

## Pen & oink



JOHN LETHLEAN

THE OBSESSION HAS GRIPPED THIS MILD MANNERED LAWYER FOR 10 YEARS

The other week I met a marvellous bloke about my age who has devoted his career – some would say life – to turning pig meat into artisanal smallgoods. Porcine obsessiveness is a powerful thing.

José Coutinho was born in the north of Portugal, in a place called Viana do Castelo, and grew up with that whole southern European thing of killing a pig each autumn and turning everything but the oink into food for the year ahead.

Now, in the far less romantic outer suburbs of Adelaide, he does the same thing for a living, having self-beatified to create the San José brand. I don't know if he is saintly, but he cures a bloody good *jamon* and makes a mean Portuguese chorizo (it has a little blood in it). And just about every other kind of cured, fermented, smoked and fresh pork product your imagination can muster. This guy is pig mad. And given the cultural fit, that's not entirely surprising.

There's something magical that happens to pig meat when salt, smoke, spices, moisture, bacteria and time are applied separately or in various combinations, and it's been going on for centuries. It's a metamorphosis that grips people.

On the basis of the printer's proof in my hand – a beautiful book featuring a dangling whole-leg prosciutto on the cover – this isn't an affliction confined to European immigrants. Peter Booth is a Melbourne lawyer who's become so profoundly immersed in his hobby of charcuterie that he's self-publishing a record of his journey: *A Charcuterie Diary*. What a project.

Several things appeal to me about it. One, it is an Australian

publication and talks to the Aussies he wants to enable. Readers may recall a column here some years ago recounting my own attempt at whole-leg prosciutto; one of the great impediments to my new career as a charcutier turned out to be the lack of an Australian manual. I got my proverbials in a tangle over nitrates and nitrites, kosher salt and other stuff. Booth had the same problem, but persevered anyway.

I like the author's frankness. The book is not intended to be a scholarly work, Booth says. "Neither is it intended for commercial use... it was written primarily because the books that were available to me I did not find helpful." He cites sourcing ingredients such as saltpetre, cuts such as "Boston butt" (from the front end of the pig, not the bum), and deciphering instructions like "incubate at 27 degrees C and 85% RH for 12 hours then increase humidity to 95 RH and reduce temperature to 14 degrees C for the next 12 hours..." Crikey.

It is also nicely written if, on occasion, slightly thesis-like in its annotations. "I acknowledge that this book may be somewhat idiosyncratic," says Booth, "but I figured that it was undesirable to write an anonymous cookbook."

Mr Booth, you figured correctly. And for anyone who's interested in making sausages, ham, bacon, you name it, at home, this quirky DIY book will be a necessity. (I'll be having a go at the n'duja.) By the time you get to the end, you'll have an appreciation of the obsession that must have gripped this mild-mannered lawyer for the past 10 years. It's that kind of single-mindedness we need to applaud. More: [acharcuteriediary.com.au](http://acharcuteriediary.com.au)

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