

Mastering great steaks at home is easy

By ELIZABETH KARMEI
Associated Press

I have a confession to make. I never order steaks in restaurants. That’s because it is so easy to make an outstanding steak at home.

And it isn’t just because I am a professional. With a little knowledge, anyone can make a great steak. While there are several cooking techniques that will produce superior steaks, I am going to focus on the simplest one. Think of this as your Steak 101 tutorial.

Simply put, cooking a great steak just comes down to buying the right piece of meat, seasoning it well, cooking it for about 5 minutes per side, then letting it rest. It’s that simple.

Since the grilling method is so simple, it is paramount to buy the best steak you can afford. This is one of those times when the quality of the raw ingredients really makes all the difference. And for this classic method, I’m using the term “steak” to cover a variety of cuts, including rib-eye, New York strip and filet mignon — the traditional boneless cuts that are typically found on a steakhouse menu and are at least 1-inch thick.

It’s important to note that it is the thickness and not the overall weight of the steak that’s important. The thinner the steak, the harder it is to cook correctly. By the time you get a good sear on each side of a thin steak, it usually is cooked (or overcooked) all the way through. But on a thicker steak, the inside will remain medium to medium-rare.

My preference is to buy one thick, 16-ounce steak to serve four people. I call that the party steak. You grill it, slice it up and serve it on a platter family-style. Serving one steak also allows people who like it a little more done to choose from the end pieces, while those who prefer rare can eat the center slices.

Next up, the cooking. Start by removing the steak from the



AP Photo/Matthew Mead

The perfect steakhouse steak.

STEAK BUTTER

A compound butter gives your steak that steakhouse presentation and adds that little something extra to the steak. This is what changes the steak from backyard beef to a real steakhouse treat.

Start to finish: 10 minutes
Servings: 8

- 1 stick unsalted butter, softened
- 4 teaspoons minced fresh parsley
- 2 teaspoons granulated garlic
- 2 teaspoons dried tarragon

In a medium bowl, mix together all ingredients. Set out a sheet of plastic wrap or waxed paper about 8-inches long. Drop the butter by the spoonful to form a log. Roll the butter in the plastic wrap and twist the ends to form a round log. Refrigerate until butter is hard and easily to cut into slices. Will keep refrigerated for one week.

Nutrition information per serving: 110 calories; 100 calories from fat (91 percent of total calories); 12 g fat (7 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 30 mg cholesterol; 0 mg sodium; 1 g carbohydrate; 0 g fiber; 0 g sugar; 0 g protein.

refrigerator, unwrapping it and patting it dry with paper towels. Do this while the grill is heating. During this time, I also like to wrap the steak in paper towels to absorb any surface moisture. A dry steak sears better than a wet one.

Once the steak and the grill are ready, you brush a little olive oil on it. The olive oil keeps the juices inside the steak, promotes caramelization, and keeps it from sticking. Next, season it with salt and (if you

like) pepper. I usually pepper my steak once it comes off the grill because pepper burns quickly, but most people season with both salt and pepper at the start.

To grill, place the steak across the grates so you get maximum grill marks, cover the grill and let the steak cook for 5 minutes. Then, using tongs, flip the steak to the other side and place on a part of the cooking grate that wasn’t used before. This will give you the best

grill marks on the second side. The steak absorbs the heat from the grates and so it is best to cook each side on fresh, hot grates. After another 5 minutes — depending on how rare you like your steak and how thick the steak is — remove the steak from the grill, top with butter, if using, and let rest for 3 to 5 minutes.

A quick test for doneness is to touch the steak with your finger. If the steak feels firm but not hard,

it is at medium. If it feels hard, it probably is well-done. If it feels soft and jelly-like, it is not cooked enough. But however long you cook it, be sure to let it rest before slicing. This ensures a tender, juicy steak.

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A U.S.-made hard cider that’s worth drinking

By J.M. HIRSCH
AP Food Editor

BOSTON — There was a day not so long ago when this country had squat to offer as far as hard ciders. And for those of us who came of age on this deliciously dryly-sweet boozy beverage, it kind of sucked.

Having spent my university years in Scotland, I took advantage of many a pint of hard cider to warm my soul during the bitter, damp seasons (11 months of the year) and make studying metaphysics more tolerable. But when I graduated and returned to the U.S., I was dismayed to discover so few choices on our shelves and in our bars. And what few there were rarely were worth drinking.

That was more than a few years ago. Today, we are awash in hard cider choices, a trend that has piggybacked on the craft beer wave. Sadly, most of them still aren’t worth drinking, tending to be either stupidly sweet or breathtakingly dry. After a while, I simply shrugged and chalked it up to the U.S. not having a strong cider culture, nor much history making it (at least compared to Europe).

Then I spent this summer living (and drinking) in Boston, where Downeast Cider House ciders flow something akin to water. I first encountered the cider at a Cambridge bar, where the waitress told me it was produced in Maine. That turns out to be true mostly in spirit, despite the name. It’s a slightly Boston-based company (that started in Maine in 2012, but moved for reasons amusingly told via cartoons on the company’s website — <http://downeastcider.com/history/>).

And the company produces a deliciously murky cider. Wait... Murky?

Murky isn’t often a term associated with delicious. But roll with this one. The ciders I enjoyed as a too-young man were crisply, transparently amber. Downeast Cider House ciders are cloudy. I balked when my first pint was poured. But then I tasted. Clean and crisp, a little sweet, a little dry. Which is to say, a balanced cider. The sort of drink Americans have shown themselves not particularly adept at producing.

The company was started by Ross Brockman and Tyler Mosher during their final year



AP Photo/Stephan Savoia

A glass of original Downeast Cider. The company expects to produce 17,000 barrels of cider this year, more than doubling overall production compared to last year.

“... We decided to make a hard cider that tasted like fresh apples.”

— Tyler Mosher, co-founder of Downeast Cider House

at Bates College in Maine. Brockman’s brother, Matt, also joined the troupe. Why is their cider different? They’ll tell you it’s because they do everything from scratch. They’ll also mention that their ciders aren’t filtered, hence the murkiness. They are right, of course, but their motivation matters, too.

When Mosher and Brockman started playing around with making cider during college, they had a simple goal. They wanted to do something that stood out from other ciders being produced.

“There were two different types. The melted Jolly Ranchers, mass produced

ciders,” Mosher said recently of ciders that tend to be candy sweet. “On the other side were small craft producers emulating old English ciders, dry ciders. So we decided to make a hard cider that tasted like fresh apples.”

The resulting ciders are refreshing and lightly sweet, but not cloying. My favorite is their “original,” which accounts for nearly three-quarters of the 17,000 barrels they expect to produce this year, a more than doubling of overall production over last year. So it would seem I’m not the only one impressed by their ciders.

Distribution of Downeast Cider House ciders is mostly at bars and by the can in New England, New York and New Jersey. They are worth hunting for.

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Washington, D.C.

Don’t skip must-sees but take time to explore

WASHINGTON (AP) — You could easily spend a whole visit to Washington exploring the museums, galleries and monuments along the National Mall. But that would be wrong.

You’d miss out on all the energy, nightlife, parks, culture, sports and interesting food and drink in D.C.’s thriving neighborhoods.

See the must-sees like the White House and the Smithsonian. But carve out some time for the things locals love, too.

WHAT’S NEW

Be forewarned: Washington is under construction. A large swath of the grassy National Mall is torn up between Seventh and 12th Streets for a turf restoration project that won’t end until January 2017. The Capitol dome is encased in scaffolding, and there are renovations underway inside the Capitol, too. The Rotunda will be closed through Sept. 7. And there’s more construction near the Washington Monument, where the National Museum of African American History and Culture is rising on the last available spot on the mall. It’s scheduled to open in 2016.

Updates from the White House: Tourists finally can take photos on the public tour, and the newly redecorated Old Family Dining Room has been added to the tour route. Outside, you can gawk at the extra spikes that have been added to ward off White House fence jumpers.

Born to shop? Check out the high-end retailers in the new CityCenterDC neighborhood.

A convenient new way to get around: Hop on the \$1 “Circulator” bus that makes a loop between Union Station and 15 stops around the Mall.

CLASSIC ATTRACTIONS

You can’t beat the free and plentiful historic sites and museums at the heart of the city. But do some homework to zero in on what most interests you. Or, surrender to happenstance and be surprised.

•The Smithsonian is not one building. It’s 19 museums, 12 public gardens, nine research centers and the National Zoo. You can’t cover it all. Would you rather see the giant pandas (National Zoo) or the Hope Diamond (Natural History Museum) or the Star-Spangled Banner (American History Museum) or Charles Lindbergh’s Spirit of St. Louis (Air and Space Museum)? These are the kinds of choices you must make.

Important Lesson Two: You probably won’t get inside the White House if you don’t plan months in advance and line up tickets through a congressional office. You’re also better off booking advance tickets for the Washington Monument and to tour the Capitol.

TIPS

Avoid getting glares from locals when using Metro escalators: Stand on the right side, walk ahead on the left side. Clogging the escalators is the biggest peeve locals have with out-of-towners.

Pick up the Smithsonian’s 35-page Visitor Survival Guide for a \$1 donation; it distills the essentials into one pamphlet.

Park your car and use other ways to get around. Ride the Metro: It’s cleaner than New York’s subway system though less extensive. Rent one of the thousands of bikes stationed around town by Capital Bikeshare. Take the red Circulator buses that loop through different sections of the city. Take a guided Segway tour, a fun way to see classic sites while trying out a new mode of transportation. Check out monuments from a new vantage point by kayaking the Potomac. Try the hop on, hop off tour options, including Old Town Trolley Tours, D.C. Ducks (land and water) and Big Bus.

Visit the monuments at night or book an evening tour. It will be cooler and less crowded than during the day. Fall is a nice time to visit: the summer heat and humidity ease, and you miss the hordes of school kids who come in the spring.

Washington.org, the go-to site for tourists, has a long freebies list. It also offers sample itineraries focused on various interests. Search under “DC Itinerary.”

HANGING OUT

When you max out on history and patriotism, ditch the Mall and explore some neighborhoods.

Have weekend brunch on Capitol Hill at Eastern Market, the city’s oldest continually operated fresh food public market, or in the restaurant mecca along Barracks Row on Eighth Street SE. Spend Sunday afternoon at the Dacha Beer Garden in the newly cool Shaw neighborhood. Grab dinner along Maine Avenue at the fish market on the Southwest waterfront. (Think crabs steamed 30 seconds ago on a floating dock on the Potomac.) Also popular on the waterfront: Cantina Marina for cheap-ish eats and drink.

Check out special events at the National Building Museum — the Great Hall has been turned into a “beach” made of translucent plastic balls through Labor Day. Rent a kayak from Fletcher’s Cove boathouse and paddle the C&O Canal; pick pawpaw if the pulp fruit’s in season. Enjoy a free Friday night concert or other activities at Yards Park in the emerging Navy Yard area. Play bocce on the outdoor plaza at Vinoteca in the U Street corridor. Have some serious barbecue from the pitmaster at DCity Smokehouse.