



## FOOD

# A charcuterie diary by P J Booth

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Peter Booth is a commercial barrister at the Victorian Bar. His matters involve contract, equity, company law and trusts. He is a bit like Clark Kent. This is because it is in his guise as 'P J Booth' that his secret talents have become fully realised. These concern all manner of methods for preserving meat. His passion for charcuterie has resulted in a book, called *A Charcuterie Diary*, which is 365 pages long, contains about 150 recipes, and is approximately 75,000 words in length. It is a beautiful work, with numerous gorgeous photographs accompanying stories and instructions.

Peter Booth thinks the book is expensive at AUD \$75, and apologises for the cost ('P J Booth' may be less humble). In any event, if you are an enthusiastic cook (and not a vegan), this cook book is for you.

John Lethlean, recently reviewing *A Charcuterie Diary*

for *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, wrote, "for anyone interested in making sausages, ham, bacon or you name it, at home, this quirky DIY book will be a necessity". He added, "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 last 10 years".

Several years ago, and as the book explains, P J Booth became interested in charcuterie. He says it is a record of four years of trial and error, fear and loathing. He says his first products were inedible. After reading as widely as he could, he then spent several years experimenting with recipes and techniques suited to his circumstances. He wrote *A Charcuterie Diary* mainly because the books available to him, he did not find helpful. They were either based on imperial measurements (not metric) or just really old. They used products he could not source reliably or at all ("saltpetre" for example) or which he did not understand ("Boston butt" which comes from the



front end of the pig not the rear end). Some were predicated on equipment or conditions he could not possibly replicate at home (“...incubate at 27°C and 85°RH for 12 hours then increase humidity to 95°C and reduce temperature to 14°C for the next 12 hours...”); or suppliers who would not supply to him, on the other side of the world. Most of all they usually did not explain exactly what was going on in the process of charcuterie. All these things made him write the book.

P J Booth’s writing style is anything but mild-mannered. It is passionate, direct, and to the point. His comments on the rear cover of the book conclude, “Never trust a vegan”. He does not apologise for this. Rather, whilst he frankly acknowledges that his approach may be idiosyncratic (he is not a chef, either by training or inclination), he figured it was undesirable to write an anonymous cookbook. He leaves it to others to judge whether his approach was correct.

Family members do not emerge unscathed. He thanks his wife Helen for her editorial and proof reading expertise. He grudgingly acknowledges “No. 1 Daughter” who spent “quality time in a final, often quite hurtful, editorial proof read”. He thanks “The Hairy Nephews for being crash test dummies with a variety of charcuterie”. He is positive about “Lucy, the black dog” which benefited from some failures. He is not so positive about his other dog, “The Rat, an evil Jack Russell Terrier for whom I have no regard”.

This book is a record of P J Booth’s experiences and drawn from a diary in which he kept recipes, observations and results over the past four years.

To judge for yourself, here is an extract from *A Charcuterie Diary*, including a recipe which P J Booth recommends to those wanting to impress friends with minimal effort.

In P J Booth’s own words, “Meat the family”.

## A prosciutto called Kevin

I was determined that this charcuterie thing would not beat me. Frankly, I had mixed success. For reasons which I do not now recall, I decided to jump into the deep end and embark on a prosciutto. I certainly did not understand what I was doing, but it felt good nonetheless. I was becoming a charcutier, (well sort of) although I did not know it at the time.

It just seemed like a good idea at the time.

Kevin was the start of the more scientific approach.

If you feel the need to apportion blame for all that has followed, then most must fall to Kevin.

Although, you already knew that. But I digress.

Kevin was the first prosciutto. I asked Frank The Butcher (his real name) when it would be good to start preparing a prosciutto. He said “When you see me wearing a beanie in the shop, then it will be time”. It sounded pretty scientific to me. I waited. I waited some more. Frank The Butcher did not wear the beanie until mid-June, to my mind a bit late. In any event, I did what he said.

When I saw the beanie being worn, I attended the shop to purchase a leg of pork. Frank The Butcher trimmed the leg of pork for prosciutto and I was all set to start the journey. After careful consideration, it was decided that the inaugural prosciutto would be called Kevin. Kevin was lovingly rubbed with a mixture of salt and Curing Salt and put to bed in a salty sleeping bag (a big plastic tub actually) for two days/kilogram. Far too long as it turned out but it seemed like a good idea at the time. Thereafter Kevin was put into some nice muslin pyjamas for the big sleep. Kevin was hung high up on the veranda out in the direct sun but with good airflow. I checked Kevin every few days and things were good. Kevin was happy. I was happy.

As things transpired, there were some unseasonably warm days in August. That was a problem because things got quite warm on the veranda up under the eaves. My hygrometer told me so. Accordingly, I put Kevin in the fridge for a few days. Kevin seemed happy enough. When things cooled down a bit I returned him to the veranda. Sadly the days got warmer more often. Kevin still had so much time to spend maturing that I decided drastic action needed to be taken.

I decided to relocate Kevin to Camp Otway, on the west coast of Victoria, about 3 hours’ drive from Melbourne. Kevin was left in a cupboard in the house which is situated at 300 metres above sea level with plenty of breeze. It seemed like a



good idea at the time. Indeed it was a good idea until, once again, things got warm. I got nervous and decided that I had to check on Kevin. I travelled for three hours to Camp Otway to see how Kevin was progressing. Nervously, I opened the door, expecting to see Kevin watching my television and drinking my wine. All was good, much to my relief. Kevin was happy and so was I. Nonetheless, I figured that it was not good to be so far away from Kevin, so we returned to Melbourne together. The question now was what to do, the weather becoming warmer each day. I suggested that Kevin might enjoy time in my modest

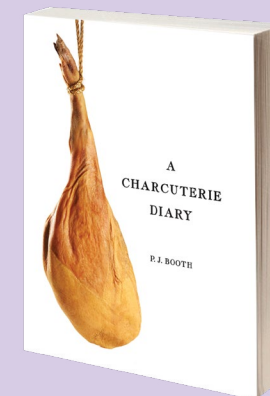
cellar. Kevin agreed. Sadly, although the temperature was good, the humidity was too high. Things went bad very quickly. We fought off the MOMC<sup>1</sup> bravely together. It was a close run thing. What to do?

The answer was at hand, Sebastian (a local gastronome), has a cellar. Well alright, it was just a space under his house, but which had more airflow than my modest cellar. Kevin was agisted at Chez Sebastian quite happily for much of the remainder of his days. Kevin ended up being a remarkable success, especially as a first time effort (albeit a bit salty). ■

Stockists include:

- Books for Cooks (Melbourne, Victoria)
- Dymocks (Camberwell, Victoria)
- Tim’s Bookshop (Kew, Victoria)
- Readings (Hawthorn, Victoria)
- Readings (Carlton, Victoria)
- The Artisan Bottega (North Melbourne, Victoria)
- Smoked and Cured (Melbourne, Victoria)

You can read some extracts from the book at [acharcuteriediary.com.au](http://acharcuteriediary.com.au).



1. ‘Moulds of Many Colours’ which is to be contrasted to ‘WMOH’ - the ‘White Mould of Happiness’.
2. For example Elizabeth David in “*French Provincial Cooking*” or Rick Stein in “*French Odyssey*”.
3. The quantities are a guide only, this is a quick cure so the precise measurements really do not matter. Go wild. But not too wild.

## RECIPE

### Petit salé

Petit salé is a lightly salted pork belly which is poached and served with puy lentils. “Petit sale” means lightly salted; referring to the short time the meat is cured before cooking. Recipes for the dish<sup>2</sup> usually do not use a curing salt as well. I think the dish benefits from a small amount of Curing Salt No. 1 if for no other reason that it gives a pleasing pink colour to the finished dish. Without the Curing Salt it is not so attractive to the eye. If you like corned beef, then you will like this.

If you do not like corned beef, then there is something wrong with you.

This is one of my all time favourite dishes. If you make nothing else from this book, you should make this. If you do not make this dish, I will find you. There will be nowhere to hide.

#### Ingredients:<sup>3</sup>

Pork (belly, skin on, bones removed) – 1 kg.  
Salt – 45g.  
Brown sugar – 15g.  
Curing Salt No. 1 – 2g.  
Bay leaves (crushed) – 2.  
Juniper berries (crushed) – 4.  
Thyme (fresh) – 1 sprig or if using dried thyme, 1 tsp.

#### Method:

Place the pork in resealable plastic bag together with all the other ingredients for 2 hours in the refrigerator. Thereafter remove and rinse the meat well.

Gently poach the meat in a court bouillon (water with 1 carrot, 1 celery stick, ½ onion, 1 bay leaf, 4 pepper corns) until well-cooked but not falling apart (treat it like corned beef but a bit more gently, it is not as robust). Slice thickly and serve with puy lentils which have been cooked in the poaching liquor from which the petit salé has been removed.

If you do not like this then I cannot help you.

*Note: Curing Salt No. 1 contains 6.25% nitrate and is used for shorter term products. It is available from suppliers such as The Essential Ingredient, Butcher at Home, Cellar Plus – The Artisan’s Bottega, Smoked and Cured, and Costante Imports.*

