

Deconstructing a sausage

[Ontario Edition]

Toronto Star - Toronto, Ont.

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Date: Jun 11, 2003
Start Page: F.05
Section: FOOD
Text Word Count: 1194

Document Text

The South African boerewors trail leads, as these things do now, to a Slovenian-born butcher in Oakville.

Here, in a tidy butcher shop where the scent of ground coriander and cloves tickles the nose, Mario Goriup has been pumping out coil upon coil of his signature sausage since 1977.

Well, let's rephrase that to say he's been making his signature recipe for one of South Africa's most beloved foods- the spiced farmer's sausage that's affectionately called "boeries."

It's a stellar sausage. Spiced but not spicy. Dense with beef. Nearly greaseless. Mysterious. One fan insists that chutney is slipped into the mix for a hint of sweetness. Another thinks the deliciousness is in the way it's packed extra thick. It's so good that hiding it in a bun is a crime.

Goriup and his crew at Florence Meat Supplies are nonchalant about what they say is simply lean ground beef and spice encased in an animal intestine.

Have you ever really thought about how sausages are made? Come and watch.

"You see why the shop smells so nice?" says Goriup, holding a plastic bucket filled with a ground spice mix up to my nose. "I mix my own spice- it's my own recipe. Just pure spices."

A larger plastic tub is filled with beef bits that are trimmed before being put through the grinder/mixer with the spices. The well-mixed, spiced ground beef pours out as boerewors. It's packed, 20 kilos at a time, into the stuffer/filler.

Goriup dips his hand into a plastic bucket filled with water and pulls out a clammy white intestine. This one's pig, but it could be sheep or cow. He checks its length and fits one end over a tube attached to the stuffer/filler. It's like he's slipping a balloon on to a helium nozzle.

With a flip of a switch, about 30 pounds of boerewors mixture shoots out of the machine into the casing, which snakes across the counter. It's all over in a few seconds. The sausage is draped over stainless steel meat hooks for 10 minutes to drain, hung in a walk-in cooler for a day or two, and then cut into 1-pound lengths.

This sausage might end up in the butcher shop's meat showcase and snapped up by a customer for \$3.59 a pound. Or it could be frozen and shipped to a handful of shops around Toronto that stock South African food and sell the sausage for about \$4.99 a pound.

Some of its sibling sausages are destined for restaurants- Burger Hut, Bakerberry's and one branch of Licks Homeburgers- that serve boerewors on a bun.

So it seems most boerewors in these parts- except those made at Sausage King in St. Lawrence Market- trace back to Florence Meats.



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All Goriup remembers about his first taste of the spiced farmer's sausage is that it came shortly after he arrived in South Africa from Slovenia at age 24 and began butcher college.

"It was really good to me because I was hungry for meat. We never had meat in Europe- well maybe once a month- but there was no meat to buy every day like there is in Europe and North America."

South Africa was home for 17 years, but he made more Italian salami and prosciutto than boerewors. "It's not something that was special there- it was just like making hamburger here."

"A lot of our regular clients, who aren't South African, buy it for the fact it's different," confides Goriup's son Damian. "It's very difficult to find beef sausages- everybody does pork. This is a mild-flavoured sausage. It's not a greasy-spoon sausage. Even though it's a sausage, you can't throw just anything into it- you have to have standards."

Damian sniffs at the thought of butchers who buy spice blends and use water and wheat flour fillers in their sausages.

So how to cook boerewors? In South Africa it's grilled over charcoal at braais (barbecues). Twirl one long piece into a coil. Barbecue it on medium-high heat, in a skillet with a bit of water, or under the broiler. Don't grease the grill. Don't parboil the sausage. Don't overcook it- about five minutes a side should keep it nice and juicy. And don't you dare poke it with a fork. You can poke it with your finger, advises Mario. "If it's spongy, it's not done. If you get the firmness, it's done."

Slice it however you want. The type of bun (if any) that you use is inconsequential. To be truly South African, smother your boerewors with Mrs. H.S. Ball's Chutney (original, tomato, peach, chili, hot or extra hot)- a South African condiment that's even stocked by Loblaws.

Every savoury sausagefest should end on a sweet South African note.

Luckily, Goriup's son Tom bakes milktaarts, a milky custard pie with a hint of sugar, cooked in a flaked pastry shell and topped with cinnamon. And he makes koeksisters, braided, doughnut-style yeast dough that's deep-fried, cooled and then soaked in chilled sugar syrup.

His dad sells them. So does Andreas Orphanou at Baxter's Fine Foods in Toronto. But not Tom, who has made desserts under the Bakerberry's label for Pusateri's Fine Foods for 10 years, and runs Bakerberry's cafe and juice bar. But he does host a boerewors barbecue (with his dad's sausages) at lunch on Wednesdays and Thursdays at his Toronto cafe.

"After the first or second barbecue, the e-mails started flying and all of a sudden we were totally swamped and people were coming from all over," says Tom. "Boerewors are something that's more mainstream. That sausage is really a unique sausage and it really is good."

There's more than just patriotism and family loyalty speaking here. Have some boerewors- you'll see.

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