile infusion. Chunks of tender pork shoulder are added along with the hominy (dried corn kernels) that have been soaked, leaving them plump, soft, chewy and filling. The hearty dish gets a DIY boost, as each bowl comes with a dish of lime, chopped onion and cilantro. Add to taste and think warm thoughts. \$5.95 small/\$7.95 large (2839 N.E. Alberta St., 503-281-3662)

**Pigstrami at Belly Timber:** Who doesn't love pastrami -- beef brisket that's all smoky, spicy, salty and fatty? Now, drop the dish into overdrive by subbing pig for cow. Sure, it's even richer than the original, but you don't have to eat it every day. Plus, the portion and price are small, so you can compensate for your understandable indiscretion with a salad -- or multiply the sin by ordering one of chef David Siegel's other pork specialties. \$4 (3257 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., 503-235-3277, [www.bellytimberrestaurant.com](http://www.bellytimberrestaurant.com))

**Mabo-dofu at Biwa:** "Red miso bolognese" is what one of the Biwa cooks calls this hearty dish, which mingles Chinese and Japanese traditions. Adapted from classic Szechuan cooking, chunks of firm tofu combine with ground pork, miso paste and bamboo shoot along with ginger for a sweet-piquant bite and chile oil for a blast of heat. It's not as searing as some Chinese versions, but then again, you will still be able to taste the rest of your meal, and that's a good thing at Biwa, an izakaya (Japanese tavern) favorite. \$8 (215 S.E. Ninth Ave., 503-239-8830, [www.biwarestaurant.com](http://www.biwarestaurant.com))



Fredrick Joe/The OregonianPork cheeks at Beaker & Flask**Pork cheeks at**

**Beaker & Flask:** Well-exercised from a life of chewing, porcine facial muscles are lean, but risk fibrous inedibility in the wrong hands. Not a problem at this creative cocktail bar and ambitious food emporium, where former Paley's Place sous-chef Ben Bettinger rules the sty, er, stove. Long-braised and fall-apart-tender chunks of cheek swing with sweet and hot braised red chiles, onion, tomato and perky pieces of pickled octopus. It's all bound with garlicky aioli and served atop a thick slice of grilled Grand Central Baking bread. Mouth party! \$9 (720 S.E. Washington St., 503-235-8180, [www.beakerandflask.com](http://www.beakerandflask.com))

**Meat Pie at Ned Ludd:** Rustic dishes hot from the wood-fired oven are the specialty at this restaurant, which celebrates its namesake's futile resistance to the onslaught of the Industrial Revolution. Nothing says rustic quite like the plump meat pies. The shell is made from the classic French butter-rich tart pastry called *pâte brisée*. The filling is a mash-up of multiple chopped meats, always including a prominent proportion of pork, sautéed in pork fat and cooked down with white wine, cream and herbs. A cult favorite among latter-day Luddites. \$9 (3925 N.E. MLK Jr. Blvd., 503-288-6900, [www.nedluddpdx.com](http://www.nedluddpdx.com))

## Entrees

**Kha muu thawt at Ping:** From the Flintstones direct to your table, a massive half-foreleg (or "knuckle") arrives on a platter as all heads in the room snap around to view your prize. Deep-fried with skin on, the meat is tender and juicy, pairing exquisitely with the side of chile-citrus sauce. You may not get that far, though, because this dish serves two easily, and it's hard to get past all the crackly skin deeply flavored with a five-spice-infused marinade. \$24 (102 N.W. Fourth Ave., 503-229-7464, [www.pingpdx.com](http://www.pingpdx.com))

**Pork chop at Laurelhurst Market:** They're killing it at this indie-modern steakhouse and butcher market. One reason is the monster-sized, double-cut pork chop from Tails & Trotters, the local pork specialist that finishes their piggies on a happy go-bye-bye diet of hazelnuts. Unlike typical industrial-grade pork, the meat from these porkers is well-marbled with flavor-giving fat. So, after the 18-ounce chop at Laurelhurst Market is brined, smoked and grilled, you get a piece of meat that's moist and marvelous, not desiccated and disgusting. Plus, no overdressed servers or idiotic "meet your meat" shtick here. \$22 (3155 E. Burnside St., 503-206-3097, [www.laurelhurstmarket.com](http://www.laurelhurstmarket.com))

**Pork belly ragu at Lincoln:** Pasta and pork is the perfect pairing of richness with a humble al dente backdrop. Plus, for the lean-and-mean set, the belly for the sauce is ground and well-rendered before it's reduced with white wine, pork stock, tomato paste and a little sage. Pasta support rotates between flat, 3/4-inch-wide, egg-rich tagliette noodles and semolina-based cavatelli, which look like -- but fortunately do not taste like -- caterpillars. Topped with a little grated pecorino Romano cheese, this dish makes for a pleasing and filling plate. \$17 (3808 N. Williams Ave., No. 127, 503-288-6200, [www.lincolnpdx.com](http://www.lincolnpdx.com))

**Pork shoulder at MetroVino:** On the Gilligan's Island scale, bacon may be the Ginger of the pork world, but a good chunk of the pig's shoulder is the wholesome and lovely Mary Ann. As prepared by chef Gregory Denton, this cut is slow-roasted and served fork-tender with an autumn garniture of green beans, fingerling potatoes and

chanterelle mushrooms, all topped with an herbal chimichurri sauce. Denton is especially adept at the hearty dishes of the gray season, and this pork preparation has him at the top of his game. \$22 (1139 N.W. 11th Ave., 503-517-7778, [www.metrovinopdx.com](http://www.metrovinopdx.com))



Fredrick D. Joe/The Oregonian Adam Sappington, chef at The Country

Cat "**Whole Hog**" at **The Country Cat**: Adam Sappington may dress like a hardscrabble farmer in his signature blue coveralls. But his kitchen chops are among the tops in town. His "Whole Hog" dish, using Sweet Briar Farms pork, comes with a chop, too -- a brined one -- along with a pinwheel of pork belly, smoked shoulder meat, plus a bonus mystery croquette (actually, it's yummy head cheese). Accompanied by white corn grits and a seasonal vegetable, it's a formidable plate of chow, so good luck joining the Clean Plate Cub with this one. \$20 (7937 S.E. Stark St., 503-408-1414, [www.thecountrycat.net](http://www.thecountrycat.net))

### Everything else

**Sausage pizza at Apizza Scholls**: World-class pies fly out of the oven and into the hands of the throngs that begin lining up a half-hour before opening time. The draw: Apizza's attention to every detail, from crispy, char-kissed crust to terrific toppings. Order the sausage -- on its own or with anchovies for a twisted surf and turf -- and you get a half-pound of Carlton Farms pork shoulder that's been salt-cured overnight, then coarsely ground and mixed with lots of fennel seed, garlic and herbs and a healthy glug of Sambuca anise liqueur. Pizza perfection. \$20 (4741 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., 503-233-1286, [www.apizzascholls.com](http://www.apizzascholls.com))

**Pork ribs at Podnah's Pit Barbecue**: Make no mistake: pitmaster, proprietor and Lone Star State refugee Rodney Muirhead smokes some of the finest racks in town. His Texas-style barbecue is so tasty, it doesn't need to be slathered in a swamp of sauce. His meaty spare rib racks get a rub of brown sugar and chiles before heading to the

smoker out back for five hours. Like a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis, the ribs exit their sauna with a deep umber crust and the telltale pink ring that announces genuine Texas 'cue. The meat within is blissfully tender. The taste -- sweet, smoky, porky -- is nothing short of barbecue nirvana. \$10 quarter-rack, \$17 half, \$32 full (1469 N.E. Prescott St., 503-281-3700, [www.podnahspit.com](http://www.podnahspit.com))

**Apricot-Bacon Cornbread at Le Pigeon:** You just knew this eccentric, meat-centric Oregonian 2008 Restaurant of the Year would feature a pork dessert. And this sweetmeat may only be for the diehards: a standard cornbread recipe is enhanced with bacon fat, tart-sweet chunks of dried apricot and lots of browned, chewy bits of rendered Nueske's bacon. With a topping of more smoky bacon, a bit of honey and a scoop of homemade maple ice cream, the concoction manages a meet-and-greet with every tastebud on your tongue. \$7 (738 E. Burnside St., 503-546-9796, [www.lepigeon.com](http://www.lepigeon.com))

**Candied Bacon at Belly Timber:** I'm taking my young daughter trick-or-treating to Belly Timber this Halloween. She's going to score some of the amazing sweet and smoky strips of porcine perfection they sell without any superfluous sides, and I'm going to steal it from her goody bag after she's crashed, post-sugar rush. OK, now it's out there. Truly, what can you say to hickory-smoked, super-crispy bacon that's been cured in a combination of superfine sugar, a little salt and a sprinkle of herbs? If your answer is "more, please," this dish is for you. \$2 (3257 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., 503-235-3277, [www.bellytimberrestaurant.com](http://www.bellytimberrestaurant.com))

-- **Michael C. Zusman**, Special to The Oregonian

© 2010 OregonLive.com. All rights reserved.