

MORE THAN MEATS THE EYE

At these butchers, service and sustainability are as important as the products they sell

BY STEPHEN D'AGOSTINO

Paper or plastic? In Vermont, that's a question you don't hear anymore. Yet it's still a choice we can make—meat wrapped in plastic sitting on a bed of Styrofoam that you choose from dozens of the same cuts at a grocery store or meat wrapped in paper that you selected from the other side of the glass, pointing out the perfectly marbled steak that's making your mouth water. When the butcher hands you the paper-wrapped cut, it's like receiving a gift.

The true gift is not the meat but the experience. Recently, I visited three butcher shops around the state, which, in an increasingly automated, impersonal, online world, are simultaneously a breath of fresh air and a touch of nostalgia.

5TH QUARTER, WAITSFIELD INSPIRED BY HISTORY

Our first stop was at the 5th Quarter in Waitsfield, where Josh Turka is the owner and butcher. Josh's philosophy for selling meat—and the name of his shop—is derived from *quinto quarto*, a historical term well known in Rome that relates to how a butchered animal's meat was doled out. The first quarter, the best cuts, was given to nobility, the second to clergy, the third to the bourgeois, and the fourth to the army.

“The poor people,” Josh says, “would get the offal, the tongue, the tripe, whatever was left. They jokingly referred to it as the fifth quarter, and they made historically famous world cuisine out of it.”

The term stuck with Josh. Eventually, he opened 5th Quarter as a wholesale whole-animal butchery and worked part time at Mad River Taste Place in Waitsfield. At one point, Josh floated the idea of opening a butcher shop within the store. Mary Tuthill, the manager, and Robin Morris, the owner, saw the benefit to both businesses and said yes.

5th Quarter's meat case is filled with rib eye and chuck roast, aged to a deep red that almost seems purple, marbled pork shoulder, meaty chops, and various sausages. It's not how they look, though, that is most important to Josh. It's how they taste, the meat's deliciousness. To ensure what can only be assumed by sight, Josh starts with animals that have been humanely raised. He notes, “We partner with farmers who raise their animals on pasture so they can walk around and live life like they should, farmers who care for the animals when they are sick, but don't give hormones or antibiotics.”

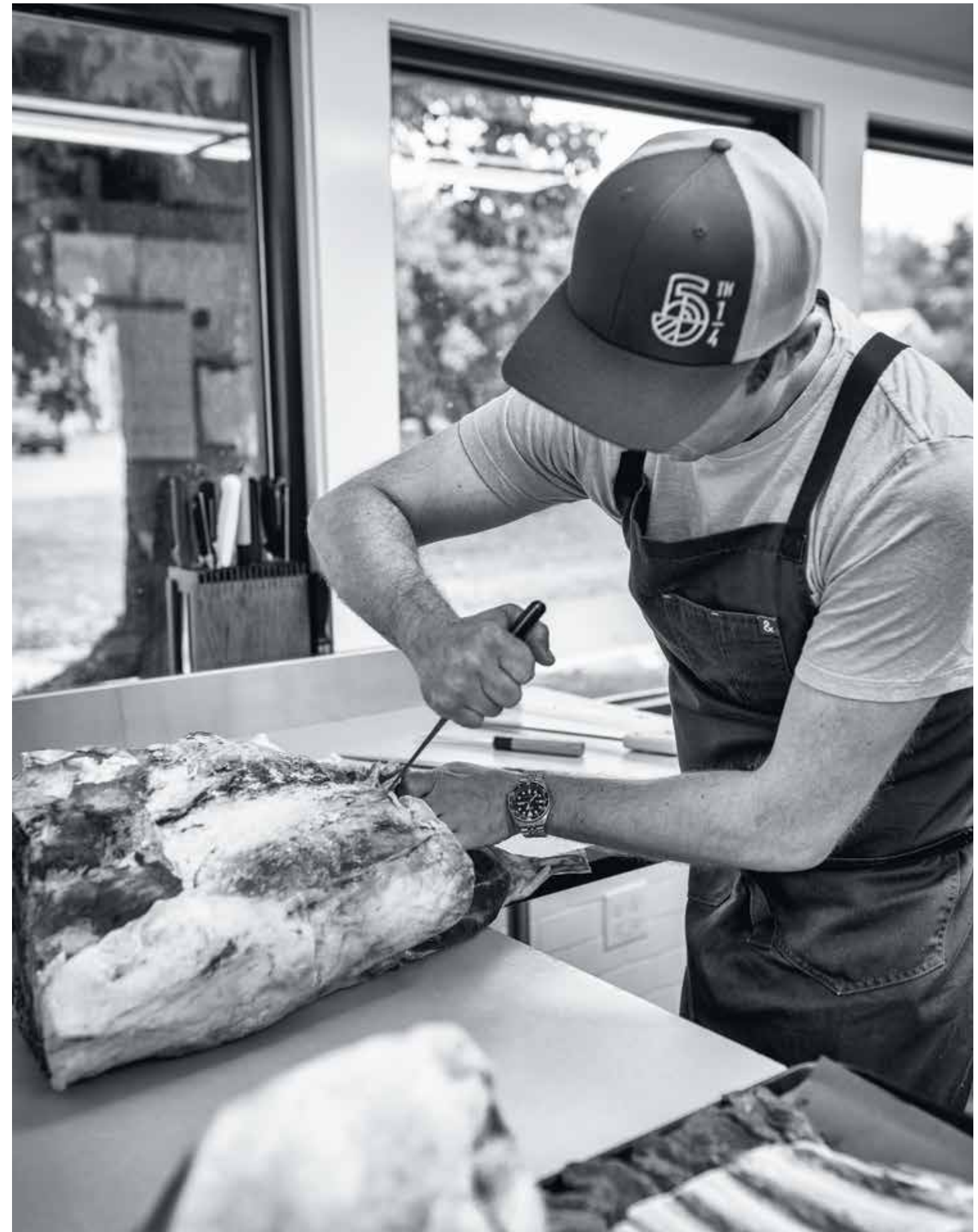
That morning, Josh received a recently slaughtered pig from a local farm. He explains that the animal's diet consisted of whey created during cheesemaking, edible scraps from local restaurants and businesses, and apples and squash from nearby farms. The pig is hyperlocal, and Josh notes that its hyperlocal diet “keeps things out of landfills and compost heaps.”

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Josh Turka prepares the day's freshly cut, beautifully aged, marbled meats.

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Josh Turka puts his whole-animal butchery skills to good use at 5th Quarter.