

# Creative chefs introduce new sausage flavors

Kristine M. Kierzek, Special to the Journal Sentinel 11:01 p.m. CDT August 18, 2016



(Photo: Michael Sears / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Look back a generation, and you'll see that Milwaukeeans have always made room on their plates for familiar, traditional sausages: bratwurst, Italian, Polish, even chorizo.

Thanks to millennial tastes and creative chefs, the sausage world here has been changing. Flavor varieties and options in both fresh and smoked links have been growing ever more adventurous. If you can put it on a burger, it probably will work in a

sausage.

Wisconsin produces some of the most well-known sausages in the country, with [Usinger's](#) a staple for more than a century, [Klement's](#) marking its 60th anniversary in Bay View, and [Johnsonville](#) in Sheboygan selling tons of bratwurst in Wisconsin.

Add chefs, butchers and sausage-makers from around the state, and you have a new evolution of flavors hitting the grill.

"Around the world there are five categories of sausages, and thousands of types in those categories," said Jeff Sindelar, associate professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and a University of Wisconsin Extension meat specialist. "Many are regional. Then there are the ones that don't fit in a category."

"Sausage is by definition a product that is ground then put into some type of casing or something to hold its shape before it is sold to a consumer or further processed by cooking or smoking," said Sindelar.

"But it is common nowadays to see deconstructed sausages, ground chorizo, ground Italian sausage, some patty forms. We're crossing the boundaries of what some of these products are traditionally seen as. You're seeing products that are just very creative and inspired by other foods."

"Sausage is about saving and savoring every last bit of meat," said Chris Ying, the editor-in-chief and co-founder of [Lucky Peach](#) magazine, which launched a new series of cookbooks earlier this year with "The Wurst of Lucky Peach: A Treasury of Encased Meats" (Clarkson Potter, \$35). "It is, at its heart, a preservation technique that we have perfected into delicious bites of encased meat."

"In America, I think we are largely informed by the German/Western European idea of sausage, and I think Americans aren't yet used to seeing fermented sausages or seafood sausages."

While classics always have a place at the table — Usinger's has used the same recipes since 1880 for a reason — consumers are increasingly able to find creative and worldly flavors locally.



Owner Yollande Deacon of Irie Zulu in Wauwatosa holds two favorite sausage dishes prepared at her restaurant. On the left is the plantain jerk sausage canape with onions sauce and Martha Pimento and cheese. On the right is a combo platter of sausages with grilled sausage, unscrewed appetizer with jerk and Ethiopian cherry tomato and plantains. (Photo: Angela Peterson / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

Yollande Deacon makes and sells seven styles of African and Jamaican sausages, including a South African Boerewors. All are available at her restaurant, [Irie Zulu](#) in Wauwatosa, and several styles are also available at Sendik's in Whitefish Bay.

Butcher [Matthew Devan](#), a South African native, also makes Boerewors sausage in brat size and breakfast links for his [SA Braai](#) label.

In Riverwest, chef Rosy Rodriguez makes morcilla, a Puerto Rican Christmas favorite and puts it on the everyday menu at [Company Brewing](#).

At [Bavette La Boucherie](#), lamb merguez and kimchi brats are regular options. You'll find sour sausage on the menu at [DanDan](#), [Thai Bangkok's](#) (9112 W. Brown Deer Road) Hmong sausage with ginger has fans, and Filipino longganisa crops up as a special occasionally at the [Meat on the Street](#) food truck.

Vegetarian and vegan sausage options are even growing. Consider Bay View's Vanguard, where vegan sausage isn't just an afterthought but a menu mainstay.

You're also seeing an increasing consumer interest in chicken sausages. [Gilbert's Craft Sausages](#), made in Denmark, Wis., produces varieties of chicken sausages that go beyond the everyday. Think chicken kale, caprese with mozzarella or bourbon and buffalo flavors.

"My personal favorite is our new Aloha chicken sausage, made with pineapple, coconut, ginger and brown sugar," said Chris G. Salm, co-founder and CEO of Gilbert's. Available in eight to 10 flavor varieties per year, Gilbert's this year was named the official chicken sausage at Chicago's Wrigley Field.

John Hudoc of [Hometown Sausage Kitchen](#) in East Troy, where they produce more than 45 varieties of smoked and fresh poultry and pork sausages, also has found consumers more adventurous.



Hometown Sausage Kitchen owner John Hudoc breaks down hogs to get the cuts of meat he needs. (Photo: Michael Sears / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

“We’re doing many more creative-based poultry sausages,” said Hudoc, who works with the Spice House to create seasoning blends and who takes cues from restaurants and chefs who order from them.

“We eat sausage every day here,” he added. “We make the chorizo for Colectivo. We do a Thai chicken sausage I like a lot. But my new favorite one is a wild rice and blue cheese. We met a lady from the Chippewa tribe up north, and we picked up all this wild rice from her.”

[Dean Rindahl](#), the head sausage-maker at [Fox Brothers Piggly Wiggly](#), has been making sausages since 1994.

“People get tired of the same thing; they’re always looking for something different,” said Rindahl. “Flavored brats are real popular right now, and we make a little over 30 different kinds. At least seven or eight varieties right now are chicken — a chicken Philly, marinara, our bestseller is Southwestern fiesta.



A combo platter from Irie Zulu contains grilled sausage with jerk and Ethiopian sauce, unscrewed appetizer jerk and Ethiopian jerk, cherry tomatoes and plantains. (Photo: Angela Peterson / Milwaukee Journal Sentinel)

"I made a precooked chicken nacho brat with jalapeños and cheddar cheese — that one's pretty good," he continued. "I think in the last two months we've sold 8,000 pounds of chicken brats. In July we were making just over a ton a day of precooked and fresh brats."

Ron Schroder, a senior brand manager for grilling at Johnsonville, can talk bratwurst all day long. Much of his work is spent studying sausage trends and listening to consumers.

"Brats are central to grilling, and that's the primary product line I manage, and where we've been doing most of our flavor activity," said Schroder, noting they sell more bratwurst in Wisconsin than anywhere else in the country. It takes three to six months for Johnsonville to introduce a new flavor.

"We know millennials are flavor seekers, and they're looking for flavors from around the world and in new places like Africa, and southeast Asian flavors, maybe some Thai and Indian flavors, but they can get very specific to regions," said Schroder. "Another example of a flavor that has caught on is harissa. That is a flavor from a region, and it is becoming more of a mainstream."

New flavors are introduced regionally for a limited time each year, and in Wisconsin, varieties include cheddar bacon, the firecracker (spicy), buffalo blue, jalapeño and cheddar, chipotle, and Monterey jack.

"One of our other successful ones has been hatch green chile," Schroder said. That one isn't available in Wisconsin, but after its introduction in areas of New Mexico and Arizona the company has unexpectedly found interest growing in other regions.

"Buffalo blue is one of the popular flavors on burgers in recent years. If it is popular on a burger, it will usually play well in sausages."

## 5 special sausage recipes



Gilbert's Aloha chicken sausage is the basis of the Aloha Stadium Dog. (Photo: Gilbert's Craft Sausages)

[Aloha Stadium Dog](#)





This skillet dish uses a gluten-free Polish sausage. (Photo: Klement's Sausages)

#### Polish Sausage and Peppers



Jamaican Jerk Sausage with Joloff Sauce (Photo: Kristine M. Kierzek)

#### Jamaican Jerk Sausage with Joloff Sauce



Grill-Braised Chorizo with Poblano Chile, Cilantro & Lime (Photo: Kristine M. Kierzek)

[Grill-Braised Chorizo with Poblano Chile, Cilantro and Lime](#)



Simmering brats in beer with onions is a classic preparation in Wisconsin. (Photo: Nancy Stohs)

[Green Bay Brats](#)