

The IMPROPER BOSTONIAN

Celebrating 20 Years

October 19–November 1, 2011

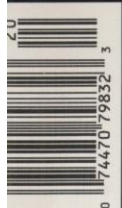
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Dining { J. CHARLES MOKRISKI }

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The Salty Pig

130 Dartmouth St., Boston
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PORCINE LANGUAGE Choose from a variety of charcuterie options.

ON THE CHINESE CALENDAR, the next year of the pig isn't until 2019. For Bostonian diners, Babe's time in the spotlight has already come (and gone, some might say). An urge to dine on swine has overtaken the foodie sect, and area restaurants have obliged, providing pork belly in every conceivable form and flavor. The folks behind the Salty Pig have gone whole hog into the trend.

The eatery's space, which has housed a number of fairly short-lived restaurants, holds a soupçon of whimsy, with chalk doodles on massive black buttresses and *Far Side* cartoons wallpapering the restroom. Behind the bar stands an open kitchen. The sight of busy cooks and the sensation of heat emanating from the pizza oven will help any patron work up an appetite.

Nearly a dozen varieties of charcuterie beckon from the top of the Pig's menu. Over three visits, I crisscrossed the list, returning to favorites, trying additions and lamenting options that had disappeared. The best choices included Massachusetts' own SP Kitchen mortadellina (\$4), an exquisite blend of minced pork and garlic embedded with delicate rounds of fat and a generous

quantity of pistachios. Sadly, on a subsequent visit it had been ousted by a more ordinary, far less tasty mortadella from Bologna, Italy. But a second addition, Benton's 24-month-pasteurized baked ham (\$4)—silky in texture, sweet and savory—more than compensated for the mortadellina's departure. Other selections included a full-flavored Berkshire pork pâté (\$4), a tender, smoky speck (\$4) from the Alto Adige, fiery soppressata (\$3) from Campania and two standouts from Iowa's La Quercia: a rich jamón serrano (\$5) and a tantalizingly spiced coppa picante (\$4). Crunchy, mildly sweet house-made pickles provided a pleasant texture and flavor contrast.

It's disheartening that the rest of the menu struggles to reach the level of the charcuterie. Three meatballs (\$12) stayed on message, combining flavor and moist consistency in a garlicky tomato sauce. But the burrata appetizer (\$10), a tiny serving topped with two quarters of an heirloom tomato, disappointed and wasn't improved by a garnish of compressed watermelon and basil-fennel oil. While a sopressata pizza (\$11) hit the spot with a crisp crust and a delicious topping of basil, tomato and creamy mozzarella, the clam pizza (\$13) missed the mark, its few fragments of shellfish buried under a jungle