

FOOD & WINE

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Roasted turkey with
sausage stuffing—delicious
with California Zinfandel

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the *ultimate*
american cheese plate

The centerpiece of Bruce Aidells's kitchen is the giant island, where he can cook comfortably with his wife, Nancy Oakes.



A MEAT MASTER COOKS IN HIS DREAM KITCHEN

Bruce Aidells thinks big—which explains how he founded a sausage empire, and why he is obsessed with roasting large cuts of meat in his incredible new Sonoma kitchen.

BY KRISTIN DONNELLY PHOTOGRAPHS BY KELLER & KELLER



WHEN HE SOLD HIS Eponymous sausage company five years ago, Bruce Aidells began drawing up plans for his dream house: 3,500 square feet in Sonoma, inspired by the work of Greene & Greene, the renowned 20th-century American Arts and Crafts architects. Aidells's interest in custom-woodwork-heavy design is echoed in his new indoor and outdoor kitchens, which have intricately detailed fir cabinetry and gorgeous, naturalistic rock work. The new kitchens are where Aidells cooks his favorite big cuts of meat—like roasted leg of lamb and glazed bone-in ham—and experiments with artisanally cured meats he develops for clients, including purebred Duroc bacon for Iowa-based Vande Rose Farms, and country ham for the famous pastrami-maker David's Old World.

Aidells's architectural predilections conform to his Luddite approach to cooking. His latest obsession is roasting over a wood fire, both in his indoor hearth and outdoor pizza oven. When cooking in his hearth, he often uses a spit or a Tuscan grill set over burning logs. His outdoor pizza oven, encased in custom Greene & Greene-style rock work, is from Mugnaini Imports, the same company that made the oven for Los Angeles's Pizzeria Mozza. Indoors, Aidells also has a Montague commercial range and an oven from Fisher & Paykel; outdoors, there's a Viking gas grill with an infrared rotisserie. "You could say I have a lot of fire power," he says.

Being able to cook for a crowd and work comfortably with his wife, Nancy Oakes, the chef and owner of San Francisco's Boulevard restaurant, also drove the design of Aidells's indoor kitchen. He set up what he calls "the business side" of the island like a restaurant cooking line, with the range, oven and hearth arranged in a row. This leaves him plenty of room for his latest experiments, such as meaty brisket braised with sherry, tomatoes and olives, and an eight-pound rack of pork stuffed with spicy sausage and kale. For his glazed ham, Aidells relies on an all-American ingredient to create a super-crackly crust and sweet sauce: Dr Pepper.

But even with his new projects, Aidells hasn't totally given up on sausage, which has turned the image of his bearded face on the packaging into a national icon. In a separate guesthouse, he built a minimalist kitchen with stainless steel and butcher-block surfaces for sausage-making. Eventually, he wants to invite chefs and the local hunters who bring him wild boar and turkeys to stay and cure their own salami together. His vision of retirement? "I see myself as the guy in the rocking chair outside, giving the chefs and hunters recipes," he says.



RECIPE FILE

- 1 dr pepper-glazed ham with prunes
- 2 roasted rack of pork with sausage stuffing
- 3 butternut squash bread pudding
- 4 olive-crust leg of lamb
- 5 cauliflower pilaf
- 6 spanish-style braised beef brisket



Aidells specializes in wood-fired roasts, like olive-crust leg of lamb with cauliflower pilaf (recipes, pp. 252 and 254) and pork stuffed with sausage and kale (recipe, p. 250), opposite.

DECONSTRUCTING THE KITCHEN

- 1 POT RACK** Aidells replicated a "cloud lift" beam (an Asian-inspired arch) in Greene & Greene's famous Gamble House in Pasadena. Using meat hooks, he hangs his extensive collection of copper cookware from a rail mounted on the bottom (custom beam by Bertram/Blondina Handrail & Stair; 707-584-8485).
- 2 CABINETS** Custom Douglas-fir cabinetry offers a number of clever storage solutions, such as pull-out shelves for glassware and deep drawers for platters and lids (Creative Cabinets; 310-353-5772 or creativecabinets.com).
- 3 HEARTH** The custom-built hearth is lined with yellow firebrick, which can withstand ultrahigh temperatures (Bob Saling Masonry; 707-523-1523).
- 4 COPPER-COVERED HOOD** Metal artisan Joseph Mross of Archive Designs (541-607-6581; archive-designs.com) covered Thermador ventilation units (thermador.com) with hammered copper and forged-steel strips.
- 5 OVERSIZE ISLAND** At the kitchen's center is a custom 11-by-6-foot island with a butcher-block top. To fill dead space in the middle, Aidells's architect, Greg Klein of John Malick & Associates (510-595-8042; jmalick.com), added a raised platform that houses electrical outlets.
- 6 CONCRETE FLOOR** Stained an earthy walnut tone, the floor looks like wood but is fireproof and easier to maintain (Touchstone Architectural Cement; 707-838-2048 or touchstonecement.com).





Dr Pepper–Glazed Ham with Prunes

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 3 HR

12 SERVINGS

Most smoked hams are sold fully cooked, so “why bake them again?” Bruce Aidells asks, before answering his own question: to improve the texture and add a homemade glaze—in this case, one made with Dr Pepper soda and prunes—for extra flavor. After the ham is cooked, Aidells reduces the pan juices and tosses in prunes to make a sauce. “Glazes flavor only the outside of the ham,” he says. “But you can spoon pan sauces over every slice.”

One 10-pound, bone-in smoked ham, skin removed and fat trimmed to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch

- 3 cups Dr Pepper (not diet)
- 2 cups water
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pitted prunes
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup yellow mustard
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup light brown sugar
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons cornstarch mixed with 2 tablespoons of water

1. Preheat the oven to 325° and position a rack in the bottom third of the oven. Set the smoked ham in a large roasting pan. Score a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch-deep crosshatch pattern into the fat at 2-inch intervals. Pour 2 cups of the Dr Pepper and the 2 cups of water into the pan and roast the ham for about 2½ hours, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest part of the ham registers 120°. Increase the oven temperature to 425°.

2. Meanwhile, in a medium saucepan, simmer the prunes in the remaining 1 cup of Dr Pepper until they are plump and the liquid is slightly reduced, about 10 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the prunes to a small bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Whisk the mustard, brown sugar and vinegar into the liquid in the saucepan and boil until very thick and syrupy, about 5 minutes.

3. Drizzle the syrupy glaze over the ham and roast until glossy, 20 minutes. Carefully transfer the ham to a cutting board.

4. Pour the pan juices into the saucepan and spoon off the fat. Boil the sauce until reduced to 2 cups, 10 minutes. Whisk in the cornstarch slurry and the prunes and bring to a boil. Simmer the sauce until thickened, 2 minutes. Slice the ham and serve with the Dr Pepper sauce.

WINE The sweet, fruity Dr Pepper glaze on this juicy ham pairs best with an equally easygoing, fruity wine—Zinfandel, for instance. California’s Lodi region is an up-and-coming source for good Zinfandel, as shown in wines like the licorice-inflected 2005 7 Deadly Zins and the blueberry-fruity 2005 Ravenswood Lodi.

Roasted Rack of Pork with Sausage Stuffing

ACTIVE: 1 HR 15 MIN;

TOTAL: 3 HR 15 MIN

10 SERVINGS

Aidells stuffs this bone-in roast with sausage, mushrooms and kale, then spit-roasts the pork in the wood-fired hearth oven in his new kitchen. “It’s like one giant stuffed pork chop,” he says.

- 1 ounce dried porcini mushrooms (1 cup)
- 2 cups boiling water
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ pounds kale, stems and inner ribs discarded
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- $\frac{1}{2}$ pound hot Italian sausage, casings removed
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 large leek, white and tender green parts only, finely chopped
- 6 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped sage
- 1 cup dry, crustless sourdough bread, finely diced (2 ounces)
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese
- Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1 large egg, beaten
- One 9-rib, center-cut rack of pork, chine bone removed (8 pounds)
- 1 tablespoon sweet pimentón de la Vera (smoked Spanish paprika)

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