



Schooled by a Butcher

He expected a sermon on the glory of bacon. And a chance to wield a bone saw. Instead, a demonstration on cutting up a pig defined the countless errors of the author's ways.

By Mike Madaio

I'll admit it. I arrived at the Heritage Pig Butchering Class at Wyebrook Farm, in Honey Brook, with visions of bone saws buzzing through my head.

The Web site description was coy about audience participation, but I'd heard of similar demonstrations that encouraged it. This one proved to be more of a lecture. A compelling one, but a largely-one-sided tutorial nonetheless. My dream of carving the perfect chop with my own hands would have to go back on the bucket list.

When I told my wife about the session after I signed up for it, her reaction was as follows: "Ew." Turned out, that was a fairly common sentiment. I posted pics on Facebook after the class, and most of the comments ran along that line. Apparently, I'm still among the minority that's interested in putting a face to my bacon.

The class was an extension of Wyebrook's—and its owner, Dean Carlson's—sustainability ethos. It surfaced again and again. And by the end, I found myself a little dumbstruck over how little, exactly, there is to go around—and how much of that is wasted. Unsettling as it came to be, the farm's own woodland-pastured pig on display was the ideal illustration. Say a pig's butchered for baby back ribs. What that means is that spare ribs and bone-in pork chops are now out of the question. One cut in the name of two or even more, essentially. And the more the options narrow, the more of



THE PORK THAT'S BUTCHERED (TOP, LEFT AND RIGHT) AND AGED (ABOVE) AT WYEBROOK FARM IS PASTURE-RAISED THERE, TOO (BOTTOM).

the pig falls to waste.

We're just beginning to hear the phrase, "snout-to-tail cooking." As we grew to favor certain cuts—the tenderloin, say, or the aforementioned baby back ribs—whole pigs were being slaughtered for these few and relatively-small portions. Whereas, across much of the rest of the world, sirloin, flank and skirt pork steaks were being devoured. Even the humble butt (shoulder). There, quantity dictated over quality. Or so we always assumed. And it was easy to do so because as long as it was unfamiliar and pretty much unavailable here, it must be a lesser cut. Otherwise, we'd be eating it, too.

I walked in with a sort of primal blood-thirst. I walked out empowered, but by a clearer notion of how to live with less blood on my hands. Figuratively, of course.



More Cutting, Less Guilt-Tripping

Josh Lawler, one of the country's authorities on snout-to-tail cooking, regularly stages less-preachy butchering classes at his Center City restaurant, The Farm and Fisherman. He covers goat, cow, deer, game and hog. In a given session, he'll butcher an entire animal, dissecting the various cuts and techniques as he goes before preparing a five-course feast with them. The cost runs between \$125 and \$160. Visit www.thefarmandfisherman.com.

Similar, but less frequent, sessions are staged at COOK (audreyclairecook.com), in Rittenhouse Square, La Cucina at the Market (lacucinaatthemarket.com) at the Reading Terminal Market and Greensgrow Farms (www.greensgrow.org), in Kensington.

Wyebrook Farm (wyebrookfarm.com) also hosts goat and grass-fed beef hind- and front-quarter butchering classes. In a day-long affair, November 24, Russet chef-owner Andrew Wood will "kill, bleed, scald and eviscerate" one of the farm's pastured pigs in the morning. Then, after breaking for lunch, which is included (pig heart and lung soup, pork sausage, French ham), he'll lead a charcuterie tutorial. If you're still standing, there'll be an all-pork dinner, too—smoked and braised pig's head with shell beans, pickled cabbage and tomato fondue; brown butter-sweet potato tortellini in a bacon-liver ragu. The class and dinner are 100 bucks each. Class participants get a \$10-discount on dinner. And a prescription for Lipitor. —MM

