

Long Island restaurants serving must-try charcuterie boards

Charcuterie is how the French refer to the world of cured meats, and it's way classier than "cold cuts."

The word derives from the French "charcutier," pork butcher, but the category includes any meat that has been preserved by the ancient methods of salting, smoking and/or drying, from bresaola (air-dried beef) to merguez (lamb sausage) to duck prosciutto.

The Italian term "salumi" gets to the heart of the matter: its root is sale, Latin for salt. In the days before refrigeration and freezing (most of human history), fresh meat didn't last more than a day or so. If you wanted to save it for future consumption and/or resale, you had to treat it in a way that would discourage spoilage. Since salt inhibits bacterial growth (and has done so since long before humans discovered bacteria), the best way to preserve that leg of pig was to cover it with salt and hang it up so the breeze could dry it out. That's ham. Or grind up the meat, mix it with salt and fat, stuff into casings and hang it up to dry. That's salami.

What started out as a necessary means of preservation has evolved into an art form. In the past few decades, Americans have developed both an appreciation for fine European cured meats and have even started curing their own. (Salumeria Biellese in New York and La Quercia in Iowa are only two of many domestic charcutiers.)

On Long Island, charcuterie boards are becoming de rigueur at establishments that seek to blend modern sensibilities with traditional tastes. Share them with friends at the outset of a meal, or settle in at the bar with nothing more than a board and a beer.

At Mirabelle, the four-star restaurant at the Three Village Inn in Stony Brook, chef Guy Reuge prepares a charcuterie board balancing textures and tastes.

"And we try to find things that are more exotic," he added.

Reuge and others offer cheeses, which traditionally stand alone on their own board. But he also sends out a board that combines meats and American cheeses from New York, Vermont and California.

Finding their way alongside the meats and cheeses at some establishments are jams, chutney, fresh and pickled fruits, olives, grapes and nuts. To go along with all this: good bread, sometimes toasted, and perhaps savory or plain crackers.

Getting to the meat of the issue, cured and otherwise, here are a few Long Island destinations where the charcuterie board is at home and often reigns.

Mirabelle at Three Village Inn



(Credit: Mirabelle at Three Village Inn)

Mirabelle at Three Village Inn (150 Main St., Stony Brook): Expect variety and imagination at Mirabelle, in Stony Brook. The charcuterie board may include Serrano ham, Rosette de Lyon, the cured pork sausage, saucisson sec, similar to a Gallic salami, duck pâté and duck prosciutto, rillettes of rabbit and duck, smoked duck breast and wild boar sausage. The restaurant also is readying a ham board, with Serrano, Bayonne, tasso and mangalitsa. Price: \$16 to \$19. More info: 631-751-0555, lessings.com