

PURVEYORS: TORONTO

PASSIONATE ABOUT PIG

Mario Pingue's Guanciale is a Cure-All

As a child, being too young to work in the fields, Mario Pingue learned the tradition of curing meats from his grandfather.



It was only later in life as a restaurateur and owner of a catering business in Niagara Falls that he realized the true value of quality charcuterie. Now as a local purveyor of traditional Italian cured meats with his company Niagara Food Specialties, Mario Pingue focuses his attention on the artisan quality of the product he crafts.

At Scarpetta in Toronto, Chef Scott Conant uses Pingue's guanciale (jowl bacon) and pancetta mainly in the charcuterie plate, but he is starting to incorporate the product into a lot of other dishes. "It is such a wonderful product that it just begs to be put to good use," Conant says.

Pingue's passion for his products is obvious when he talks about cooking with it. "We love the unctuous texture and flavor of our guanciale when cooked. It pairs well with seafood, fowl, and beast alike. Duck fat takes a back seat to it. It is very clean up front, but something takes over the palate and leaves the mouth with an intense yet subtle and lingering finish." The *lonza*—or back loin—is aged with the back fat intact. "The team at Scarpetta uses the back fat, which is true *lardo*," Pingue continues. "It is butter, simple and clean, and provides a great palate for whatever

spice it will be teamed with, including salt. The lean *lomo* is then used for charcuterie."

Buying local has always been a priority to Chef Conant, but his choice to stay domestic with this particular product is quite interesting, given guanciale and other cured products are traditionally crafted in Italy. If you've had the best in Europe, one assumes you can only find the "local artisan" product there, but Pingue has proven the doubters wrong. "There is no compromise in our standards—from the husbandry of the animal we butcher, hand cutting every piece, spicing and traditional aging, and to selling only when it is time to eat, not merely when it's safe to eat. In the end, Scott and I share a commitment to quality."

Having watched the Toronto marketplace open up over the years, Pingue is excited for Scarpetta to flourish. "Toronto is a great food center. The consumers are discerning—they are open to new ideas, but only as a genuine interpretation, not a novelty. And from what I have seen in the back of the house, I am certain that Scarpetta will not disappoint!"

"You can meet a million people who are passionate about what they do, but not everyone can bring the kind of quality to the table that Mario Pingue does. He balances passion and quality better than anyone I have ever met. His cured meats have this residual depth of flavor that stays in your mouth. His guanciale is awesome! You put it on the slicer and when you taste it, it really just melts in your mouth. His products are just so deeply flavored and professionally done. I am very impressed."

—Scott Conant