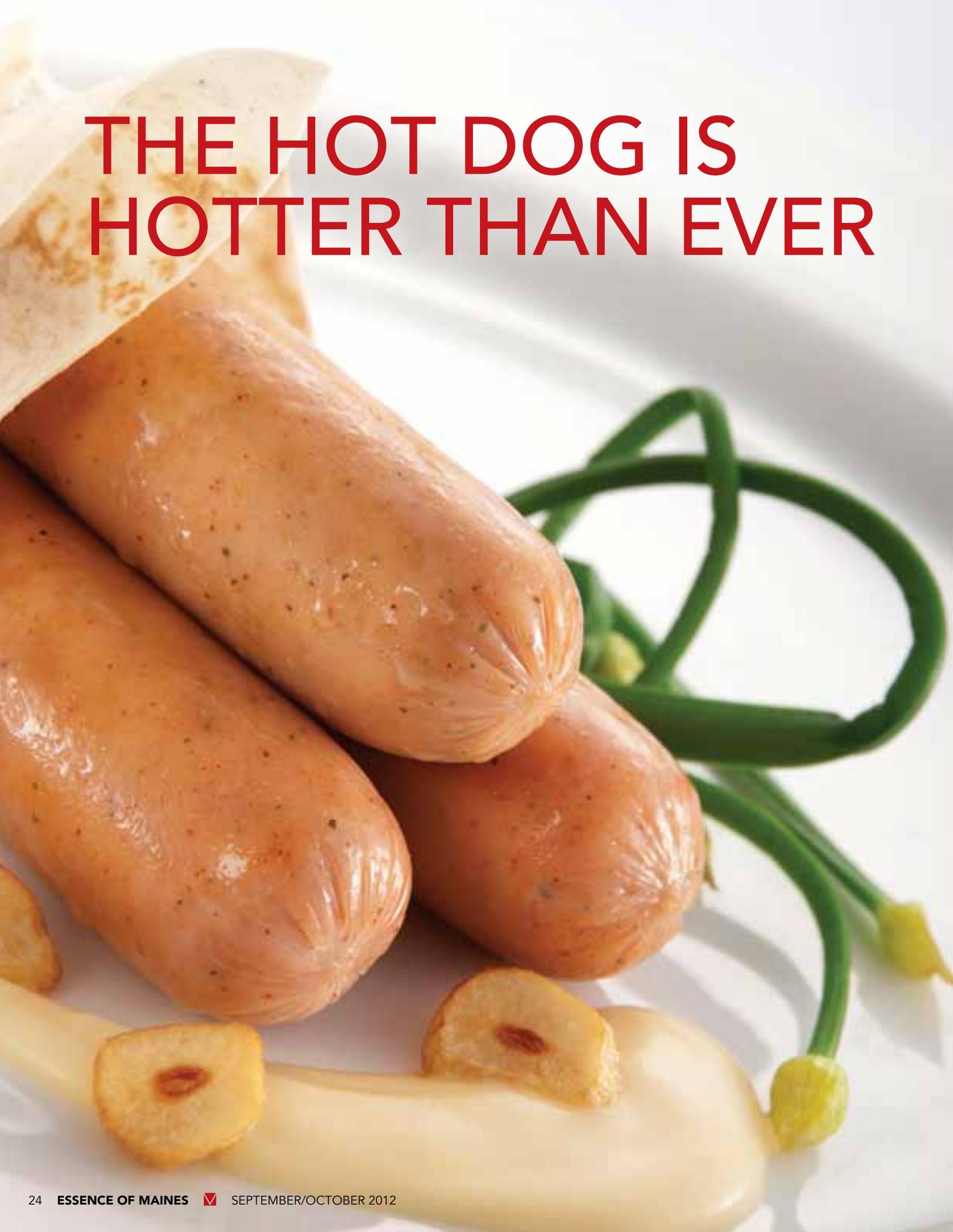


THE HOT DOG IS HOTTER THAN EVER



From food trucks to chains to chef-driven restaurants, hot dogs are experiencing a renaissance. With all the innovation lavished on hamburgers lately, it should come as no surprise that the humble hot dog is finally climbing the value chain. This growing new trend of hot dogs is a further development of the “better burger” trend. And while well-done classics continue to thrive, many of the crowd-pleasers on menus across the U.S. are surpassing tradition to include inventive toppings and ingredients.



Nancy Kruse, menu trend analyst and president of The Kruse Company consultancy in Atlanta, says these haute dogs owe a debt to the burger upgrades that have occurred during the past five years. Kruse says, “I think the extraordinary success of the new age burger chain has caused chains and chefs to reconsider the hot dog and treat it the same way they do the burger - namely as a carrier for a range of creative premium toppings.”

With one eye on the bottom line, restaurateurs are leveraging customer cravings for fresh tastes, ethnic flavors, house-made ingredients, and unique presentation styles to transform this all-American favorite.

For example, Richard Blais, winner of Bravo's television cooking competition “Top Chef All-Stars,” has created HD1, a restaurant focused on serving high-quality hot dogs with unusual combinations.

The menu at his Atlanta-based restaurant includes offerings such as the Kenturkey, a turkey sausage topped with tomato-pimento marmalade, mornay, bacon, and parmesan; the Eastbound and Down, a hot dog topped with pulled pork, coleslaw and mop sauce; and the South of Chi-Town, a hot dog topped with chow-chow, fried green tomato, sweet pickle and barbeque sauce.

At Sonic Drive-In, this 3,500-unit quick-service chain has become known for its inventive hot dogs. The Chicago Dog, part of its Premium All-Beef Hot Dog lineup, is a rendition of the classic item. A grilled beef hot dog is topped with pickles, relish, tomatoes, sport peppers, chopped onions, celery salt, and mustard, and is served in a poppy seed bun. Sonic said the

launch of the hot dog line, touted as a snack or a meal, drove sales across four dayparts.

The Senate Pub, a Cincinnati-based independent eatery, has added style and variety to its menu with additions such as their Korean Hot Dog. It has blended Korean and American cuisines by topping an all-beef hot dog with red chili mayonnaise, braised beef short ribs, house-made kimchi, pickled cucumbers and sesame seeds, and served it on a brioche bun.

Wienerschnitzel, a 350-plus-unit hot dog chain based in Irvine, Calif., said its Angus Pastrami Dog, served in a pretzel bun, has been popular since day one. The item starts with a 100-percent Angus beef hot dog that's topped with pastrami, Swiss cheese, mustard, and a pickle spear, and served in a pretzel bun.

“Developments in hot dogs allow them to serve as a blank slate.”

New at Dirty Franks' International Dogs in Columbus, Ohio, hot dogs can be topped with Korean kimchi, mango chutney, tzatziki sauce, or Sriracha slaw, and they serve brunch

hot dogs with pork loin breakfast sausage and smoked bacon at Franks 'n Dawgs in Chicago.

We've looked around at what other restaurateurs are doing and compiled the following list of possible ingredients to spark your imagination. Serve a Thai-style “hot dog” if you like. But exercise your own good judgment: customers pay for what tastes good, not innovation for its own sake.

(Note: the following ingredients are listed in no particular order; they're not recipes, just ideas.)



The Meat

Coneys, Franks, Weiners, etc., made with beef, pork, or turkey

Kielbasa or Polish sausage

German bratwurst

English “bangers”

Mexican chorizo

Portuguese linguica

House-made duck, tarragon, and juniper-berry sausage; or any other house-made sausage

Italian sweet or hot sausage

Andouille sausage

Calabrese sausage

The “Bun”

The basic hot dog roll

Puff pastry wrap or fillo dough

Poppy-seed or sesame roll

Naan or flatbread

Mini baguette

Filipino pan de sal

Flour or corn tortilla, steamed or lightly crisped in oil

Toppings

Pickle relish, sliced dill pickles, deep-fried pickle chips

Sliced jalapeños or mild peppers

Chopped tomatoes, onions, mushrooms, bell peppers – raw or sautéed

Sauerkraut, kimchi, jicama, or green papaya salad, mint-ponzu-ginger slaw

Chili

Fried egg

Havarti, Swiss, American, Cheddar, Pepper-Jack, chevre, or other cheese

Toasted pine nuts, pecans, walnuts

Bacon, shaved pastrami, pancetta

Avocados or guacamole

Olives, capers

Romaine lettuce

Relishes & Condiments

Mustard: traditional yellow, stone-ground, or house-made

Roasted red-pepper or veggie cream cheese

Chipotle mayo, tomato aioli, garlic-lemon sauce, dill relish

Crème fraiche, hollandaise, or mornay sauce

Grape, cranberry relish

Horseradish

Sriracha or house-made hot chili sauce

Curry sauce

Cilantro-mint chutney

Cooked salsas or molés

Wasabi dressing

Roasted garlic

Thai peanut sauce

INSTEAD OF BREAD

Once you knock the hot dog out of the bun, a constellation of possibilities opens to your imagination. The bun? Why not a flatbread instead? Or a “blanket” of puff pastry? How about a fresh-made poppy-seed or pretzel roll? Stretching for even more differentiation, look for hot dogs served on things other than bread. Arepas, for example. Flattened tostones. Bao. Waffles. Rice cakes.

Or take the sausage - instead of the standard beef-and-pork frank, how about a house-made chicken-and-apple sausage, or chorizo, or Portuguese linguica? When it comes to toppings, would customers mind if you replaced yellow mustard with a stone-ground cranberry mustard? And why not make it healthy,

too, by adding fresh vegetables?

You get the idea.

The four basic parts of a hot dog – bun, sausage, toppings, and condiments

– can all be reimagined to create

dishes that are both familiar and exotic.

While these “hotter” dogs may never look quite right on white tablecloths, they could be perfect as a lunch special or a hearty addition to your bar menu. Some restaurants have even built their entire menu around them!

