



Kathryn McAree

# The Sophisticated Sausage

Isn't it about time we gave these little parcels of savoury meats and spices the respect they deserve?

by Kathryn McAree

Is it only a Saturday morning hangover necessity or a Sunday brunch fix? For far too long, North Americans have been slugging the sausage, giving it a rather trashy reputation. Isn't it about time we rose to the occasion and gave the sausage the respect it deserves?

Countries such as the U.K. obviously respect their sausages, and statistics bear this out. They annually consume 300,000 tons of sausages in six main ways: barbecue, breakfast, comfort food, children's meals, lunch boxes and, the most important category, "satisfyingly sophisticated." Other countries such as Australia and New Zealand are following suit in all categories, but it is the latter that I found most intriguing at a conference earlier this year. *Pinot Noir 2007* is a four-day conference held in Wellington, New Zealand. I found myself, albeit slightly fuzzy from the Pinot festivities of the night before, attending a bright-and-early food pairing session with wine experts, rock star chefs and designer sausages. In the kitchen and out back on the grill, New Zealand's answer to Martha Stewart, **Ruth Pretty**, was cooking up three different sausages created by guest chefs **Brad Farmerie** from **Public** in New York; **Josh Emmett of The London**, New York; and homeboy **Rex Morgan** from **Citron** in Wellington and **Inspire** in Queenstown.

Our two Pinot critics were Aussies **Nick Stock** and **Matt Skinner** (the latter heads up wine operations at **Jamie Oliver's Fifteen Restaurant** London, Cornwall and Melbourne). Skinner gave us the lowdown on our Pinot's vast pairing capabilities before getting down to the nitty-gritty of what it takes to be a good—no great—sausage. He described Pinot as the "most food-friendly wine on the planet ... intriguing, sexy, incredibly inspiring," leaving us with the notion that "Pinot can turn good food into great food." Nick Stock told us how the best sausages should be "nice and plump with shiny skin, well packed without air, hand-linked or coiled, and not bulked up with other stuff." The Pinot matched so perfectly with the three sausages created by the chefs, it led me on a bit of a sausage expedition of my own. Everywhere I went in New Zealand, there were sausages ahead of me. In the frying pan for breakfast, in my friend's lunch box, in pasta for dinner, and on the grill on the weekend. Kids weren't asking for chicken for dinner. They all wanted sausages!

Back at home on Vancouver Island, I found this search for the perfect sausage still in my thoughts. It seems that for many Canadians the sausage has had an unsavoury past, but isn't what's in your butcher's case these days more deserving of a higher rank in the food chain? I set out to find some of those lonely sausages while shopping in Victoria at **Ottavio's Bakery and Delicatessen** and **The Village Butcher** in Oak Bay, **Choux Choux Charcuterie** on Fort Street and **Pepper's Foods** in Cadboro Bay where I discovered my favourite **Cowichan Bay Farm** 100-percent natural chicken sausages. Before my trip down under, I had only consumed chicken sausages for breakfast, but now I was determined to eat sausages at other times and hence had to find the perfect wine pairing. I knew I needed help with this adventure and called in the cavalry.

Well, I called the kitchen at **Brasserie L'ecole** and explained my pairing mission to chef **Sean Brennan**, who wanted in on the quest. He would even make his own sausage, he said. Sommelier and co-owner **Marc Morrison** was easily roped into our silliness. I arrived at Brasserie

L'ecole with an arsenal of local sausages and some local Vancouver Island wines. There was Sean in the kitchen hand-linking his own sausages with Marc looking on. Sean had created a sausage the same way he creates all of the dishes that come out of his kitchen—not a lot of ingredients with too many flavours but fresh, local ingredients lovingly prepared. The sausage was fabulous—only ground pork, red wine and a little garlic, salt and pepper. Soon he had cooked his sausages along with eleven others, first in a frying pan on top of the stove with a bit of canola oil, then finished in the oven at a moderate heat, 350°F.

Marc and I were ready and waiting with several wines. As the 12 plates of sausages arrived, we began savouring, chomping and tasting. Our adventure had got seriously, well ... serious. We were initially overwhelmed with flavours and textures; this wasn't going to be a simple as we thought. I had originally assumed that a nicely balanced high acid white wine would work well with the fat content in sausages, especially those made from pork, turkey and chicken, but it became apparent that they really needed a prevalent fruitiness as well. By the looks on our faces, you could easily see that this wasn't working, until I took a bite of the **Galloping Goose** Tuscan sausage, then sipped **Blue Grouse** Ortega from the Cowichan Valley. That's when I knew we were on to something. It worked and the melding together of all of the flavours was a hit. It made sense that our Island wines and meats should pair well together, but the vast flavours in the sausages were tricking our palates. Indeed, we discovered that the sausages could change the flavour of a wine all together, bringing a background flavour to the forefront and taking over the flavour of the wine. For instance, an Italian sausage paired with that food-friendly Pinot Noir left us with a menthol or eucalyptus flavour. I can't say this was particularly pleasing, but it certainly was interesting! It was simply a matter of finding the right match.

And we had found several. I had brought along a bottle of **Pond Paddock** Pinot Noir from New Zealand. A Victoria native, **Jeff Barber**, and his Kiwi wife, **Christine Barnett**, are making outstanding Pinot on their Martinborough vineyard in New Zealand named **Pond Paddock**. **Larry Arnold** still has a few bottles in stock at **Spinnakers Wine and Spirit Merchants** in Victoria. It paired perfectly with Sean's pork sausage. We definitely cleaned the plate with that pairing. The chicken sausages from Cowichan Bay Farm, which Sean describes as "dynamite sausages," were our thumbs-up favourites. Although we couldn't pinpoint the perfect pairing for the Italian sausages, the Cowichan Bay Farm citrus sausage really brought out the citrus in a **St. Urbans-Hof** Riesling. Riesling for breakfast anyone? I love to serve Cowichan Bay Farm sausages as appetizers as well as breakfast. They're quick to cook in a hot toaster oven and simply slice on an angle and serve with a toothpick. Choux Choux's Spanish raisin sausage really brought out the spiciness in the **Blue Grouse** Ortega and paired well with the Pinot offering a similar spiciness and creating a great aftertaste. Choux Choux's Italian sausage with fennel and paprika served with the Pinot Noir really knocked the paprika out, creating a spicy hit at the back of the throat. The Village Butcher turkey and sun-dried tomato sausage made a softer match with the **Salt Spring Island** Pinot Gris.

So, what makes these sausages special? First, I'd have to



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At Brasserie L'ecole: Sausages are labelled and ready for the tasting

say it's the people that make them. **Andrew Moyer** at **Ottavio's** tells me that "**Johan and Kate Wessels** from **Galloping Goose** have been sourcing local meat, making fine sausages, delivering them to our back door with a dose of humour and cooking them in their mobile carts for us at **Ottavio** for 10 years now. They make a damn fine sausage!"

These hard-working link labourers are dedicated to top-quality ingredients. **Lyle Young** at **Cowichan Bay Farm** creates a high-quality sausage using very few ingredients. "There are no fillers or extenders, binders, colours or preservatives typically used in sausages. We let the flavour of the chicken speak for itself. It's just chicken, herbs and spices." Young went on to explain that since chicken is such a slippery meat, they don't have to use much fat. In fact, a Cowichan Bay Farm chicken sausage has about one third of the fat of a regular pork or beef sausage. This is apparent in the cooking process; you'll find that these sausages are some of the few that don't curl as they cook. There is very little shrinkage or change of shape.

**Michael Windle** of **The Village Butcher** says, "You're going to get out of it what you put into it." Their lamb, pork, beef, veal or turkey sausages are made from the meat they bring in, which is always all-natural, free-range, hormone-free, antibiotic-free and vegetarian-fed. "We try to come up with interesting flavours without loading up with fat and salt—just adding better fresh ingredients."

It seems that if the sausage maker cares about what they put into it, their TLC is going to produce quality, tasty product.

Now it's your turn to take on the challenge of finding your favourite sausages. Do consider these gourmet links for more than just breakfast, and do a little wine pairing of your own. They're quick to prepare and simple to plan a meal around. Pick up these Vancouver Island sausages at the following stores in Victoria:

- Cowichan Bay Farm** sausages at **Pepper's Foods** in Cadboro Bay or directly from the farm
- Choux Choux** house-made sausages at 830 Fort St.
- Galloping Goose** sausages at **Pepper's** or **Ottavio** Italian Bakery & Delicatessen, 2272 Oak Bay Ave.
- The Village Butcher** house-made sausages at 208-2250 Oak Bay Ave. (entrance on Monterey Avenue)

And don't forget to try some of the wines we enjoyed:  
**Blue Grouse Vineyards**  
**Pond Paddock** Pinot Noir  
**Salt Spring Island** Vineyard  
**St. Urbans-Hof** Riesling