

# A California Partnership

*Tim Winkler - Winkler Woolly Pigs*  
*Tony Incontro - Incontro Cured*



*By Wilhelm W. Kohl*

*Design Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche*





*A* first phone call from Tim Winkler on December 26, 2010 has led to a long term friendship. The call was about buying some Blonde Mangalitsas, and Tim decided to buy one on the spot. The name of that particular pig, ear mark Yellow No. 1, was Molly, and she was the first Blonde Mangalitsa to ever arrive in California, after landing in San Francisco from Detroit on April 25, 2011.

She was quickly followed by two boars on June 20 the same year, Red No. 8, nicknamed Fabio, a Pavel offspring, and Blue No. 1, appropriately named Clooney, a Pedro sired boar.

What lucky animals they were. Taking an airplane trip to beautiful California wine country, all expenses paid, flight, transportation, lodging and food by their host. Talk about spending the rest of their lives in the land of milk and honey, maybe with a glass of good wine for desert. Tim's place certainly is in wine country, with a climate similar to southern Italy or central Spain of "Dehesa" pig rearing fame.



- *Molly* -

*The* Dehesa, a type of agroforestry used as natural environment for masting Iberico pigs, is very similar to several of the areas Tim is lucky enough to have available as well.

And the oaks that produce the standard fare for the famous “Pata Negra” hams, with the “jamón ibérico de bellota”, the ham from acorns, representing the most superior quality, are very similar in California.

I visited Tim for the first time in July that same year together with my son Jason, then a graduate student at the film school at UCLA, and certainly will never forget that visit. When we arrived at the farm together, approaching Tim’s house after not making enough noise to even alert his guard dog, we noticed a blonde pig darting out of his garage. It was Molly, who had made fast friends with Tim’s German Shepherd, and had been snacking together with him on the dog food in Tim’s garage. Talk about pigs being smart. By the time we got around the house to the pig pens, she was back in hers, sheepishly looking at us. She probably was thinking –o.k., you caught me, but I am soooooo cute, and you already knew what is going on anyway.

Tim had also acquired some Swallow Belly Mangalitsa pigs from another breeder, and had just had his first litter, with another litter arriving during our visit. At that point, Tim was the proverbial “backyard” farmer, and a funny one at that. He had named the 2 sows “Lustig” (German for funny) and “Launig” (German for moody) based on their behavior since arriving on his farm.

But Tim had big plans, and he certainly put his ideas to work rather quickly. Another purchase from us brought four additional Blondes to California on September 21, 2011, completing Tim’s acquisition of all he breeding material available from our original import of Blonde Mangalitsas. (H-21 (Helga/Pavel), R-16 (Rhonda/Pavel) & L-17 (Laurie/Pedro)







*So* it was not surprising to find a completely different operation the 2<sup>nd</sup> time I visited Tim in Windsor, together with my business partner at the time, Marc Santucci, on January 19 & 20, 2014. Talk about finding an expanding a business.....

The way Tim got into the pigs is through his aquatic contracting business, because he has spent most of his life trying to improve aquatic environments the natural way. He has worked extensively on means of natural filtration, designing ecologically and biologically balanced environments, ranging from fish pond to natural swimming pools. These chlorine free swimming pools, while quite popular in Europe, (my sister has one at her summer home in the Austrian country side) are really something still quite rare in California, und even rarer in the rest of country.

When researching more environmentally friendly ways to eradicate invasive weeds, which are very hard to deal with, even when chemicals are freely used, Tim discovered that pigs love water. Mangalitsas are virtual vacuum cleaners for weeds, quickly clearing overgrown ponds quite effectively. So they serve a dual purpose under Tim's management. Producing some of the most flavorful meat at the same time as working hard restoring some beautiful natural environment.

For Tim, whose herd of pigs has grown to around 450 animals in less than five years, it has meant a complete change in careers. From aquascapist to virtually full time pig breeder, supplying some of the best known restaurants in California.

But while supplying great restaurants like the famous "French Laundry" in Yountville, California, or the Meadow Wood Resort in Napa Valley, Tim has spent more and more time recently working on establishing a bigger and bigger genetic base for the breed. Tim visited my farm for the first time in the summer of 2013 for the initial Mangalitsa Breeders Conference, and whole heartedly agreed with us that additional blood lines were needed from Europe.





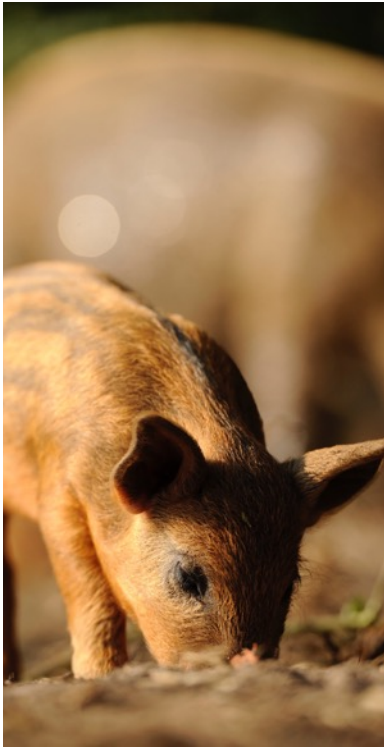
*T*wo years later, when Tim visited us in Michigan again for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Mangalitsa Breeders meeting, he already had several litters of the new blood lines on the ground. These had come from our 2014 import from Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche in the Netherlands, and had arrived in November of 2014.

Tim had bought just about all the available breeding lines of Swallow Belly Mangalitsas since 2011, but had been unable to get any Red ones from the initial import by Auburn University & Mosefund Farms in 2010. He was quite anxious to get some to California, and in slightly more than a year after his visit, the pigs were on the way.

It was in October 2014, when we imported an additional 18 breeding pigs from Europe, the now widely distributed first Hungarian blood lines. Out of these 18 pigs in that shipment, 10 were Red Mangalitsas, and 8 of these Red Mangalitsas went directly via air from the USDA quarantine facility in New York to Tim in California. Same was true for the 3<sup>rd</sup> import organized by me, just before I sold my interest in Pure Mangalitsa LLC.











*I*n May 2016 a total of 2 more Reds and the first Swallow Bellies imported since 2010, went directly to Tim in California. Not by air this time, but by truck, as the size of the pigs was too large already for regular air shipment. These pigs certainly were well travelled, from Amsterdam to New York by air, and then roughly 3,000 additional miles across the entire USA another 30 days later.

Tim certainly has put all the pigs, raised in the very outdoor pig friendly climate of California, to excellent use. Over the last 4 years, a lot of breeding stock has been shipped from his farms in Windsor all over the USA, and some to Canada as well. Breeding pigs from his farm have taken long trips, gone all the way back across the continent from California as far as Virginia, back to Michigan, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Texas and many other places. He has great pride in his breeding operation, and knows as much about his pigs as anybody in the business. Going back to producing only pure bred Mangalitsas, after experimenting with different crosses, he now is one of the premier sources of breeding pigs in the USA. Nobody has sold more breeding pigs in the USA than Tim.

I had the pleasure of visiting Tim again in February of 2015, this time together with Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche, meeting up with Steven Zwick (see articles under LA Chefs' Suppliers) at Tim's home farm. It was quite a sight watching Barbara identifying the Reds, many of which seemed to remember her from their days in her quarantine facility in the Netherlands. The pigs had adapted to the California weather quite well, and Tim was getting ready to breed them for the first time. We also met up with Heather Irvin, staff writer for Sonoma Magazine, then working on an article about Tim's farm. Her article was promptly published on October 7, 2015 and has only added some more fire to Tim's reputation as one of the premium suppliers of Mangalitsa pork.



*N*apa Valley of course is one of the greatest destinations for foodies and wine lovers in America, and the reputation of its grapes, and the ever growing number of wineries, are world renowned. No wonder then that “Foodies” just swoon over their cured Mangalitsa products, including hams, cured for no less than 30 month. No better hams are produced in Spain or Italy, but the quantity of course is quite limited. You might just have to join their wine club to enjoy it.

Tony Incontro, formerly head salumist and sous chef at Del Dotto Winery, now working on his own dream, is responsible for these delicacies.

It has always been Tony’s dream to start his own label, revolving 100% around pure Mangalitsa! So he recently ventured with the Offenbach family behind Golden Gate Meat Co., producing under the USDA eyes, creating true small batches of truly great charcuterie. Butchering whole animals from start to finish, he is now exclusively using Tim’s animals.





*H*eavily influenced by his fellow artisans in southwestern Spain, where the Iberico pig, very similar to the Mangalitsa, is the king of charcuterie, he makes similar styled products. He without question is a rising star in the world of cured pork. I call him Tim Winkler's secret weapon, and if you ever get to taste some of his salumi, from salami to culatello, about 15 versions in total, you will know what I am talking about. I knew from the first time I met Tony back in 2011 that his skills and devotion as a salumist were special.

His moto is: *"Pig, salt & patience."*

When you salt a ham and then watch it cure for 30 month without knowing for certain how it will turn out, you know what patience means. Fortunately, his experience, a lot of it by trial and error, has led to creating some of the greatest charcuterie I have ever tasted.



Tony, of Sicilian and Calabrian heritage, who hails from Omaha, Nebraska, has been involved and infatuated with salumi since he was 8 years old. My notes from our first meeting show that the whole family, from grandfather, father, brother and him, butchered pork together in their garage, turning it into all types of Italian style charcuterie. He does not remember how old he was when he finally got to use the knife, but it seems he has had it in his hands ever since.





*W*atching Tony slice into a pig carcass is an experience many people have not had in person like me, they have to watch on Youtube, but I can assure you, anybody will quickly recognize his tremendous expertise. He can seam out a Mangalitsa like few others, with a speed and efficiency that takes many years to acquire.

It is Mangalitsas that are the pig of choice for Tony's salumi. He loves the Mangalitsa fat, and the intensive marbling and red color of its meat. Tony insists "*It is the fat that is the key to great salumi*", and he has been a fan of the breed ever since 2009, when he cut into one for the first time at a restaurant in San Francisco. He immediately fell in love with the beautiful, soft, silk like and pure white fat – cured into the famous "Lardo" – and now one of his specialties. Lardo, the cured white backfat of the pig, has only recently been introduced to the American pallet, and Tony has worked on his style and formula for the last 10 years.



*Tony's motto is: "Pig, salt & patience."*





*T*aking bricks of the pure white fat, he submerges it in a natural brine made simply out of coarse salt, garlic, black peppercorn and sometimes other spices, and lets it cure in large, very dark containers. His style is based on Colonnata style of curing, practiced in the small city located in the Apuan Alps, and claimed to be the best lardo in the world. Produced there since ancient times, it combines the use of the white marble of the region, as curing basins, and the locally produced pork. The aging occurs naturally over a period of at least 6 month, and does not require any additional additives or preservatives.

Tony simply believes that paying attention to past traditions of his preparation and many other salumi varieties, are the very key to making beautiful, elegant and simple cured products. “Don’t try to get fancy and start trying to recreate the wheel that has been turning for a thousand years. Let the animal’s beautiful attributes speak for themselves. To me, this craft and definitely my style is about showcasing the animal’s fullest potential through slowly fermenting, drying and concentrating the flavor to the max. My hams will age no less than 24 month in a Spanish inspired Bodega de Jamon”.



The results of Tony’s experimenting are providing happy customers with out of this world experiences in flavor and texture, and he is gaining quite a reputation for his products among his fellow salumists and food and wine enthusiasts. To name a few, The French Laundry showcased his products at their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. The restaurant at Meadowood Resort uses his lardo, and world renowned wine critic Robert Parker Jr. periodically requests that Tony send his choice of cures directly to his residence in Maryland. It’s usually a whole bone-in Mangalitsa ham.





*"Only the best is good enough for our discriminating customers !"*





*W*ith Tim's pigs just down the road on open pasture, he is in the lucky position to receive great, consistent quality Mangalitsa pork from a local source. Starting with a great flavor profile, Tony can work his magic, turning great pork into incredibly tasting salumi. Tony has shown great respect and undeterred interest in Tim Winkler's Mangalitsa farm, and for that matter, the Mangalitsa pig in general. More than anybody else in this country, to my knowledge anyway, he has been a true advocate for this breed and its place in the charcuterie world.

His Mangalitsa hams, cured for 30 month, certainly are equals, if not superior, to any of the better known Spanish Mangalitsa hams. Any of us that have had the fortitude to taste one, certainly are excited of Tony increasing his production in the near future.

Tim certainly has not stopped in his efforts to further promote the Mangalitsa pig. Just a few days ago, Tim bought all the remaining, original Blonde boar lines imported from Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche in 2016.

They have arrived safely in California as of the publication of this article, and certainly will provide a great base for quality animals for breeders all over the US and Canada. Some of them might even go to much more distant places, like Japan for example, as the occurrence of ASFV (African Swine Fever) in Hungary will make further exports of breeding lines from there impossible for the foreseeable future.

Will be exciting to follow Tim and Tony's efforts – wishing them the best of luck.





*Picture credit for this publication:*

*Tony Incontro*

*Tim Winkler*

*Michael Woolsey Photography*

*Barbara Meyer zu Altenschildesche*

*Sonoma Magazine*

*Additional links:*

*<https://lacheftnet.wordpress.com/2016/07/04/la-chefs-suppliers-winkler-wooly-pigs/>*

*<https://www.sonomamag.com/mangalitsa-pigs-big-size-business/>*





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