

Charcutería is not just another in a slew of American books devoted to this ancient craft, it's the first to explore the Spanish tradition of curing meat and fish—a lovely, loving, fascinating, and, most all, *useful* book all lovers of the craft should be grateful for.

—MICHAEL RUHLMAN, AUTHOR OF *CHARCUTERIE* AND *SALUMI*

CHARCUTERÍA

The Soul of Spain

JEFFREY WEISS

FOREWORD BY JOSÉ ANDRÉS

PHOTOGRAPHS BY NATHAN RAWLINSON

ILLUSTRATIONS BY SERGIO MORA

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AN AGATE IMPRINT

CHICAGO



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First ebook edition 2014

ISBN-13: 978-1-57284-737-8

Weiss, Jeffrey

Charcuteria : the soul of Spain / Jeffrey Weiss.

pages cm

Text in English; some chapter headings and parts of table of contents, in Spanish.

Includes index.

Summary: "A guide to Spanish charcuteria, with recipes"-- Provided by publisher.

ISBN-13: 978-1-57284-152-9 (hardcover)

ISBN-10: 1-57284-152-4 (hardcover)

1. Cooking (Meat) 2. Cooking, Spanish. I. Title.

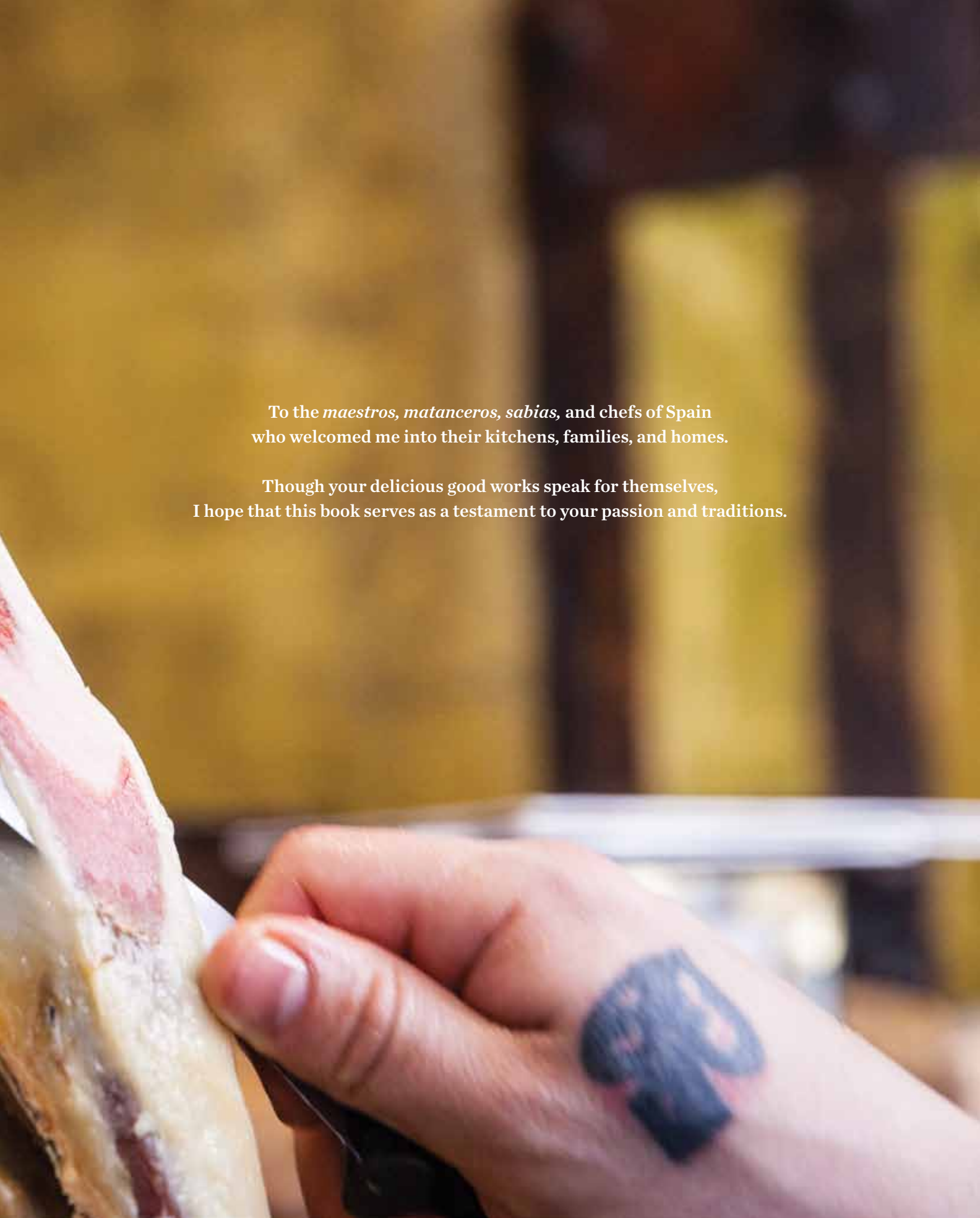
TX612.M4W45 2013

641.5946--dc23

2013018755

14 15 16 17

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To the *maestros, matanceros, sabias*, and chefs of Spain
who welcomed me into their kitchens, families, and homes.

Though your delicious good works speak for themselves,
I hope that this book serves as a testament to your passion and traditions.



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FOREWORD



GROWING UP IN Asturias, in the north of Spain, my life was flavored with *chorizo*. My favorite memories as a small boy were coming home to the rich smell of garbanzo stew, big bowls of warm chickpeas and *chorizo*. There was *chorizo a la sidra*, cooked with the apple cider famous in the region. And of course, there was always *fabada*, the most classic dish of Asturias. This hearty stew, made with buttery beans called *fabes*, is studded with *chorizo*, *morcilla* (blood sausage), and thick bacon. Then, when my family moved to Barcelona, most holidays were scented with the smell of *butifarra*, the Catalan fresh pork sausage, as it was grilled in the town squares. As an adult now, in America, I'm never far from a whole leg of the prized *jamón Ibérico de bellota*, Spain's most celebrated ham from the *pata negra* pig. Meat has real meaning for someone like me.

To most of the world, Spain looks like a single country, but it is really a fascinating mix of

people, languages, cultures, and food. Regional differences are many, and nowhere is this more obvious than when you look at our tradition of cured meats, *carnes y embutidos*. From each corner of the country to its heart, in Madrid, you'll find a huge variety of fresh sausage, cured sausage, hams, and so many other preserved cuts of meat. Many of them, however, rarely make it outside of the country. But this is beginning to change.

I could not be more proud to see how Spanish cuisine is honored and recognized throughout the world today. Spanish restaurants top nearly every list of the world's best, thanks to many of my friends, including Ferran and Albert Adrià, Juan Mari Arzak, and Joan and Jordi Roca. Spanish ingredients and dishes are becoming part of every day life. For nearly 25 years, I have been cooking the foods of my country and sharing the story of Spain here in my home of

America. In my restaurants in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Miami, diners are fascinated by the smoky, spicy, and sweet flavors of *embutidos*: *chistorra*, *chorizo*, *lomo*, *sobrasada*, *butifarra*, *jamón Serrano* and of course *jamón Ibérico*. Whether I'm guiding TV viewers, chefs, and culinary students through La Alberca, near Salamanca, to see the pigs of my friend Santiago Martin (whose Fermín *jamón Ibérico* was the first to legally come to the US), or taking friends like Stanley Feder of Simply Sausage through the Catalan countryside to taste traditional *butifarra* he makes for some of my restaurants, I love to see the amazement newcomers experience when learning the stories behind these flavors and traditions.

But the great story of preserving and curing in Spain has yet to be truly told, until now. *Charcutería* brings to life—with real heart, history and technique—an astonishing look at the legacy

of Spain's flavorful meats. More and more Americans today are enjoying superb cured meats. Some are imported, and many are made locally, following European traditions. Chefs across the country offer amazing displays of artisan-made or house-cured *charcuterie*. Even home cooks are learning the skills of the butcher and understanding how to use the whole animal. This book is special, and perfectly timed to introduce these stories of salt and smoke and Spain.

What you will find here in *Charcutería* is a love letter; it is filled with the passion and perseverance of a young man on a mission to discover the soul of Spain. Right out of a top university, with no formal training in Spanish cuisine but eager to learn and fascinated with Spain, Jeffrey Weiss came to cook with us at Jaleo, my tapas restaurant in downtown Washington, DC. We could tell right away that he had more than just a fascination with Spanish



cooking. It was a true calling for him. He was able to use his experience to win a spot in the Spanish government's amazing gastronomy training program, tasting and traveling across Spain. His time there—spent cooking, learning, eating, drinking—allowed him to open a window into the heart of Spanish culture; to become part of families and hear their stories; to watch masters at work; and to participate in the cycle of life on the farms and in the fields.

This book perfectly marries the necessary techniques of brining, salting, fermenting, and drying with the exceptional stories of Spain's particular animals, such as the *Ibérico* pig; special cuts of meat like *secreto*; and traditions of old-world dishes like tongue, tails, and salted bones. It connects the past to the present. And I know it will open up the door to new possibilities for what you can create at home.

—José Andrés



INTRODUCTION

**ON *CARMEN*,
PORK BLOOD,
AND *POLLA*
JOKES**

Understanding the Spanish gastronomy of today and how it continues to influence the American gastronomy of tomorrow



MADRID

MANOLO, A FAITHFUL friend and barkeep at our favorite dive bar for cooks, rasps in his cigarette smoke-laden Spanish baritone:

“Nunca has probado una morcilla como esta, Americano.”

Translation: “You have never tasted a *morcilla* like this one, American.”

His steady gaze dares me to disagree but, sadly, I realize he’s right. That’s all he wants to hear anyway.

Fiercely partisan culinary fightin’ words like these are typical in bars all around Madrid, often spoken over *cañas* of beer and plates of cured meats. In this instance, Manolo is talking about a *ración* of *morcilla achorizada*, a blood sausage from Jaén, that he’s just thrown in front of me like a gauntlet. This *morcilla*, unlike other blood

sausages from around the world, is a mixture of *chorizo masa* mixed with pig’s blood, cooked potatoes, rice, onions, and spices. The stuffed *morcilla* is then smoked and dry cured and the result is utterly delicious; it’s *sabroso* in a way that makes me angry you can’t find anything like it where I live, since it’s difficult to find *morcilla achorizada* outside Spain and completely impossible to find it in the United States.

“Thanks for rubbing it in, *cabrón*.”

I manage a sarcastic smile and stab the last slice with a toothpick. It’s one of the best *embudidos* I have ever tried—the intense smokiness of the *morcilla* is amazing—and my brain immediately starts rationalizing, with the calculating obsession of a heroin junkie getting helter-skelter for another hit, how I can sneak some of these wrinkled black delights back home to California without causing an international incident.



ANDALUCÍA

IN GRANADA THERE is a small, inconspicuous alleyway that houses one of the best *flamenco* clubs in Spain. You'd never know it, though, since the only advertisement for the club is some black graffiti lettering on a dimly lit, sunwashed wall. A scraggly, hastily painted arrow points deeper into the abyss. To make matters worse, the club is open only at night, which was where I found myself late one summer evening, staring into this great unknown.

The sign says: "Eshavira Club."

Standing there in the moonlight, confronted by the deafening stillness of this portal leading to God-knows-where, I realized that at times like these, there are two types of people in the world: Some look down that alley and, acknowledging their lack of the requisite testicular fortitude, quickly sprint away with their tail between their legs; and others, spurred on by a chemical courage borne of the local inebriant of choice, plod down that alley and onward, toward destiny.

With a few hesitant steps made easier by said inebriant, I joined the latter group.

The sun had long since rose again before I emerged from that passage to a bright new day in southern Spain. I stumbled into the light with shaky, hungover steps, but I had sufficient faculties to notice that something was very different: This Andalucían culture, with a veneer of Moorish influence found everywhere—from the food to the architecture to the people themselves—finally made so much beautiful sense.

What did I find in the depths of that alley, you might ask?

I found a confluence of cultures; a place lost in time, yet wholly comfortable in the present. I

found a consortium for *flamenco* and the people who cling to the practice of an ever-evolving art; the sort of place where old and older aren't afraid to mingle with new, modern, and tragically hip. I found an ancient wooden door; a bouncer with only one name; a bar that serves beer or sangria *y nada mas*; and a universe centered on a dusty, worn stage manned by men and women who stomp, clap, and sing the spirit of Gitano pain and pride.

Down that alley, I found a small piece of the Andalucían soul.



EXTREMADURA

IT'S A GOOD day to die, little piggies.

Here, 45 minutes away from the nearest city, herds of *Ibérico* pigs roam from tree to tree, searching for acorns to eat. They also do their best to avoid the butchers in blue coveralls—poised with knives in hand—who stalk the herd to cull three pigs for our *matanza*, a wintertime ritual slaughter/alcohol-and-pork-fueled party that has deep roots in Spanish antiquity.

The *Ibérico* pigs are anything but pretty—they are closely related to wild boars—but they possess a unique characteristic: They store large quantities of their fat intramuscularly—what we in America would call marbling. This naturally high amount of marbling makes *Ibérico* meat highly coveted and expensive, in large part because the fat is monounsaturated, like olive oil, and flavored by the acorns my delicious little friends gorge themselves on during the *montanera* (the acorn-feeding months prior to slaughter).

At the Rocamador, a gorgeous converted monastery and four-star hotel situated in the



countryside of rugged Extremadura, the Tristanchó family has been conducting *matanzas* for their guests, who often include chefs and the social elite of Madrid, for years. These guests are taken out to the family farm, where they participate in a slaughtering ritual dating back to the earliest Iberian settlers, before they reap the rewards of their labor.

Here, I was presented with an opportunity that a line cook like me had only ever dreamed of: the chance to learn about Spanish pork butchery and *charcuterie* in the heart of *Ibérico* country. Without hesitation, I jumped in to help a gaggle of Extremeñan mothers and grandmothers mix and stuff a local specialty sausage, when my education and hazing began concurrently.

“Jeffrey,” (pronounced “Yeh-free” here in the heart of Extremadura) “¿Como está tu chorizo?” Laughter.

Translation: “Jeffrey, how’s your sausage?” (I was in the process of stuffing *chorizo* into a casing, using hand motions you could describe only as masturbatory, so the double entendre was very much intentional.)

“Jeeeeeefrey. ¿Qué chiquito es, no?” More double entendre, more laughter.

Translation: “It’s a little small, right?”

“Jeeeeeeeeeeefrey, y es blando también. ¿Le quieres dar un masaje?”

Translation: “And it’s limp, too. Do you want me to give it a massage?” Now, they were ROFL-ing.

Apparently, gentle teasing of any *extranjero* in the group’s midst was also part of the tradition (I think Anthony Bourdain would have accurately called me the FNG, or Fucking New Guy, in that moment). To make matters worse, I was an American cook—a *gringo*, a *guiñi*, a white



boy—who fortunately knew just enough of the language of the kitchen to understand both what I was being asked to do and that I was the butt of an inside joke.

“Jeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeefrey. Ahora tu chorizo es perfecto.”

“Es muy grande ... ¿eres el orgullo de tu madre, no?”

Translation: “Your *chorizo* is perfect.”

“It is very big. You must be your mother’s pride, no?”

There I was, smack in the middle of a Spanish yo’ mama joke. I laughed, too; who wouldn’t? But my pride and my mama’s honor were at stake. Retaliation was necessary.

“Cuidado con este chorizo extranjero, Señora. ¿Creo que es demasiado grande para ti, no?”

Translation: “Be careful with this foreigner’s *chorizo*, ma’am. I think it’s a little big for you to handle, right?” Score one for the *extranjero*.

And so it went for weeks with *mi familia Extremeña*. We ate, we drank, we took the lives of *Ibérico* pigs in the name of deliciousness and necessity, and we connected with the age-old tradition of making *charcutería*, just as these mothers and grandmothers had with their mothers and grandmothers. And the ladies gave their *hijo extranjero*—their foreign son—a load of crap and an education in *comida casera* for which I am eternally grateful.

And all was right and delicious in the heart of Extremadura.



THE SPAIN I KNOW

THIS IS MY Spain, a place of transcendent memories centered on the diverse foods, rich culture, and welcoming people whom I have come to adopt as my own—if they'll have me.

These memories are the staccato sounds of the *flamenco bailaora's* footfalls, the multicolored sights of *pintxo* platters laid out on bars in San Sebastián, and the unmistakable smells of *charcutería*¹—that smoky aroma of cured pork mixed with *pimentón*, which permeates much of Spain's cuisine, culture, history, and regional pride.

But while Spain stands porky cheek to jowl with other great cured meat-producing nations, such as Italy and France, the *charcuterie* traditions of Spain are perhaps the least understood of all three. That's because Spain has an almost infinite number of regional variances to its *charcuterie* delicacies and woefully little exportation of these products, least of all to the United States. In fact, only a handful of Spanish producers have overcome the strenuous regulations set forth by the US Department of Agriculture and, as a result, only a fraction of the products available in the Spanish market actually make it to American shores.

These restrictions—coupled with a general misunderstanding of Spanish gastronomy in the '70s and '80s that lumped it under the general heading of Hispanic cooking alongside the cuisines of Cuba, Puerto Rico, and much of Central and South America—mean that a niche product like traditional *charcutería* from Spain is just now coming into popularity.

This limited distribution also means that you probably haven't tasted the sheer eye-rolling deliciousness that is *morcilla achorizada*, *fuet*, or *sobrasada*—birthrights for any Spaniard, but for *extranjeros* like you or me, simply items for the top of our bucket lists.

Fortunately for us, however, Spanish cuisine is thriving. For one, there's been a globalization of world cuisines over the past decade or so that has planted the seeds of classic Spanish culinary traditions everywhere (thanks to people like Penelope Casas and chefs like José Andrés and Ferran Adrià). Likewise, culinary awareness has grown dramatically thanks to the foodie culture that permeates our collective consciousness via the Internet, food television, blogs, and other media. And last, truly artisan foods like *charcuterie*, fermentation, baking, and preservation have seen a resurgence in the American culinary lexicon as many of us demand to know the history, craft, and quality of our food.

WHAT WAS OLD IS NEW AGAIN

THAT LAST PIECE of the puzzle—a return to artisan cuisine (meaning food that is hand-crafted, small-scale, made with an eye for quality and detail, and as far as possible from a Domino's pizza, a Frito Lay chip, or any other corporation that dares to co-opt the term)—has been the catalyst for the rebirth of *charcuterie* traditions that are now so popular in the United States.

As Chef Thomas Keller perfectly phrased it in his foreword to Michael Ruhlman and Brian Polcyn's book *Charcuterie*, these foods have been

all around us for years, but mostly in commercially manufactured forms, like supermarket bolognas, hot dogs, and other meats of dubious origin. The butchery and *charcuterie* traditions of our forefathers became misplaced in our fast-paced, commercially driven food culture, and these pseudofoods are living proof.

Today's chef- and butcher-driven *charcuterie* programs, by contrast, are much smaller in scale. The process often includes breaking down the animals in-house and attempts to vertically integrate the food's progress from farm to table, all in the name of producing the highest-quality product possible—as opposed to cutting corners for the sake of profit.

This streamlined farmer-to-consumer supply chain, which includes such luminaries as producers Armandino Batali, Allan Benton, and Paul Bertolli and chefs April Bloomfield, Jamie Bissonnette, Chris Cosentino, and Brian Polcyn, among so many others, has pushed American gastronomy forward by leading us back to our culinary past.



THAT BRINGS ME to why I wrote this book.

My journey of a thousand meat-curing miles began with a single obsession that we, the American public, have yet to fully be exposed to: the wide array of cured meats available in Spain. Sure, our collective *charcuterie* IQ has increased over the past ten or so years. We've become generally acquainted with popular cured meats like *mortadella* and *pepperoni*. Hell, we even know various forms of *prosciutto*, *kielbasa*, and *saucisson*. But *chorizos*? *Morcillas*? *Butifarras*? *No tenemos ni puta idea, amigos*.

Spanish-style *charcuterie* is underrepresented, misunderstood, and largely unheard of in this country, as any expat Spaniard who has searched the United States from coast to coast for a taste of home well knows. While the blame for this state of affairs largely rests with stifling restrictions that keep out far too many Spanish cured goodies, our historical misunderstanding of the traditions of Spanish cuisine is also a culprit. Case in point: No self-respecting Spanish *abuela* I know makes chicken with green olives, but for some reason countless American cookbooks from the '70s, '80s, and '90s erroneously call this dish "Spanish Chicken."

That said, American gastronomy may be a melting pot that now correctly represents our love affair with Spanish flavors and techniques, but the traditions of *charcutería* are still woefully absent from it.

That is why I embarked on a culinary odyssey on the topic—to introduce Americans to regional and national *charcutería* specialties that permeate the hearts and souls of the Spanish people. In doing so, I hope to provide a road map for producing and using these recipes in your own kitchen, just in case you don't feel like braving a transatlantic flight or US smuggling ordinances for your own slice of Extremadura, País Vasco, or Castilla-La Mancha.

During my hands-on education, I participated in the opportunity of a lifetime in 2009, when I was awarded one of only two Spanish Institute for Foreign Trade (*Instituto Español de Comercio Exterior*; known as ICEX) scholarships given that year to American cooks. The ICEX scholarship program is a culinary grant sponsored by the Spanish government, which allowed me to cook



in kitchens all over the Spanish countryside and provided me with the chance to make *charcutería* elbow-to-elbow with the *maestros* (or, more often than not, the *maestras*) of this craft.

In this book, I'll share much of my journey, the times I learned and practiced the art of *charcutería* and *la cocina Española*. You'll meet the cast of characters who helped me understand why the cuisine and culture of Spain are so unique, and why they deserve a place on the world stage.

First, I'll discuss the history of *chorizos*, *jamones*, and other forms of *charcutería* as they evolved through the ritual pig slaughters known as *matanzas*, finishing up with the modern age of

industrialized *charcuterie* and the restrictions placed on it in the United States.

From there, I will introduce you to something you've likely never seen before: Spanish pork butchery, which differs significantly from methods used in the United States. Specifically, I'll cover the *cerdo Ibérico*—the famous black *Ibérico* pigs—and discuss the *matanza* ritual, as well as Spanish-specific butchery cuts for pigs, including the *secreto*, *pluma*, *presa*, *aguja*, and others. I hope you have the opportunity to seek out these cuts on your own, but this information will also serve you well later in the book, when I discuss the different parts required for different types of *charcutería*.

Next, I'll continue with the basics of *charcutería*, including the steps involved in making fresh, semicured, dry-cured, and whole-muscle *charcuterie*. I'll also cover equipment and ingredient options that will help you get the job done, including the best ways for weighing, measuring, buying, and practicing as you start curing your own meat.

Then I'll get to *el alma* of the book: the recipes and techniques that I learned from my time cooking, traveling, and learning with the chefs, *sabias*, and *matanceros* of Spain.

The recipes are divided into chapters according to the techniques involved for making specific types of *charcuterie*. For many of these preparations, I'll also include my favorite ways to use the *charcuterie* when preparing delicious traditional dishes. These cherished recipes were given to me by the talented Spaniards I've come to call *mi familia*.

- ⇒ I start with the most basic of preparations: *salmuera* (brine) and *salazón* (salt cure), two of the oldest and simplest preservation techniques that yield some of the best-known *charcutería* recipes.
- ⇒ Next comes *adobo*, a technique that involves using a marinade as the primary means of preservation.
- ⇒ Then, you'll learn about the *escabeche* technique, a method of hot pickling for proteins, fish, or vegetables that allows them to be stored for a period of time to ripen and mature.

⇒ *Conservas y Confits* introduces recipes for preserving meats, vegetables, and seafood in the style of Spain's renowned canned foods. Surprisingly, in Spain canned foods are considered a luxury and can actually cost more than identical foods in their fresh form.

⇒ The largest section of the book covers *embutidos*, the various sausages and other stuffed meats found throughout Spain. There, you'll learn about fresh, cooked, semicured, and dry-cured *charcuterie*, as well as recipes for using each style of sausage in traditional and modern preparations.

⇒ Next, I'll share with you my personal favorite corner of the world of *charcutería*: *pâtés* and *terrines*. This subject has become very popular in the past several years, as *terrine* boards of different sizes and shapes have begun appearing on restaurant menus across the United States.

⇒ Last, but certainly not least, you'll learn about the traditional sauces and garnishes typically served with *charcutería*, followed by a short chapter of traditional desserts and *licores* that incorporate *charcuterie* recipes and techniques.



CHAPTER

1





WHO'S YOUR PAPÍ CHULO?

Rediscovering our porcine forefathers
of the Iberian Peninsula



THE HISTORY OF

charcuterie in Spain, like much of the historical record of Europe's cured meats legacy, is difficult to trace. The details have been lost to time, but it's safe to say that the evolution of *charcutería* is closely linked to the life and death of the local pig population, Celtic-Iberian tribes, the march of the Holy Roman Empire, and the oral traditions passed down as early man (and woman) discovered that their snouted, floppy-eared, porcine companions were in fact a delicious means of survival.

EL TOCINO LA OLLA, EL HOMBRE LA PLAZA, Y LA MUJER LA CASA.²

THE PORK BELLY IN THE POT, THE MAN IN THE PLAZA,
AND THE WOMAN IN THE HOUSE.

—An old, and decidedly chauvinistic, Spanish refrain



PIGS, WARS, CELTS, AND COWS

A NUMBER OF cultures occupied Spain in early times, and together they helped lay the foundations for many regionally unique food cultures.

Phoenicians crossed the Strait of Gibraltar and founded colonies in the southern Iberian cities Cadiz and Tartessus in the ninth century BC. Carthaginians took up residence in the Balearic Islands before setting out to conquer most of Iberia in the third century BC, with Carthago Nuevo (located in modern-day Murcia) serving as their base of power and capital.³

Around the fifth century BC, northern Spain was occupied by the ancestors of today's Basque people and tribes of early Celtic colonists. The latter is credited with establishing a strong pork-centric culture, and possibly the initial regular practices of the *matanza*,⁴ as they marched

across the Pyrenees and eventually settled north of the Rio Duero and Rio Ebro.⁵ These early Celtic settlers viewed the pig as more than a simple food source, however; animals like pigs, bulls, and lambs were worthy of sacrificial rituals, *verracos* (statuettes) for worship, and representation on ancient coins from the era.⁶

After the conquest of Spain by the Roman Empire in 19 BC, the country was renamed Hispania. The cosmopolitan Romans brought ideas, goods, and technology to the Iberian Peninsula via the Roman roads. Concepts became a shared commodity between lands through the spread of Christian teachings, architectural fundamentals for building marvels like aqueducts, new farming methods, and—most important to the culinary world—new *charcuterie* and meat-preserving techniques, many of which likely arose from Rome's conquest of Gaul around 51 BC.



Those meat-curing secrets begat *jamonés* and *embutidos* coveted throughout the Empire, as towns like Pompeiopolis (known today as Pamplona) structured whole economies around exportation of their *jamonés*.⁷ These culinary specialties were solely the province of Rome's social elite, since only the wealthy upper class had the financial means to procure such luxuries from faraway Hispania.⁸

THE CHURCH TAKES CHARGE

AS ROMAN RULE declined in the third century AD, Visigoths from the north gradually extended their control over Hispania, while the porcine-

centric culture of the peninsula's emerging gastronomy continued to flourish. Specifically, acorn-fed pigs roamed even more freely in their native oak forests once they became protected by new Gothic laws codified in the *Liber Iudiciorum*. In this Visigothic book of laws, Iberian pigs received specified protections for their feeding habitat in oak-tree laden *dehesas*, and protections were also put into place for the gradual transformation of freshly harvested Iberian hams into succulent *jamonés*.⁹

At the same time, the Catholic Church took a leading role in maintaining formal education, preserving historical records, and managing government in the region. As a result, Hispania was one of the few centers of culinary

development that survived both the Visigothic reign and the 800-year Moorish occupation in later years. For example, monasteries like the order of San Fructuoso maintained large herds of pigs for making *embutidos*. The cured meats kept the resident monks and traveling pilgrims fed, and the monks were also able to study the pigs and products made from them. In fact, the order maintained archives about medicinal uses for pork. Their work makes up a good portion of the archival information about *charcutería* that survives today.¹⁰

800 YEARS OF MOORISH RULE

BEGINNING IN AD 711 and continuing for the next eight centuries until the completion of the *Reconquista* in 1492, most of the Iberian Peninsula was ruled by Moorish and Berber invaders from Africa—all except the northern states, which defiantly resisted occupation and remained the last vestiges of Christian freedom in Spain. During these centuries of occupation, Spain was renamed yet again (Al-Andalus) and religious tolerance was granted, up to a certain point, by the conquering Moors. Specifically, the populace's cultural and religious practices were allowed to continue under the conditions of stiff taxation, which eventually became a rallying point for revolution for many native Spaniards.

Fomenting anger over both the occupation and the new taxes shifted the pig from a symbol of wealth or family survival to one of Spanish pride and defiance. Since eating pork or even

The *matanza* became the ultimate act of defiance, as Spanish families moved their pig-slaughtering practices away from the hidden corrals or inner courtyards of their homes to front yards and village squares.

handling pigs by Muslims was forbidden by strict religious laws, the only people who could farm and eat pigs in Spain during this period were Christians opposed to the occupation.

Thus, the *matanza* became the ultimate act of defiance, as Spanish families moved their pig-slaughtering practices away from the hidden corrals or inner courtyards of their homes to front yards and village squares. These actions loudly proclaimed their political and culinary leanings, while also delivering a great big, passive-aggressive, porky middle finger to the ruling Moors.¹¹

NEW WORLD, NEW INGREDIENTS, NEW CHARCUTERÍA

IN 1492, CHRISTOPHER Columbus “sailed the ocean blue” to the New World with the blessing and sponsorship of Spain's King Fernando and Queen Isabel. It may be debatable whether Columbus was in fact the first European to discover these shores, but we can thank him for bringing eight special passengers along for the ride on his second voyage. Part of his precious cargo included eight *Ibérico* pigs, the forerunners of our swine population, which were released to multiply and proliferate on the island of Hispaniola, where the

nations of Haiti and the Dominican Republic exist today (Hernando de Soto later brought more pigs to continental North America in 1539).¹²

Columbus's voyages, and those of subsequent explorers, not only planted some very important culinary seeds here in the Americas; they also forever changed European gastronomy. Specifically, the culinary heritage of the Old World became enriched with new ingredients like corn, peppers, potatoes, chocolate, and other discoveries; notably, some very important red-pepper-tinged changes occurred in the *charcutería* of the period.¹³

Peppers from the Americas eventually made their way into recipes for *chorizos*, *lomos*, *morcillas*, and other forms of Spanish *charcuterie*—sometimes in a smoked, dried, and powdered form (*pimentón*) and other times as a mashed paste (from *ñora* and *choricero* peppers). As a result, all manner of sausages became tinted a vibrant red, and Spanish *embutidos* were imbued with a heretofore unknown smoky, spicy quality. Quite simply, it was one of the greatest developments in Spanish culinary history.

As described by noted author and Spanish culinary expert Teresa Barrenechea, this truly was a golden age for Spain, from both a culinary and cultural perspective:

Spain served as a center for Europe and the gateway to the newly conquered lands of the Americas. The grandson of the Catholic Kings, Carlos I, ruled the sprawling Hapsburg Empire and became Holy Roman Emperor Charles V. With the seat of the Hapsburgs now in Spain, food traditions traveled back and forth all over Europe,

affecting the eating habits of the entire continent. Then, in the mid-eighteenth century, the Hapsburgs gave way to the Bourbons, who introduced French styles to the Spanish court and upper classes.¹⁴

COMFORT IN DARK TIMES

THE RICH, MULTICULTURAL gastronomic landscape of Spain—a collective harmony of so many countries and cultures dating back over a thousand years—came into serious jeopardy in modern times. During the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) and dictator Francisco Franco's reign (1939–1975) thereafter, the autonomy of Spain's provinces faced oppression and near annihilation. Everything from local linguistic dialects to bullfights to *flamenco* came under scrutiny by a regime hell-bent on uniting the proudly regionalist Spanish people under a single banner: one language and one rule.¹⁵

And the dark times continued thereafter. An economic depression ensued until the 1950s, leading to a strong black market for everyday luxuries like coffee, sugar, and tobacco. The cuisine of the era, which of course was focused on wasting absolutely nothing, showcased necessary innovations Spanish households had to employ to make the most of what they had. Stale bread provided a means for thickening soups. Families found ways to use every odd and end from slaughtered animals, and many people turned to preserved foods like *charcutería* to get the protein and fat they needed, since fresh meat was far too expensive.

Coincidentally, as suppression and economic woes swept across Spain during and after the Franco era, *charcutería* production soared. In fact, its popularity reached its highest levels to date at this point in time, as businesses with fiercely guarded family recipes for curing meat expanded.¹⁶ Franco's suppressive regime opposed overt regionalist displays of language, culture, and the arts, so the people of Catalonia, País Vasco, Galicia, and other regions turned to their native *charcutería* recipes and traditions—a source of comfort to their souls—as a means of expression, freedom, and economic sanctuary from oppression.

MODERN SPAIN ON THE WORLD STAGE

THESE DAYS, CATALONIA—just one of seventeen distinct *comunidades autónomas* (autonomous communities) in Spain—alone recognizes seventeen different versions of *chorizo*. And while the Catalan viewpoint on cuisine is certainly valid (they gave the world Ferran Adrià, after all), add to this number the various local, regional, and national *charcutería* specialties of the rest of the country, and you'll begin to understand the dizzying scope and depth of Spain's cured meat lineage.

Generally considered the national sausage of Spain, more than 65,000 tons of *chorizo* are made by Spanish producers every year, which amounts to about 40 percent of Spain's entire sausage production.¹⁷ In fact, *chorizo* is such an innate part of the Spanish soul that every February, a festival is held in its honor in the small town of Vila de Cruces in Galicia. *Charcutiers*

from all over Spain bring their products, and festival goers devour and debate over whose is the best in the land.

But for all of the hype about *chorizo* within Spain's borders, very little information about this delicacy has still yet to make it out of the country. Sure, you might see *chorizo* at your local Whole Foods or spot José Andrés, one of the most vocal proponents of all things Spanish, waxing poetic about it on TV. But only in the last few years have Spanish producers gained access to the American market, and even then only a small fraction of pork-laden goodies have trickled through.

In October 2002, for example, Palacios, a producer of *chorizo* based in La Rioja, became the first to be allowed by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to import *chorizo* into the United States.¹⁸ And while the Palacios product is certainly a decent *chorizo*, it is hardly representative of the multitude of other *charcutería* products enjoyed every day by the average Spaniard. Fortunately, in recent years, companies like La Tienda, Fermín, 5J, Wagshal's, and a few others have been allowed to either import some Spanish *charcutería* products or put their traditional recipes to work here in the United States, creating authentic reproductions.

Likewise, *jamón Ibérico* is only a recent revelation here in the United States. For years, Embutidos Fermín fought to educate the USDA about its products and the process involved—but it wasn't until 2007 that the first legal *jamones* were ceremonially sliced at José Andrés's Washington, DC, restaurant, Jaleo. In a *New York Times* article by Amanda Hesser, exporter Jesús García



commented on the issue, “The problem is that American authorities do not recognize the European Union’s standards for production. They want companies to follow their own standards. And some companies do not want to change.”¹⁹

Fast forward to today. Americans still have very few options when it comes to trying the lesser-known varieties of *charcutería* available to the Spanish people. Hope exists, however, that this may be soon rectified, as evidenced by the sweeping acquittal of many Italian cured-meat imports in April 2013.²⁰

For now, anyway, we can travel to Spain and consume to our heart’s content. We can buy what precious little is available in our country. We can make it ourselves. Or we can make a futile attempt at stuffing contraband pork into our suitcases and pray, with the wide-eyed, guilt-laden face of a Colombian drug mule, not to get busted by the Department of Homeland Security.

Just know that on this point, dear reader, I can offer a bit of personal advice: Getting caught is an epic fail of disastrous proportions, even if it’s not your fault.

Case in point: After a trip to Madrid and the surrounding countryside, my Spanish “family” thought that they’d surprise me with a little package of *morcilla* secreted away in my suitcase. It was a gesture borne of more heart than brains, as ultimately it truly *was* a great surprise—especially when I found myself tagged for an agricultural check at a particularly thorough US Customs checkpoint.

I simply didn’t understand. I’d filled out my Customs card and done everything right. Yet there I was, unloading my dirty unmentionables

on a counter for God, curious passersby, and the TSA to look over and admire. And that’s when I caught a waft of something familiarly porky, and my heart sank: There, in the gloved hands of an agent, was a gift-wrapped package of undeniably dubious origin wrapped in orange-tinted, grease-stained butcher paper and covered with a plastic baggie.

And all I could stammer was: “Awwwww, *shit*.”

Fortunately, after some quick explaining to the Customs agents who took pity on me (and thankfully didn’t stick me with either the \$50,000 fine or the 10-year jail sentence), I was let off with a warning. Of course, that warning entailed having my name entered into a national database as a “person of concern” with notes of the encounter attached. That’s why to this very day, whenever I go through US Customs, I get the same question: “Sir, do you have any meats in your possession? Perhaps some ‘*ham-own*’?”

Trust me, folks...until the USDA pulls that ginormous stick (or maybe it’s a big ham bone?) out of its ass, it’s going to be much easier to make *charcutería* yourself or buy it from a legal vendor. And I’m here to help!



CHAPTER

2

A person wearing blue overalls is holding a large, dark, hairy animal paw. The background is a blurred outdoor setting. The text is overlaid on the image.

THE SECRETO OF THE SECRETO

Surviving bad hangovers, great pork,
and crazy butchers with hatchets



HIT UP ANY

self-respecting *restaurante* serving the elusive, uniquely Spanish cut of pork called *secreto Ibérico*—be it a temple of *alta cocina* in the heartland of the Costa Brava or a roadside bar in the outskirts of Badajoz—and you will notice something peculiar; something that runs counter to the government-advised method of pork cookery we Americans have come to know.

DEL CERDO HASTA LOS ANDARES.
OF THE PIG, EVERYTHING CAN BE EATEN.



The pork will arrive to your table properly *poco hecho*—that’s medium rare in American culinary parlance. Yes, medium-rare pork...but relax, my fellow Americans. You have nothing to fear but fear itself.

Ibérico pork is raised with love, slaughtered with respect, marbled like the finest Kobe beef, and loaded with the sort of flavor you simply cannot find anywhere else. And that is why Spain’s four-legged national porcine treasure is simply not meant for the kind of indistinguishable, chalk-dry, cooked-to-160°F ending that the USDA has historically recommended as the only means of “safe” pork consumption since the last century.

But this chapter is not merely a diatribe against the way in which we have been told to incinerate our pork in this country since the 1950s (thankfully, we have progressively rebelled against The Man in recent years and recommendations have relaxed...a little²¹). Rather, I am not-so-subtly hinting at a different way of doing

things. My goal for this chapter is to present to you the perspective and practices of porcine husbandry, butchery, and cookery of the Iberian people to compare and contrast with our own.

What follows in this chapter, therefore, will be an introduction of sorts into the life, the death, and the afterlife of the famed *Ibérico* pig. In the Spanish countryside, these meadow-dwelling, acorn-grazing herds live out their lives before being dispatched with honor for their one-of-a-kind musculature and delectable, acorn-imbued fat.

I’ll start by discussing our four-legged friends’ final days of life as part of a typical *matanza*, including defining the ritual and explaining how it’s performed. I’ll then take you through the laborious task of breaking down *Ibéricos* following the Spanish method, including identifying the various commercial cuts of pork you’re likely to find in Spanish markets. Last, I’ll contrast the economy and methodology of Spanish pork butchery with our own American system of breaking pigs down.



PORCOPHOBES AND PORCOPHILES

ANTHROPOLOGIST MARVIN HARRIS theorized that the human race can be divided into porcophobes and porcophiles; his theory differentiates between cultures that consider the pig forbidden in all its forms and those that consider all things swine-related to be righteous, delicious, and true.²²

If we take this theory at face value, the Spanish decidedly fall into the latter group: They have consistently ranked as one of the top five pork-consuming nations in the world for the past 10 years,²³ and they are the world's largest producers and consumers of ham with production at around 40 million hams a year (roughly 1 ham per Spaniard!). Most Spanish hams never leave Spain, however, since Spain exports only about 10 percent of its annual production due to high demand within its own borders.²⁴

And the Spaniards display that fervent love and respect for their native Babe most at the inception point: the age-old *matanzas del cerdo* ("pig slaughters"), which are held every winter across the entire country. While this ritual originated as a burden of necessity—a means for entire regions of people to survive harsh winter conditions while living on the cusp of poverty—these days, most *matanzas* are parties that serve a festive, social purpose. Modern *matanzas* are familial gatherings where attendees are plied with enough free-flowing alcohol and soul-satisfying food to keep them blissfully elbows-deep in piggy blood, guts, and gore.

In years past, *matanzas* took place around holidays honoring local saints, thereby allowing

entire extended families to get together in their households for the occasion. Families would employ the services of some *matanceros* (slaughterers, typically men), a *matancera* (a person in charge of meat processing, typically a woman), and a group of *sabias* (the word literally means "wise women," as they are the ones with the knowledge of various *embutido* recipes and techniques). The team would work in concert—with the family doing the grunt work—to ensure the quality standards for the slaughter and to make enough fresh and cured meats to sustain all for the year to come.

In cities like La Alberca in Salamanca, home of Embutidos Fermín, the entire populace waits yearlong with giddy excitement for its *Ibérico*-based celebration during the festival weekend of San Anton. Throughout the year, the town pet—an *Ibérico* pig, of course—wanders the streets with abandon and is fed and fattened up by everyone in town. Then, in January, a great *matanza* is held during the festival weekend and the pig is raffled off to its lucky new owner. (In years past, the pig always went to a needy family in the area to ensure the family's survival. Today, the raffle benefits local charities.)

Nowadays, however, all pigs meant for commercial distribution and many pigs destined for individual families are brought to a local slaughterhouse and killed in a controlled environment, inspected by an on-site veterinarian for any diseases, and only then released for further processing.²⁵ These are modern changes for modern times.

The Spanish produce around 40 million hams a year (roughly 1 ham per Spaniard!).

MORE THAN ONE WAY TO SKIN A PIG

ASIDE FROM THE relatively new, factory-based slaughter system (begrudgingly set in place years ago to help prevent the spread of trichinosis, which is now nearly nonexistent), the *matanza* thankfully varies little from time-honored methods.

For example, some *matanzas* last for two days, and some for three. Some families make *embutidos* on the first day, and some on the last. The type of *embutidos* made will vary depending on what region you hail from, but generally speaking, the cuts of pork and schedules of production at most *matanzas* are all similar to those you'll learn about in this chapter.

My experiences with the *matanza* ritual, which mostly took place in Extremadura, a rugged region in the western part of Spain, taught me that it is for neither the faint-hearted nor the weak-willed. *Matanzas* are intense, draining, and days-long affairs requiring early and constant fortification from food as well as drink. Both come in copious amounts, and the latter is preferably a strong alcoholic variety served before, during, and especially after a long day's work.

Following is an account of a typical first day of a two-day *matanza* on a working farm in the rural countryside of Spain—the sort of place that harvests and processes all of their own animals on-site. I participated in many such *matanzas* over the course of a few seasons, with shifts starting in the early morning before the sun rises and continuing on until the early evening. The schedule often varied a bit depending on the temperature of the farmhouse and surrounding countryside, the time of day, the degree of

porcine stubbornness we faced, and the state of hangover the butchers and the rest of us were in. But this is more or less how it went.



BEFORE THAT, HOWEVER, let me give you the first, last, and only disclaimer of this book: What follows is not for those who prefer to think of meat as a nameless, faceless, sterile, Styrofoam-packaged product available at your local supermarket.

The *matanza* ritual—at its core—is dedicated to following techniques handed down through the centuries to minimize animal suffering and maximize usable yields—in addition to being unacceptably cruel, upsetting the animal ruins the meat.

Nonetheless, slaughtering pigs is a messy business that cannot be accomplished without a sharp implement, a capacity to witness death, and a good amount of blood...so read on only if you accept these truths to be self-evident.

DARKNESS FALLS

OUR SLEEPY GROUP of *matanza* participants begins the day with a bumpy, motion sickness-inducing, off-road excursion to an ancient farmhouse in the Extremeñan countryside, a place that time has clearly excused from the burdens of change. The sun is slowly rising above the surrounding ridgeline, tracing outlines of a large valley we'd entered under the cover of darkness. The new morning light betrays the shadows of acorn meadows, orange groves, and herds of roaming, mammoth, black



pig-monsters on a desperate and noisy search for some breakfast.

Inside the farmhouse, we enter a simple, gigantic room with portents of things to come literally hanging over our heads: Row upon row of *morcillas*, *chorizos*, *lomos*, and other *charcutería* hang from ceiling racks, drying in the morning breeze.²⁶ The room includes a small kitchen area with ancient water faucets and a large dining area. In the dining space, giant wood tables are covered in plastic tarps, ready for the messy work to come. An ancient, hand-crank sausage stuffer and grinder dominates the room's eastern wall. Next to that, open doors lead out to the backyard slaughter area, providing a magnificent view of the valley and the sunrise. On the opposite side of the building—protected from the morning sun—lies a salting room, where *jamonés* and other large slabs of meat from previous *matanzas* quietly sit and cure.

It's the smells that get you, though. The essence of *pimentón* emanates from the very walls, the floors, and the rafters; there's the faint, sweet funk of drying *chorizo*; the comforting waft and "pop!" of an oak-wood fire in the small fireplace that serves as a body-warming station and hot line for cooking; and the hunger-inducing smells of a delicious, hearty, high-calorie breakfast meant to sustain us for the day's grueling work.

Strong coffee percolates in a coffeepot older than most of us, set directly in the fire. On the table, platters contain slices of *chorizo* and *lomo* from a prior *matanza* (inspiration for our work to come, perhaps?); *cachuela*, a specialty local *pâté* made from pork blood and other offal, smeared on grilled slices of bread; and *migas*, a peasant's dish of crumbled bread, *chorizo*, peppers, and garlic fried in lard and topped with a fried farm egg. (Of course, the *migas* varies for those of us needing to sop up a hangover—two





From left: El Maestro, Elvis, and Little Joey

eggs, in that case. One portly chef visiting from Barcelona avails himself of four eggs...Spanish cooks really love their fried eggs.)

Against the clatter of fork-on-plate, we can hear *them* through the open doors leading to the slaughtering area. They are our reason for coming, the reason for all of this. Three little *cerdos Ibéricos*—and by little, I mean upward of 350 pounds each—were rounded up earlier on this, the morning of their final day on this cosmic plane. They look happy—or at least as happy as pigs can look—as they lounge in their spacious, warm Death Row shelter.

We meet our *matanceros*, the taskmasters of our day's work. The three large men in blue coveralls who will handle the slaughter and butchery duties have the serious faces and dark eyes typical of men who dispense death professionally. I mentally give them names, so I can remember them: *El Maestro*, the oldest one, does the talking;

Elvis, so named for his sideburns and comparable good looks to The King in his prime, is the middle-sized one; and Little Joey, the shortest of the group, looks like Joe Pesci from the *Goodfellas* years and even has the same staccato speech.

We are then introduced to three deceptively diminutive women in floral, plastic-lined aprons—our *sabias*—who will handle pretty much everything else, including setting up our fortifying morning shots of Chinchón, a potent anise-flavored liquor from the town of the same name.

The shots (*chupitos*) are poured and the *matanceros* offer a toast to the local saints. A second round honors our soon-to-be-dead piggy friends, and then a third honors the start of the *matanza*. Three shots in, out come the sharp knives and hatchets—wood-handled, medieval-looking, blood-stained axes for splitting bones—and suddenly I'm glad I didn't share Elvis's nickname with the group.



DEAD PIG WALKING

IT'S TIME.

Piggie Number 1 is encouraged (read: shoved, pushed, and cajoled with food) out of the relative comfort of his shed onto a dirt-filled runway with three sequential gates. As he unknowingly walks past the first gate, a *matancero* closes it with a “CLANG.” The process continues until Piggie is poised in the slaughter area next to an ominous-looking stainless steel table. At this point, much too late to make a difference, Piggie realizes something is up and the *matanceros* make their move.

Piggie is quickly corralled to a corner and pushed to the ground. He is hog-tied and then carried—relatively quickly, given his size—to the table by all three huffing, puffing, swearing, and now cigarette-smoking *matanceros*.

The process is not a silent one, but once Piggie is on the table, he grows a little quieter, perhaps accepting his fate as *El Maestro* speaks a few words to him (is there such thing as a Pig Whisperer?). As Piggie's neck dangles over a large bowl (*lebrillo*) destined to catch blood for making *morcilla*, Little Joey uses a very sharp knife to quickly sever its carotid and jugular. Piggie immediately bleeds out, and brain death occurs within seconds.

At this point, I want to clarify something for those of you squirming in your seat or wetting these pages with tears of mourning.

I witnessed and participated in the slaughter of dozens of Piggies during these *matanzas*, and each time this part—the act of taking a life—was

of the utmost importance to everyone involved. The most serious step in the ritual, it is absolutely intense and almost always occurs in relative silence, save the protesting sounds of Piggie and occasional swear words from the *matanceros*.

El Maestro explained it all to me over a *caña* later that day. Not only does the quality of the slaughter rely on the animal's emotional state in this moment and in the preceding moments of its impending sacrifice, but a quick death is a matter of respect. Anything less would be disrespectful to the ancient custom, to its modern practice, to the sacrifice of these majestic animals, and to the family that raised the animals over the past years. In fact, even the verb that *El Maestro* used to describe the action—*sacrificar*—denotes the accepted responsibility and gravity of his work. Using that term acknowledges that the *matanza* is as much a celebration of life's basic elements of living, dying, and life going on as it is about acquiring meat, fat, and calories for sustenance.

In other words, these men in blue, these dealers of death, specifically work in the service of ending life quickly and honorably. *El Maestro* said it best: “That is the most important thing that we do.” It's something that, on this day, they demonstrate twice more without error.

Not only does the quality of the slaughter rely on the animal's emotional state in this moment and in the preceding moments of its impending sacrifice, but a quick death is a matter of respect.





Death's Warm Embrace

DEAD PIGS ARE warm pigs. This is a little unsettling to me.

One of the *sabias* is stirring the blood with her hand—to keep it from coagulating—while the men use a gigantic, propane-powered blowtorch to remove coarse bristles from the skin of our recently departed future meal. The smell of burning hair permeates the air.

After laying the now-hairless Piggie backside down on one of the steel tables, *El Maestro* slits the belly open and passes to the *sabias* the intestines (*intestinos*), the stomach (*tripa*), and the kidneys (*riñones*). Next, he carefully inspects the liver (*hígado*) for any signs of potential disease.

But it's the steam rising off of the carcass that catches my eye. For most *extranjeros* working under a clear winter sky in temperatures hovering around 30°F, the sight of steam—of the very essence of warmth—flowing from the body of an animal that was alive just five minutes before is one of the most arresting moments of this experience. This is, very possibly, the first freshly killed *anything* that most participants may have ever seen, a stark reminder of the disconnect perpetuated by our daily routines in modernity. Seeing evidence of life drain away is a stark contrast to the emotionally safe world we live in, where “meat” is a faceless commodity stashed neatly behind psychological and physical barriers.

El Maestro slices into the *hígado*, grunts affirmation of the animal's health, and passes the *hígado* inside to be taken to the local vet. He then turns to me and motions with a glistening, blood-stained hand. It's time for me to learn how to turn hundreds of pounds of solid Piggie into the traditional primal and sub-primal pork cuts of Spain.



From left: *El Maestro* inspecting a pig's liver; harvesting the head; starting the breakdown process.

SPANISH BUTCHERY 101

CLASS IS IN session.

First, we twist off the head (*cabeza*), *Exorcist*-style, spinning it round and round till it detaches. Decapitation complete, we pass the *cabeza* to Elvis, who harvests the tongue (*lengua*), ears (*orejas*), cheeks (*carrilladas*), brains (*sesos*), snout (*morro*), and the bones (*huesos*) for stock. At the same time, we remove the tail (*rabo*), the tenderloin (*solomillo*), and the jowls from the head (*papada*). The *rabo* will be used for braises, the *solomillo* for grilling, and the *papada* will either be covered in an *adobo* and tied up in the farmhouse's large chimney for

smoking or chopped up to flavor many sausages to come.

Working from the belly toward the back, the skin (*piel*) is slowly peeled back from the carcass until it lays open like a book cover. What's left is the entire torso of the animal *sans* skin: a warmish, thickish mountain of fat obscuring meat and bone.

Grabbing his hatchet, *El Maestro* starts hacking away at the top of the rib cage inside of the cavity, working his way downward with short chopping motions that elicit a satisfying "thwack." He cuts through the chest cavity, striking on either side of the spine (*espina*), until he reaches the bottom of the spinal