

For the tastiest Thanksgiving turkey, skip the high-tech gimmicks in favor of cooking techniques so old-school they predate the invention of the oven. Here's how to bring a bolder bird to the holiday table by harnessing the power of smoke, citrus and other venerable flavor boosters

BY SARAH KARNASIEWICZ

WRITE ABOUT FOOD for long enough, and eventually you'll find yourself presiding in your pajamas over a pit 3 feet deep, shoveling hot coals over a 16-pound turkey. Such is the power of Thanksgiving.

Indeed, for a holiday dedicated to All-American traditions, our national feast has a funny way of making ambitious cooks itchy to experiment. A plain, honest bird at the center of the holiday table—no elaborate trussing, no scientifically calibrated brine, no exotic stuffing? That sufficed for a few centuries, but nowadays, sure as the leaves fall from the trees, November will herald a buzzy new turkey technique—spatchcocking! mayo-basting! sous vide!—guaranteed to vanquish every stringy breast and dry drumstick.

In my experience, the philosophical divide between turkey traditionalists and technologists just gives families one more thing to bicker about. Consider mine: On the fourth Thursday of each November, my mother rises before the coffee maker chimes to pack a sage-and-sausage-stuffed turkey into the oven for a leisurely roast. A few hours later, she sighs as my father saunters into the

yard toting another, smaller turkey—I've taken to calling this the "groom's bird"—on which to test the latest poultry-flaming gizmo he's summoned via Amazon Prime. I'm thankful to report no human beings have been harmed in his experiments, though a few birds certainly have.

Which is why, as this holiday season loomed, I got to puzzling: Could I bridge the divide and come up with a few unconventional turkey methods that married my mother's exacting standards with my father's flair for the dramatic?

Before setting off on my quest, I called up Rick Rodgers, the man who literally wrote the book on the holiday, "Thanksgiving 101," a collection of recipes, time-tables and other strategies for pulling off the preparation with military precision. In his time as a teacher, writer and recipe developer, Mr. Rodgers has tried it all: low-and-slow, hot-and-fast, dry brining, wet brining, foil-wrapping, packing the bird in a paper bag, chilling the breasts with ice packs, mopping them with butter-soaked cheesecloth. One holiday, he nearly burned down his garage by way of a frozen bird and a deep fryer. "Everyone wants to reinvent the wheel every year because the turkeys most of us grew up eating were dry and just not very good," he said. "But there are sensible ways to do it. You don't have to be a hero."

Thus forewarned, I established some ground rules: I'd steer clear of recipes requiring expensive or esoteric single-use equipment. (Here's looking at you, sous-vide circulator.) And I'd pay special attention to methods that promised to lock in the bird's essential juices. Finally, rather than insisting on the newfangled simply for novelty's sake, I'd try looking back—thinking creatively about historic techniques and mining the collective wisdom of cooks that came before me.

Which brings me to that hole in the ground. I knew turkeys were first domesticated in Mexico and Central America, and that this poultry remains common in homestyle Mexican cooking. I found some delicious sounding Mexican turkey recipes but kept coming back to a festive pork preparation from the Yucatán, *cochinita pibil*, in which a whole suckling pig is marinated in achiote and bitter orange, covered in banana leaves and slow-roasted in an earthen pit. Surely I could do the same with a big bird.

For help assembling a recipe, I rang up Hugo Ortega, the James Beard Award-winning chef behind Hugo's in Houston. He cautioned, "Yucatecan seasonings, especially achiote, have this amazing intensity of flavor—but it can be tricky to find a balance. One of the reasons people use whole pigs is that the fat content neutralizes

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DESIGN & DECORATING

THE MEDIATOR

Can't We All Get Along?

The Conflict One roommate owns a bold, blocky seat, the other a delicate Art Deco floor lamp. Three designers offer handsome décor resolutions



From left to right: Henrendon Lounge Chairs, \$3,000 per pair, comingsoonnewyork.com; French Art Deco Floor Lamp, \$995, chairish.com

AZZINO ITALIAN ART, NEW YORK (INSPIRATION)

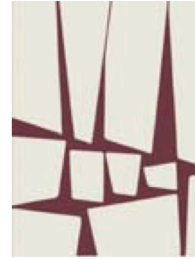
Solution 1



Draft an art photo as peacemaker. For New York designer Tim Campbell, the seat's color and presence is so dominant that the marginalized lamp needs decorative support. He chose a large black-and-white photo that won't fight with the red-orange upholstery. "The lack of color allows the trees to act like shadows of the lamp," he said. But he had other motivations: "Seeing that chair, I immediately thought of the decked-out parties Yves Saint Laurent threw in the desert outside Marrakesh in the 1970s." "The Palm Trees of Santa Monica" Photograph by Jin-Woo Prensen, \$3,800, purephoto.com



Solution 2



Nod to the shapes of both pieces with a graphic rug. The rug that Chicago designer Cari Giannoulis chose and the chair are both very modern, she points out, but the carpet pattern's dagger motifs resemble the negative spaces created by the lamp's stand. Meanwhile, the blocks of white in the carpet echo the chunkiness of the chair. The Cubanism Rug, \$55 a square foot, artandloom.com

Solution 3



Hang a fairly neutral chandelier. "This fixture is like a pair of diamond studs," said Los Angeles designer Ohara Davies-Gaetano. "They look great with everything." The clean lines of the 1950s piece stand up to the bold chairs, its softness and subtlety speak to the floor lamp's feminine sexiness. The chandelier is an ideal buffer for this mismatched duo. Venini Murano Chandelier from Galleria Veneziani, \$2,600, 1stdibs.com

