

SEASON'S BEST

pigging Out

Known as the 'Kobe beef' of pork, Mangalica pork's recent revival is winning over chefs and gastronomes alike around the world.

words LEENA NG photographs ALLAN TAN



LIKE STYLE ON THE RUNWAY, STYLE FOR PIGS IS CHANGEABLE.

With their abundant fat, the curly-haired Mangalica pigs of Hungary were all the rage a century ago. But as time went on, they became has-beens.

Now that succulent pork is back in fashion, the Mangalica—saved from near extinction on a farm at the edge of Hungary's bleak and barren Great Plain—has started making a comeback some few years go.

There are many species of pigs, such as Berkshire, Duroc and Iberico, etc. The Mangalica (pronounced as 'Mangalitsas') is one of them, and the only native pork breed in Hungary. Habsburg Toscanai Jozsef, the Hungarian royal archduke, developed the unique appearance of this breed on his property in Kisjeno as early as 1840. Mangalicas are curly-bristled pigs with black noses and hooves, and red and richly marbled flesh that doesn't at all resemble, in look or taste, other kinds of pork. Once you see the pig, it is unforgettable because its hairy, cute form reminds one of sheep, hence, earning it its moniker of 'woolly pig'.

The closest relatives of the Mangalica are the Iberico (sharing the same roots) and the Alentejana. However, the latter two are 'hairless' because they live in a mild climate all year round, unlike the Mangalica that has to deal with the feisty Central European winter.

Once the preferred breed among home cooks and butchers for its incomparable taste and richness in unsaturated fat, the Mangalica—a protected breed in Hungary since 1973—is what's known as a "fat-type hog" (the name comes from the Serbo-Croatian term for fatty pig) because of the large, white layer of fat that insulates its stout frame.

Herds shrank with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I and declined further with the introduction of fast-growing Large White and Landrace pigs and cheaper, higher quality vegetable oils



after World War II. The breed nearly disappeared in the 1950s when Communist-era pig farmers turned to leaner hogs that produced larger litters. In 1991 there were just 200 Mangalicas left, but, fortunately, a few dedicated farmers started raising them for specialty markets, and populations have bounced back to the tune of some 50,000 last year.

One of such 'heroic' saviours of the Mangalica is Peter Toth, a Hungarian animal geneticist, who did not want this Habsburg legacy to be lost. He, thus, worked to save the pigs on a farm 100 miles east of Budapest, with buildings of whitewashed stone, roofs of thick thatch (to fend off bitter winds blowing out of the Carpathian foothills), and dimly lighted wooden pens filled with straw to shelter piglets and nursing sows; breeding boars and sows live in pens open at one end.

"When Communism collapsed," Toth said, "the state farms that served as the last gene banks also collapsed. It was a total anarchy in the country. When I started to save Mangalicas, to search for them in 1991, I found only 198 purebred pigs in the country.

Sometimes, I would rescue the pigs right from the slaughterhouse."

Today his company, Olmos and Toth, in addition to maintaining breeding stock, fattens some 8,000 pigs and oversees the production of 12,000 more on farms in the surrounding regions. Because these pigs can cost 40 per cent more to raise, Hungarians, who earn less than most Europeans, use them mostly to make lard and sausages.

Presently, Mangalica pigs are mostly grown in the Hungarian plain spread out along the river Donau—a grassy area where summers are hot and dry and winters windy and snowy. The shaggy Mangalicas flounce around the pasture or grove freely, even in the snowy cold winter, breathing in fresh air from the vast land. Their natural feed is a mix of green fodder, alfalfa, grass and sometimes pumpkin and sugarbeet combined with wheat, barley, maize and sunflower—unlike the feed on factory farms made of little corn and nothing with soy.

"The Mangalica—many problems!" Toth said. "We must kill them at 130 to 140 kilogrammes to make sure that the marbling is maximised and the meat of the best quality. If you kill it at 80 kilos (when industrially produced pigs are usually slaughtered), you won't have marbled meat. You need time, 360 to 420 days, when a normal pig takes just five months to raise.

"The second big problem," he said, "is at the slaughterhouse: the carcass has only half of the quantity of meat and double the fat. So for the Mangalica product, we will have to sell the cured dried ham or fresh loin always at two to three times more in price. Also, Mangalicas give birth to only five to eight piglets a year, instead of 12 to 14 for the more commonly raised breeds.

Mangalica meat tends to be compared to the well-known Iberico meat. However, it is not merely comparable as the different species and the climatic conditions in which it is raised results in a very different taste. For one, the fat percentage of Mangalica meat can be well over 50 per cent, and it has double the marbling of average pork—its high quality fat obtained through continuous exercise even during bitter the Hungarian winters with temperatures falling below -30 degrees celsius. In fact, the Mangalica is in the Guinness Book Of Records for having the largest amount of back fat of 25 cm.

Secondly, the Mangalica has 12-16 per cent less saturated fatty acids, and 8-10 per cent more unsaturated fatty acids, than

regular hog. The 12 per cent higher oleic acid in the Mangalica meat, compared to regular white pig meat, is especially beneficial, and its particularly high mineral (zinc, copper and iron) and antioxidant content complements a healthy diet. Mangalica's positive features of monounsaturated fatty acids are also in level with those of Iberico meat—at some meat parts, the Mangalica exceeds the Iberico.

Because of its high fat content, Mangalica pork makes some of the world's most flavourful sausages and salami, such as the famed Hungarian salami. The fat—which has such a low melting point, it is very soft and one can literally poke into the fat with his finger—allows hams to cure longer, deepening flavour without sacrificing moisture; all that fat also acts as a vehicle for other flavours, like smoke and seasonings. Mangalica lardo (sometimes also sold as speck), for example, are made from fatback seasoned with rosemary, thyme, dried coriander, and other spices; it has a creamy texture and intense flavour that surpasses those of any other lardos.

Little surprise then, most of the pigs raised in Hungary (especially the rear legs) are exported to Spain to become ham and other cured meats. Toth's partner, Juan Vicente Olmos Llorente, who runs Monte Nevado in Spain, for example, takes every Mangalica ham, loin and shoulder produced on the farms. In Spain, the hams are finished and sold as jamón Mangalica, the most expensive going for 70 euros a pound, rivaling pata negra hams.

The Mangalica's marbling also makes it ideal for roasting or braising, and fresh cuts like chops and tenderloins are increasingly available alongside the cured stuff. In the United States, where a renaissance of old pork breeds like Ossabaw, Tamworth, and Gloucestershire Old Spot is in full swing, pork lovers are starting to get a taste of Mangalicas raised at farms on the West Coast. Chefs at top restaurants, like The French Laundry, in Yountville, California, pay as much as 40 per cent more for them than for Berkshires, another elite breed.

In Singapore, specialty meat purveyor Huber's Butchery imports Mangalica pork directly from Pick Szeged, one of Hungary's oldest (founded more than 140 years ago) and largest salami producers. Pick is part of the Bonafarm Group which is owned by the richest man in Hungary. As the local authorities only permit chilled pork from Australia and Canada to be imported into our shores, all pork from other countries, including Mangalica, need to come in frozen. According to Ariella Lee, the Marketing Manager for Huber's, the company began selling the pork to Western and Asian (mostly Japanese) restaurants here in July 2011 and only recently started to put the meat on retail for consumers at its Dempsey store in March this year. Every two to three months, Huber's brings in one shipment of certain cuts of Mangalica pork—neck steak, loin steak, pork chops and pork belly—as other products, such as salami, sausages and smoked fat from Pick—are yet to be approved.

Executive chef of DB Bistro Moderne in Marina Bay Sands, Stephane Istel, is a newfound fan of the Mangalica. "When I first tasted this pig at a friend's barbecue," Istel says "it took me back to my mother's kitchen in Alsace on a Sunday afternoon, windows steaming from the roasting pork in the oven. Back then pork tasted as it should: like a pig. This pork has that same authentic taste."

Chef Li Man, who is the Senior Executive Chef for the Tung

Lok Group, shares Istel's enthusiasm. Li says, "Unlike work-day pork, such as those from Malaysia, Mangalica is marbled, and the fat dissolves on your tongue—it's softer and creamier, akin to Wagyu beef."

Japanese chef of Tonkatsu by Ma Maison, Matsabayashi Masato, who serves Mangalica pork tonkatsu cutlets at his restaurant, adds, "People who have tasted Mangalica say it is noble and not too heavy. In contrast to the muscular taste of Iberico, Mangalica has a delicate flavour. Mangalica melts in the mouth and its aftertaste is refreshing. Its superior taste does not come forward too much, neither does its aroma. These are the reasons why it is called a 'noble, dignified and elegant pork meat' out of other superior pork meats."



Mangalicas may be a little too expensive for most local bistros, but Lee of Huber's says there should be a place for them. "We tell the chefs, you got to keep some magic on the menu, some fun," she says, "because the people are coming in to escape whatever hell they're facing out there."

thin and crispy does it

Any visitor to Tokyo will have seen the rather wonderful plastic models of food on display in front of many restaurants. They have their origins in the time after World War II, when occupying servicemen, who didn't speak Japanese, needed help identifying what was on offer in each establishment, according to Matsabayashi Masato, chef of Tonkatsu by Ma Maison restaurant.

The influence of foreign visitors and traders to Japan has always had an extraordinary impact on its cuisine. Without the visiting British Navy, the Japanese would not have their favourite hangover food, *kare raisu*, or Japanese curry. Without the Portuguese, there would be no tempura, and without the French, who brought with them thinly pounded cutlets of veal covered in crumbs, there would not be the favourite Japanese dish of all, tonkatsu.

The first records of the dish in Japan stem from the late 19th century, in Ginza, where a local restaurant owner began serving westernised dishes and, even more unusually, gave his clientele forks to eat them with rather than the expected chopsticks. Pork cutlets cooked in the French style gradually became particularly popular and soon found their way to tables all over the country. But though it may have foreign roots, "katsu" has now become truly Japanese and can be found at dedicated restaurants throughout the country, like the Tonkatsu chain of restaurants owned by the Japanese Akinori group which is also behind the Ma Maison brand of restaurants. Made by dredging a thick cut of meat in successive bowls of flour, beaten egg and bread crumbs before frying, tonkatsu can be made with chicken, beef and, of course, pork, and is usually served with bowls of steaming white rice, nourishing miso soup and pickles.

At the one-year-old Tonkatsu restaurant (Ma Maison's first outlet specialising in tonkatsu) in Mandarin Gallery, Masato makes delicious tonkatsu cutlets mostly with black pig from Australia. Following the lead by the group's parent restaurants in Japan, Masato began offering a Hungary Mangalica Rosu Katsu Set at the end of last year. He says, "The crunch of the crumb coating along with the juiciness of the Mangalica pork and the sharpness of the pickles makes for a perfect combination."

One of Tonkatsu's 'secret' to making perfectly tasty tonkatsu cutlets is *jyukusei*, or a dry-ageing method of the pork for four to five days in order to intensify the flavour and juiciness of the meat.

Masato says his ideal tonkatsu is a cut of sirloin (from a pig "raised without stress") cooked in vegetable oil—not sesame—at a low temperature of 140 degrees Celsius for about 20 minutes.

"This maintains the juiciness of the meat and ensures a crisp coating," he says. Proper preparation is, well, a practiced art: "It's

nothing but oil, temperature and timing.

And, of course, ingredient quality."

From the flake size of the *panko* or breadcrumbs (the finer the flake, the

harder the crust), to the ideal oil temperature (some say 110 degrees

Celsius, others say 180 or 165), the type of oil (including lard, soy, canola and sesame, among others), to the timing, every factor counts. For home cooks, Masato advises

one to maintain a temperature of 165 degrees, and remove the tonkatsu from the oil before it is entirely cooked, allowing it to rest for a minute or so for the residual heat to finish the job, before slicing and serving. Deep-frying is a difficult kitchen technique to get right consistently, and

the chef gauges the doneness of his tonkatsu by its weight, the oil bubbles and its colour. But as with so much else, experience is key. "You just have to cook many, many tonkatsu," Masato says.

so french!

Families in Alsace generally eat *choucroute garnie* during the wintertime, because it's such a hearty, filling dish. Executive Chef of DB Bistro Moderne, Stephane Istel, has this tip to offer home cooks—adapt the recipe to make it quicker and easier by using store-bought sauerkraut instead of the homemade kind, for instance, and using vegetable oil as a substitute for duck or goose fat, which may be less accessible.

For his new Alsatian food promotion at the Marina Bay Sands restaurant every Monday evening, Istel will be creating homespun Alsatian specialities, such as roast suckling pig (a whole pig imported from an organic, free-range farm in Britain), and, of course, choucroute. In fact, choucroute is one of the dishes that have made the Alsace region of France famous for its pork products. From the typical *cervelas* to the well-known 'knack sausages', Alsatian food offers a wide range of tasty hams and sausages. To create his dish for Wine & Dine, however, Istel experimented with the exquisite Mangalica

pork from Hungary.

Istel says, "My chefs and I were laughing when we tasted it. We couldn't control ourselves. The taste, the texture, was so unbelievable."

"To make the experience even more authentic, do try a glass of Riesling wine or an Alsatian beer to accompany your Choucroute! And for a final touch, why don't you taste the delicious Apple Strudel dessert?"



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He adds, “To make the experience even more authentic, try a glass of Alsatian Riesling wine or an Alsatian beer to accompany your choucroute! And for a final touch, why don’t you taste the delicious Apple Strudel dessert?”

natural goodness

Every once in a while, one must have a home country-style meal. You know what that means. Meat with lots of vegetables plus rice, for Asians. Hong Kong-born Senior Executive Chef of the Tung Lok Group, Li Man, doesn’t cook this type of meal often at his fine dining Chinese restaurants, but it is the type of meal that reminds him of his mother. Li says, “She always had this meal ready on any given day.”

He decided, therefore, to create a simple dish of pan-fried pork as one of the dishes to be introduced in the new menu for Tung Lok Signatures’ a la carte menu. The restaurant usually uses Japanese Kurobuta pork, but Chef Li says using Mangalica pork cutlets is a great for preparing the dish which emphasises the wholesome yuanzhi yuanwei (‘original and natural flavour’) quality of the premium meat too.

Li says, “I remember when I was young, my mom love to cook pan-fried pork for us. I really love this pork dish and can eat every day!”

Because Mangalica meat is of such a high quality and has such a delicate flavour, Li says that a simple cooking method is best. “Dicing it into small cubes, mincing it for patties or braising it will be a waste for such an expensive cut of pork.”

There is no unique ingredient to use to marinate the pork, especially when using top quality meat like Mangalica pork. All you need is sugar, soy sauce, dark soy sauce and ground pepper, and some honey, according to Chef Li.

He adds, “The neck is the best part, with a good balance of fat and lean meat. You can trim some fats away but still retain some excess fats for this dish. If you’re not a pork eater, maybe you can replace pork neck with boneless whole leg (dark meat preferred).”

Once you experience the superior taste of Mangalica pork, Li says, “I can’t imagine a desire to go back to lesser quality pork found in the local supermarket.”

With one taste, you will agree how fresh ingredients and the true flavour of pork enhanced by the right seasoning will seduce your palate, Li volleys. And it is a dish that is super easy to prepare too. For his dish, Li lightly pan fried a slab of pork neck steak and served it simply as it is. Needless to say, there would not be any leftovers expected.

Indeed, if things keep up like this for the breed, Mangalica is bound to become the next big pig. **WD**

MANGALICA PORK TONKATSU

RECIPE BY **MATSUBAYASHI MASATO**, CHEF, TONKATSU MA MAISON



ingredients: (Serves 4)

8	Thin-cut Managlica Pork chops
2 cups	Panko crumbs
2	Eggs (beaten)
½ cup	Milk
½ tsp	Salt
½ tsp	Black pepper

method:

- Wrap each pork chop in plastic wrap and pound with a meat mallet or rolling pin until it is half the thickness and twice the size.
- Combine the beaten eggs and milk in a shallow dish wide enough to fit the chops.
- In another dish, do the same with the salt, pepper and panko crumbs.
- Dredge each chop in the egg mixture and then cover with panko crumbs. I do this to each chop twice to give it a full coating of crumbs. Place the coated chops on a plate and chill in the fridge for 30 minutes. I find that this gives a better end result.
- After 30 minutes, remove the chops from the fridge and shallow fry in vegetable oil for four minutes on each side, being careful that the panko crumbs don't burn.
- Allow to drain on kitchen towel. Serve with the pickles, rice and miso soup.





CHOUCROUTE

RECIPE BY **STEPHANE ISTEL**, EXECUTIVE CHEF, DB BISTRO MODERNE

ingredients: (Serves 8-10)

CONFIT MANGALICA PORK BELLY

1	Mangalica pork belly
1 sprig	Sage
1	Bay leaf
2 sprigs	Thyme
1 sprigs	Savory
1 sprigs	Oregano
6 cloves	Garlic (chopped)
3	Shallots (chopped)
1 tbsp	White peppercorns
1 cup	Coarse sea salt
2 quarts	Duck fat

method:

- The day before: Coat the belly with the sage, bay leaves, thyme, savory, oregano, garlic, shallots, peppercorns and salt. Wrap tightly with plastic wrap and rest overnight.
- The next day: Preheat oven to 250°F. Heat the duck fat to 225°F in a pan large enough to hold the pork belly. Scrape all the seasonings off the pork belly and rinse under cold water to remove any excess salt. Pat dry, add to the duck fat and transfer to the oven. Bake until very tender, about 2-3 hours. Remove the pan from the oven and let it cool. When cooled, carefully remove the belly from the fat and cut into 1/2 inch sections along each rib. When ready to serve, deep fry the confit ribs until golden brown and crispy. Arrange around the Choucroute.

CHOUCROUTE:

3 tbsp	Duck fat or butter
1 pound	Good-quality sauerkraut
1	Spanish onion (thinly sliced)
1/2	Carrot (thinly sliced)
2 cloves	Garlic
1/2 cup	Riesling
3 cups	Chicken stock
1/2 pound	Smoked bacon (cut into large chunks)
1	Bouquet garni (2 sprigs thyme, 1 bay leaf, stems from 4 sprigs parsley tied together with butcher's twine)
1	Sachet d'épices (4 juniper berries, 1 clove, 4 black peppercorns, 4 coriander seeds, tied in cheesecloth with butcher's twine)
	Salt and ground pepper to taste

method:

- In a large, heavy bottomed pot over medium heat, heat the duck fat. Add the sliced onion, carrot, and garlic cloves. Cook, stirring for about 5 minutes, or until soft. Add the Riesling, chicken stock, bacon, bouquet garni and sachet d'épices. Bring to a simmer, add sauerkraut, and mix well. Simmer for 30 minutes; serve hot.



PAN-FRIED MANGALICA PORK

RECIPE BY **LI MAN**, SENIOR EXECUTIVE CHEF, TUNG LOK SIGNATURES



ingredients: (Serves 4)

1kg	Mangalica Pork (2cm thickness)
100g	Japanese BBQ Marinade
50g	Sichuan Green Pepper Oil
2 cups	Water
100g	Knorr's Liquid Chilli Seasoning
100g	Honey
100 g	Corn Flour
Cooking Oil	

method:

- Marinate Mangalica Pork with Japanese marinade, Sichuan green pepper oil, water, chilli sauce and honey for $\frac{1}{2}$ hour.
- Coat marinated pork with corn flour.
- In a heated pan and add oil and pan fry the pork evenly on both sides.

