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# plate

Take food further.

## *Modern steakhouses hit their prime*

TOMAHAWK RIB-EYE  
DANNY GRANT  
MAPLE & ASH, CHICAGO



Woodforest Steak Board at Tris

# A new taste for old meat

It's a hard knot of gristle for soft-jawed Americans to swallow, but steaks butchered from old cattle can somehow taste beefier and cleaner than the tender but flat-flavored meat we've been weaned on. And yet, we're coming around.

The tipping point came when José Andrés—seeking to replicate the vaca vieja of his homeland—chose “antique meat” for his rib-eye tasting at Bazaar Meat in Las Vegas. He notes on his menu that the meat follows the European tradition, with a more pronounced flavor.

Last October Rob Levitt of Chicago's Publican Quality Meats butchered a seven-year-old Holstein dairy cow. “It's a darker color,” he says. “The biggest thing that surprised me was the fat. The first thing I smelled was like sweet cream, very lactic and wild.

“The flavor of the beef itself is very beefy, chestnut-y,” he continues. “It has a minerality to it much closer to grass-fed—mineral-forward but almost coppery. It reminded us of eating blood sausage.”

With standard whole-animal efficiency in mind, the beef was distributed among six chefs for a special antique beef dinner. PQM sous chef Mark Schieber took lean cuts from the leg to smoke jerk-marinated jerky with sesame-pickled vegetables, and Blackbird chef Ryan Pfeiffer pounded it flat into sashimi-thin dumplings bathed in shellfish broth. Joe Flamm braised tough cuts for ragù incorporated into risotto alla Milanese, while Publican,

PQM, and Café Cancale pastry chef Erika Chan microplaned smoked beef heart over pumpkin pie.

Many chefs compare the rich, intensely beefy flavor of aged dairy animals to dry-aged beef with the associated cheesy funk prized among its partisans. And yet that quality, along with the characteristic yellow-tinted, beta-carotene-rich fat of largely grass-fed animals can be off-putting to less adventurous consumers.

An easier sell might be the 10-year-old Akaushi beef championed by Austin Simmons of Houston's Tris. Unlike say, a Holstein, the Akaushi is a Japanese breed with Wagyu genetics; it was bred to produce beef. After the cows have been fed grain for a year, they developed well-distributed, alabaster marbling along with astonishingly beefy intensity. “The tenderness is still there,” says Simmons.

“You get almost a dry-aged flavor, without the hints of mold and blue cheese,” he says. “Guests are blown away by it. They've never tasted anything so beefy.”

Simmons buys a whole animal each month and serves the steaks on flights with other rare-breed beef. But he also smokes the briskets Texas-style, sous vides the sirloins for French dip, slices the butcher's cuts over four-cheese ravioli, and grinds the trim for a double smash burger with American cheese and bacon jam on an English muffin.

“It's been really well received that we're trying to utilize animals better,” he says.

— Mike Sula

JULIE SCHIEBER/TRIS RESTAURANT