

REAL-TIME MARKETING P.13 . . . MANAGING MUSIC COSTS P.19 . . . OPPORTUNITIES IN CATERING P.46

RESTAURANT

BUSINESS

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MENU INNOVATION

Where food and drink are going next



At MacIntosh in Charleston, S.C., chef Bacon braises lamb neck to fill ravioli

the pig go into the braising pot. Pig cheeks are a favorite of chef-owner Mike LaScola because they cook in about 90 minutes. "Each one weighs 1½ to 2 ounces and costs about a dollar for heritage-breed pork," he says. LaScola brines the cheeks overnight, then braises them in red wine, pork stock, tomato and aromatics. Once tender, he reduces the liquid with stout and mustard to glaze the meat.

A braised pork cheek appetizer at American Seasons goes for \$14. LaScola also plates them with pork loin or belly as an entree for around \$30. He's partial to braising pig ears and tails, too, although these take three to four hours to tenderize.

Lamb and goat necks also adapt well to the technique. "Braising brings out their best. The flavor is unbelievable and so rich, but it's difficult to sell lamb neck on its own," says Jeremiah Bacon, chef at MacIntosh in Charleston, S.C. He buys lamb necks for about \$3.20 a pound (they used to be \$2, he recalls) and braises them in a blend of veal and chicken stock. After cooling the necks in the liquid, Bacon sears them and picks out the meat. He fills pasta with the shredded lamb; his Braised American Lamb Neck Ravioli sells for \$14 as an appetizer.

Dirk Flanigan, executive chef of Il Coniglio in Chicago, chooses goat necks to braise. He makes goat stock with roasted bones, adding mirepoix, allspice and bay leaves. Once cooked, Flanigan favors searing the meat before plating, so it's crisp in texture. "I pair it with toasted quinoa, a mushroom duxelles and greens," he says.

—Patricia Cobe



Braised pork cheeks are a signature at American Seasons in Nantucket, Mass.

Culinary Trends

IN PRAISE OF BRAISING

Underutilized parts of the animal profit from a slow simmer.

It used to be that short ribs and shanks were the bargain cuts. Set on the back burner to braise, they required little labor and balanced out pricier steaks and chops. But recently, demand has surged for these cuts and so have prices, according to chefs we spoke to. So they and others now are exploring cheaper parts.

"Short ribs used to be half the price they are now," says Shawn Cline, corporate executive chef of Cleveland-based Hospitality Restaurants. Cline, who sources certified Angus beef, still menus them, but he's also turning to other cuts, such as coulotte steak, which weighs three

to four pounds, costs about \$7.50 and is a good size for braising.

Still, many of Cline's customers come for steak, so he's developed ways to control food costs while creating value. For example, he braises the rib-eye cap (also called the spinalis), then shreds the meat and serves it on a grilled 5-ounce filet, accompanied by parsnip puree, heirloom carrots and Brussels sprouts (\$29.50). "Food costs are 36.5 percent, but it's important to me not to break the \$30 barrier to keep this dish lower than the other steak options on the menu," he says.

At American Seasons in Nantucket, Mass., underutilized parts of