

VINTAGES

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A SWISS

CRITICS

outskirts of town. Both were behind his pleasant 1950s house.

The showroom looked like a garage that had been converted into a large, finished basement, with a linoleum floor, light paneling on the walls, and a door directly into the house. When we entered the room, I gasped. For there, along two adjoining walls, were a dozen gleaming, bright-red, completely restored Berkel slicers. Borini gazed at them with pride, I with hunger, and Joe, the collector, with an experienced, professional eye. One rare model was a prototype made in or for England, where the hams are larger than in Italy, and must be mechanically rotated into the blade to avoid doubling the size of the machine. Borini showed us how he removes dirt and paint with caustic soda and fills minor holes and dents with the same kind of compound you would find in an automobile body shop. He sends out other parts to be chrome plated, and the gold lettering and stripes are produced by a local graphics studio.

But which Berkel would I buy? I had three sources of information. First, Joe and I had driven around to his Manhattan restaurants; I took snapshots of all his Berkels, noting the model number in brass on each machine. Second, I borrowed a copy of Berkel's fiftieth-anniversary commemorative volume, published in 1948, from my friend Dave Arnold. And third, I had repeatedly visited the Web site of a firm in Parma where you can find pictures of 27 antique Berkel slicers dating from nearly the beginning of the twentieth century to the 1950s

MIRACLE CURES

Parma's pride, now made in America.

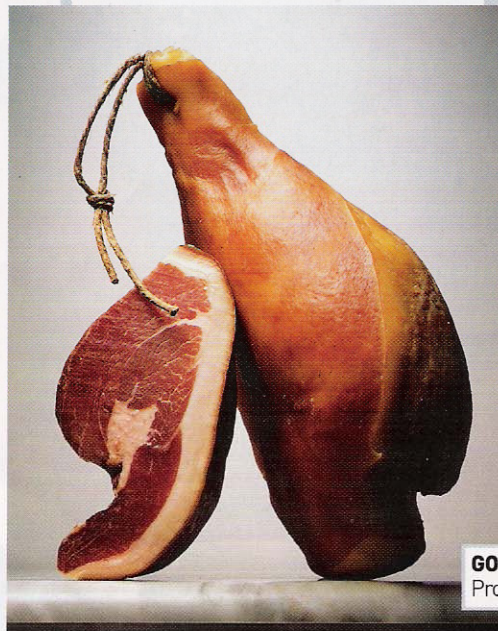
At a recent tasting of salted and dry-cured hams organized by my friend David Arnold, we sampled imported hams from Italy (prosciutto di Parma), Bayonne in France, Serrano ham from Spain (which does not include the sublime jamón ibérico), plus ten hams produced in the American South, three of which won hands down. (After all, some of

the finest Italian prosciutti are rarely imported into the U.S.) Some months later, I was sent a large chunk of ham dry-cured in the Italian style by an Iowa company called La Quercia. Sliced on a Berkel, it is the best domestically produced or imported prosciutto I've tasted. Here are the details:

La Quercia, Prosciutto Americano, Iowa: Sea-salt cured, then aged at least seven months generally following Italian methods. Some pigs are raised by the Organic Valley cooperative and others by "natural" producers; fed on corn and soybeans. La Quercia's organic prosciutto (specify when buying) is the only one available in this country. www.laquercia.us.

Colonel Newsom's, Kentucky: Salt-and-brown-sugar cured, then aged at least eleven months. Hickory smoked for several weeks. Duroc/Berkshire cross pigs; fed on corn, grasses, and nuts. www.newsomscountryham.com.

Peaceful Pastures, Tennessee: Salt-cured, then aged twelve months. Hickory smoked for two to three weeks. Tamworth pigs, fed on grass plus fallen hickory nuts, walnuts, and acorns. www.peacefulpastures.com.—**J.S.**



GOLDEN PIG

Prosciutto Americano from La Quercia.

many small, brilliant chrome-plated parts that make it look ornate, even though each one has an indispensable mechanical function. In reality, these are only my theoretical favorites because I have never touched or even seen one, except on the Web site of the Bottega del Restauro in Parma, where they cost

century. But the models 8 and 8H from the second quarter of the century were, as you can see in the photos, extremely beautiful, as well, and, I have read, represented a technological breakthrough whose function I cannot untangle as the explanation includes phrases such as "helicoidally