

IT'S NOT BACON'S FAULT. JUST AS YOU CAN'T blame *The Big Lebowski* for its Dude-quoting, White Russian-drinking devotees, so you can't hold a humble slice of pork belly responsible for the fatuous cult that's sprung up around it. ¶

Not too long ago bacon was just bacon, the Great American Breakfast Meat—a fatty, crispy, salty/smoky/spicy piece of perfection. It was a culinary simpleton, and that was the appeal. ¶ Then it started going all Hollywood, or rather Michelin, on us, as chefs like Thomas Keller and Tom Colicchio discovered the virtues of cooking with bacon. Soon it was catapulted onto plates in fine restaurants around the country. “There is no ingredient quite like bacon,” says pork fiend chef David Chang of New York’s wildly successful Momofuku restaurants. And of course there’s no such thing as basic bacon anymore—you can

Lard Times

The only bad thing about the fattiest pork product is the cult of assholes who've made it their god.

scarcely find the Boar's Head or Oscar Mayer amid all the thick-cut and locally produced, small-batch varieties. ¶ To be sure, there are damn good reasons for bacon's ascendancy—in particular a high-, middle-, and lowbrow appeal rivaled only by those of pizza and the hamburger. But that's not enough to explain the recent spike in popularity—bacon sales have gone up 25 percent nationwide in the last three years, according to Mark Pastore, vice president of New York's Pat LaFrieda Wholesale Meats (which supplies restaurants such as Balthazar, The Spotted Pig, and Shake Shack)—and there's no accounting for the excesses of the current bacon mania. ¶ Suddenly, it seems, a serving of bacon delivers a deeper meaning. It's not the flavor so much as the fact that it gives you flavor. Eating it says, “There's more to me than my reusable Whole Foods bag—I'm not pretentious, I'm still fun-loving.” “Bacon isn't



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just another meat treat—it's an archetype and an icon, a totem and a fetish object," says Josh Ozersky, ardent carnivore and author of *Meat Me in Manhattan* and *The Hamburger*. "It's all things meat, concentrated down to one strip of cured pork, and that strip functions as a middle finger to extend towards all the health cranks, stroller moms, and progressive puritans who try to prevent men from doing what they want most. Bacon is a Thai brothel on an egg plate."

Right, and if looking to validate your manhood via sex tourism seems sad, then what about doing it via skillet? The unfortunate reality is that this isn't where the baconian exuberance ends. It extends to an almost limitless supply of curiosities, like vodka, cupcakes, mints, and lip balm. There are other ways to broadcast your affection for the victual too: Tiaras and bras made of the meat. Tattoos. Pendants. Bandages. Mr. Bacon action figures (packaged with archnemesis Tofu). And it goes on. Call it the Bacon Explosion—to borrow the name of the popular 5,000-calorie barbecued-bacon-brick recipe that came about thanks to a dare sent out on Twitter and became an Internet phenomenon last winter. Good old bacon—so Web 2.0.

The effect goes beyond our arteries and



our in-boxes and into our social dynamics. Time was when you could refrain from ordering bacon without tablemates looking at you like you had three eyes. Or serve bacon without your guests asking, suspiciously, whether it was big-batch or local, slow-smoked or sugar-glazed. Most likely, those guests have a top-shelf side or two of their own at home: Sales of artisanal bacon, the

small-batch, smoked stuff, have risen 42 percent since 2007, Pastore reports.

Chefs couldn't be happier about this feeding frenzy. At Ron Silver's brunch spot Bubby's, which has locations in Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Japan, sales of bacon are up 30 percent this year—recession (and swine-flu scare) be damned. Silver calls the meat "a gateway drug for vegetarians."

To addicts—you know who you are—bacon is a way of life. On waking, it's as necessary as a good shower; at lunch, it's an indulgence that, unlike a rub-and-tug, you can share; at dinner, it's meal and nightcap in one. And late at night, an after-hours plate is like closing the deal. Think that's a bit much? Without irony, Dan Philips, founder of the Grateful Palate Bacon of the Month Club, gushes, "There really is no bad bacon. Like sex, even when it's bad it's good." And when the Bacon Salt Blog, run by the duo behind the bacon-product company J&D's, posted an April Fool's Day call for "baconlube" beta testers, 1,000 eager applicants responded.

No, it's not a problem to love bacon, or even to wear that love on your sleeve. But when you're willing to *make love to bacon*—or you insist on wearing it as your sleeve—you are definitely high on the hog. ■

Strip Search

SOME THINK EVERYTHING IS IMPROVED BY THE ADDITION OF BACON'S FLAVOR, SCENT, OR MARBLED APPEARANCE. HERE, A FEW OF THE MOST EGREGIOUS EXAMPLES.



- 1 Skateboard
- 2 Mints
- 3 Vodka
- 4 Scarf
- 5 Alarm clock
- 6 Dental floss
- 7 Mayonnaise
- 8 Water
- 9 Soap

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