

(continued from page 87) changed is that years ago there was a mule team that pulled pallets of ham to the second floor.”

Even though city hams are far more common, the long-cured country kind is what everyone in Smithfield seems to prefer. “You wouldn’t think to entertain without it,” Janice Scott, a 74-year-old home cook and caterer, told me over ham biscuits at the Smithfield Inn, a bed-and-breakfast and restaurant. When she doesn’t simmer and bake one of Smithfield’s hams, she says, she goes for a milder, dry-aged Edwards ham, cured 20 miles away, in Surry.

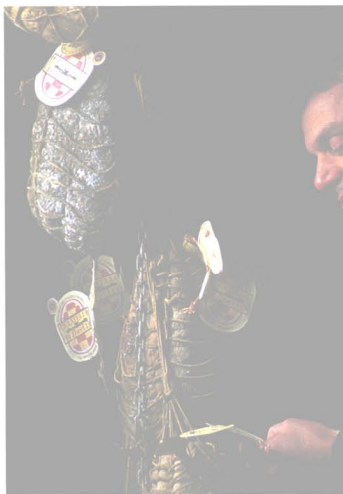
I’ve long been a fan of Edwards hams; they’re smoky and a bit sweet, with a salinity that tickles but doesn’t torch the tongue. When I visited the Edwards smokehouse and country store, the third-generation producer, a genial 53-year-old named Sam Edwards, served me his new release: a 16-to-24-month-aged ham, made from fatty Berkshire pigs; he suggests eating it raw. Called Surryano (a pun on *serrano* and *Surry*), it’s silky and intense, the perfect thing to wrap around a piece of melon—but that’s not how most people eat his long-aged hams.

Edwards took me across the James River on the nearby Surry-Jamestown ferry (which his great-grandfather used to own and operate), then over to the Old Chickahominy House, a restaurant in Williamsburg. Its owner, Maxine Williams, who’s worked there for 40 years, sells about 600 biscuits a day made with slices of cooked Edwards ham. Each of her rectangular buttermilk biscuits is a thing of beauty, enveloping slices of luscious ham and browned under the broiler before hitting the table. Williams let me into the kitchen just as one of her cooks, Tony Canaday, was beginning to maneuver his knife around the bones of a 14-pound Edwards ham, which had been simmering for four

hours. I asked whether she’d ever bought boneless ham. She shook her head. “Cooking it on the bone keeps it juicy.” Then I asked what she did with the scraps. “Ground ham!” she said, as if I should have known. “I sell a lot during the holidays for hors d’oeuvres.”

LIKE FOLKS FROM Smithfield, the people of Parma, a bustling city of 180,000 in Italy’s northern region of Emilia-Romagna, know ham: when I visited last fall, I was struck

country ham smoked, so sweeter, and Still, I visited producers and with similarly ham had developed here, halfway from Smith techniques to Parma: their covering of lard, and the open window



A producer near Parma, Italy, with *culatello*, made from the hind leg. Facing page, country ham biscuits. (See

by how everyone I met knew what producer they like the best, what length of curing suits their tastes, and how to make an outstanding ham sandwich—the local *torta frita* is a pillow of lightly fried dough stuffed with shaved prosciutto, whose creamy fat melts into the warm bread. Just south of Parma, particularly in the town of Langhirano, ham is big business. Some 200 producers cure about 9 million hams a year. Most of the hams they make aren’t cured in salt for as long as American

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Italians a *cotto*—a c ham—that boiled or b stuffed into tossed with draped over all dry-aged

THE PANTRY

A Guide to Resources

Ham

To buy **Smithfield hams** (see page 78), contact Smithfield (800/926-8448; www.smithfieldhams.com). To buy **Edwards hams**, contact S. Wallace Edwards & Sons (800/222-4267; www.virginiatradiations.com). Buy **speck** from Buon Italia (\$14.85 per pound; 212/633-9090; www.buonitalia.com), **culatello** from Salumeria Biellese (\$14.50 per pound; 212/736-7376; www.salumeriabiellese.com), **serrano ham** from Esposito's Meat Market (\$21.98 per pound; 212/279-3298), **country ham** from Smithfield or Edwards (see above), **spiral ham** from HoneyBaked Ham (\$33.95–\$113.95 for a quarter, half, or whole ham; 800/343-4267; www.honeybakedmailorder.com), **jambon de Paris** from Agata & Valentina (\$10.99 per pound; 212/452-0690; www.agatavalentina.com), **canned ham** from Schaul's Signature Gourmet Foods (\$42.95 for a 5-pound ham; 800/562-5660; www.schauls.com), **tasso ham**