MAKIN' BACON

BACON is a pleasure so uncomplicated that there is no real rationale for resisting it. Bacon exists outside of shame, outside of consequence. **SMOKING** bacon at home is simple enough to be done with some regularity and yields dividends. If they should ever happen to meet up, the liquid smoke-flavored by-product from the grocery store will cower next to your **HOMEMADE** creation.

Ask your butcher to bone out a pork belly and leave the skin on. When you ask for one belly, you will be getting one side of a pig's belly, which can be up to ten pounds of meat. You can also ask for less. Three pounds is a nice chunk, enough to share some.

For the curing process, I prefer a dry rub, after which I let the belly sit for five to seven days in refrigeration. Below is a simple dry rub. Remember, this is called a rub, so be vigorous in its application. I encourage wild experimentation: add spice, heat, sweet, or tang. After curing in the dry rub, give the belly a good rinsing and let it dry in the fridge overnight before you smoke it. If you prefer pancetta, at this point, after rinsing you would skin it, roll it, tie it, and hang it out to dry. (See page 144.)



You can purchase a smoker for the next stage, or rig a homebrew contraption yourself pretty easily. If you create your own smoking device, use a roasting pan that you are no longer attached to. It should be large enough for your pork belly to lie stretched out, like Cleopatra. It should have a shelf in it that will separate the meat from the wood chips, like a roasting tray, a strainer, or chicken wire. The lid should fit tightly.

The wood shavings you use can be prebagged from a store or from any tree that grows something you find delicious or aromatic: almond, cherry, grapefruit, lilac, walnut. Look for hard wood and avoid sap. Soak the shavings in water for half an hour. Fill the bottom of your contraption with the shavings and turn the heat up high on the stove until the wood begins to smoke. Have a meat thermometer at the ready. I use the kind with a wire and remote reader, so I can keep the lid closed until it beeps. There is less chance of your kitchen smelling like bacon for days. Lay the belly on the shelf and close the lid. The temperature in this contraption should hover around 200°F. There will be smoke. Open a window, turn on a fan, and offer a generous waft to your neighbors. The bacon will be done when the internal temperature reaches 140°F. Let it cool in a civil manner, sitting on the stove. Or maybe in a turned-off oven, if you have a dog.

For one belly: ½ pound brown sugar; ⅓ pound salt; 2 teaspoons pink curing salt (see page 288); 1 teaspoon black pepper