

CUSTOMIZED CULINARY SOLUTIONS™

# THE RUBBER BAND DOOR KNOB

December 3, 2014



What can you get from CCS? Improved culinary operations, expert culinary knowledge, industry connections, networking through many culinary and food affiliations, an on-call mentor, a diverse culinary background and [more](#).



## Which Came First, the Apple or the Fruit Cake?

I have been fortunate enough to have had the opportunity to travel around the world and visit many countries. In several trips, including my last one to Germany and Luxembourg, that travel time has landed in the weeks leading up to Christmas. After seeing how other countries transition during the holidays, I think the rest of the world has an easier time going from fall into the holiday season. As soon as late November rolls around, non-Americans are right into the holiday spirit and already thinking about the ritual of gift giving. They don't have Thanksgiving in the middle to throw them off. We're kind of headed in that direction, though.

Our mega retailers don't even worry about the grand American Thanksgiving holiday anymore. They would start promoting Christmas in September if they could.

Our Thanksgiving has become a short push, normally focusing around two to three days for family and friends and sharing a meal. The holiday itself is based on the emotional history of sharing food from the harvest and giving thanks for what has been stored for the long winters. It is a great time of year and one of my favorite meals. Food plays a tremendous part of the day. It is usually a meal of overindulgence and excess designed for creating leftovers for a later time. Our Christmas dinners function in much the same way (though with less of an emphasis on turkey and stuffing). For other countries, however, food at Christmas means something almost entirely different. For many cultures food is symbolic and is given as a gift verses being just a ritual function of the day.

Take this story, for example. My son and I were walking

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Check out this great magazine, [Four](#).



Eater is the source for people who care about dining and drinking in the nation's most important food cities, like Chicago. A favorite of industry pros and amateurs alike, Eater has an uncanny knack for finding out what's opening where, who's serving what, and how it's all going down. Find out [what's new](#) in Chicago.

through the Christmas market in Frankfurt, Germany. It was late afternoon, the sun was setting and the streets became magical with strands of lights, red ribbons and delicious smells from the food stalls. We enjoyed Glühwein (a German mulled wine) and fresh pomme frites as well as the aromas of warm roasted nuts of all sorts of varieties and flavors. This was a great experience for us, but this is not the food memory I took to heart. In the stores and shops, there were gifts comprised entirely of food. There were chocolate Santas, marzipan animals, Stollen, beautiful jars of pate de foie gras and trays of impeccably sliced Bundnerfleisch and cured hams. When I was in Japan, the scene was the same (but to a completely different degree). There, customers would spend hundreds of Yen for a flawless apple, orange or Asian pear perfectly nested in a designer box and wrapped like a newborn child. I remember cakes and cookies treated with the same elegant and delicate touch. For the Japanese, the gift of a perfect piece of fruit or assorted pastries is seen as extremely thoughtful.

We in America, though, are stuck with the stigma of the fruitcake. It's become a poor, beaten up joke with the reputation of dislike and an almost comedic persona. What is wrong with the gift of fruitcake? Nature can give us the perfect apple, but how much thought goes into the making of a cake? Have we succumbed to the box on the shelf of mass produced Stollen, Panettone or mail order fruitcake? I can still see the Hickory Farm stores and now the Harry and David's of the world where a gift basket made in June is a substitution for "I am in the shit, and don't have time to make something for my friends." Your friends deserve better.

So think about these traditions this year, and instead of sitting around the computer screen, scrolling through the pages of stuff online, jump into the kitchen and make something. Over the years I have personally made and hand packed sausages, pates and charcuterie gifts for my friends and clients. It is a labor of love for me and I get a lot of satisfaction out of making something from the heart. As chefs, we have the ability to make things that can be savored and enjoyed in the moment. How many emotional memories do you have from the gift card you received? These food experiences may be short-lived by those who consume them, but that experience can also linger and give you a true sense of holiday spirit.

Remember, it is about the giving and not the receiving. Chefs can make things that most average home cooks wouldn't think about doing. There are plenty of products out there that can help you with this, including home vacuum sealing systems, canning products and dehydrators to let you produce a whole line of products. The options are what you make of them.

Here are few suggestions:

## BUNDNERFLEISCH

Try this **Bundnerfleisch**, also known as **Bresola**.



- Infused olive oils and vinegars
- Pre-measured baking kits with instructions
- Custom spice rubs
- Infused bitters and aromatics such as simple syrups for the bar
- Infused vodkas
- Some of your home brews
- Preserved and jarred fruits as ice cream toppings
- Seasonal granola

## CHRISTMAS ALES WORTH DRINKING

**Three Floyds Alpha Klaus**



**Revolution Brewing  
Fistmas Ale**



**Great Lakes Christmas Ale**

There are plenty more ideas that you can come up with. If you think of to whom you want to give these gifts, you can personalize your gifts for those individuals. It is this thought process, the one in which you are really thinking about the receiver of the gift, that makes it special. The creating of something perfect based on someone else's tastes is the hallmark of our craft. By the way, I would rather be in my kitchen cooking and having a pint of seasonal Christmas ale than fighting the masses, looking for parking spaces and waiting in line. So think before you shop, and happy holidays.



- Chef John Reed, CEC, CCA, ACE



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