

GREAT STEAKS!

Whether dining out or cooking at home, the following guide has everything you need to know for a stellar steak experience.



By Amy Sowder and Diane Weintraub Pohl

Featuring photography by Andre Baranowski





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STEAK-OUT

11 steaks to savor

A thick, juicy steak has always been synonymous with success and celebration. A steak is not just dinner—it's a reward. But what makes a steak great? What separates that standard supermarket grayish-pink hunk of shrink-wrapped beef from the sizzling, juicy, mouthwatering marvel at your favorite steakhouse? Despite its ostensible simplicity, a lot of care goes into making delicious cuts of beef. And it all starts on the ranch.

First, we owe that rich, savory flavor to the breeding—and feeding—of the cattle. Were the cattle grass-fed or grain-fed? Their diet will affect the way the steak tastes. For instance, grain-fed beef tends to have a richer, fattier flavor, while grass-fed has a beefier taste. Typically, cattle graze on pasture

for the first six months to a year of their lives, and most finish at a feedlot on a concentrated mix of corn, soy, grains, supplements, hormones, and antibiotics—a process that speeds the animal to slaughter weight while enhancing fat marbling. Grass-fed cattle produce beef that, in addition to tasting meatier, usually has less marbling, due to higher muscle mass.

And speaking of marbling, its importance can't be underestimated. Those luscious white threads of fat within the meat that melt while cooking keep the meat juicy and tender while infusing it with flavor. In fact, marbling is so important, it's a key factor that determines the cut of beef's USDA rating; the more fat within the red meat, the richer the taste and the higher the grade.

Prime-rated beef accounts for the top 2 to 3 percent of all steaks and is generally available only from the finest purveyors. There's choice and select as well; check out the various grades in the Steak Eater's Requisite Terms box on page 143.

We smelled, tasted, chewed, compared, and researched our way through more than 250 ounces of meat—more than 15 pounds—to select 11 steaks prepped and cooked by those who know how to do it best. Here is the result of all of our hard work.



Gaucha Grill's churrasco steak



GAUCHO GRILL
1 N Broadway, White Plains
(914) 437-9966;
www.gauchogrillnewyork.com

"Gaucha Grill in White Plains is the place to taste how Argentina does steak."

ARGENTINIAN CHURRASCO STEAK at Gaucha Grill (\$31)

Several cultures are known for their steak; there's Japan's highly prized Kobe and Scotland's Aberdeen Angus. Gaucha Grill in White Plains is the place to taste how Argentina does steak.

Gauchos were nomadic horsemen/cowhands of the South American grasslands in the 18th and 19th centuries who subsisted on a diet of mostly meat. Today, the restaurant's most popular meat is the Argentinian churrasco steak (although more tender, expensive cuts are offered).

But this skirt steak is a classic. The long belt of meat is from the steer's belly, cut thin with a visible grain. Gaucha Grill's foot-long, half-inch-thick skirt arrives on a white rectangular plate with the smaller end tucked under. A little cup of red-flecked, tangy chimichurri accessorizes the skirt, along with a garnish of whipped potatoes and a dramatic wreath of delicate fried onions.

Seared medium-rare, the skirt steak is chewy yet moist inside and slightly crispy on the outside. On the wider, thicker end, the rosy blush spreads, leaking garnet when pressure is applied.

For side dishes, venture toward Gaucha's quinoa mix for \$8 with sautéed shiitake mushrooms and sweet plantains. Experiment with

other interesting choices: garlic mojito tostones and fried yuca.

A mixed-berry salad of baby greens, red wine-poached pears, apple slices, mango, Gorgonzola cheese, and blueberry vinaigrette doesn't fall along traditional Argentinian lines, either. The dining room's crystal chandeliers, cowhide wall panels, and white leather pin-cushioned booths borrow elegance from the range and the metropolis.

BRAZILIAN MEAT PARADE at Copacabana (\$38.95)

Come on—it's a meat parade.

Fourteen meats on sticks weave, swagger, and prance around the tables at Copacabana Churrascaria in Port Chester. The palatable parade tempts diners until they're so full they must stop the table visits by flipping their cards from green to red.

Five meats are different cuts of steak: tender prime rib with sections cooked medium-rare, medium, and well-done; juicy top sirloin with a nice outer char; long beef rib with a thready texture like slow-cooked roasts; a smoky flank steak; and beef tenderloin wrapped in bacon for an extra flavor punch.

If nothing else, it's a great steak education. As a rodizio, Copacabana charges one fixed



COPACABANA STEAKHOUSE
29 N Main St,
Port Chester
(914)939-6894;
www.copacabana
steak.com

Top: A bit of theater comes with dinner at Copacabana; right: skirt steak platter

price for this all-you-can-consume protein fest, which includes an extensive salad bar (there's even sushi!) and dishes of beans, white rice, fried bananas, yuca flour, and the fluffy, heady, Brazilian cheese bread balls called *pão de queijo*.

The dining room's mango-yellow walls contrast with all that sizzling browned meat and match the bright ties on the servers and cloth napkins at the tables. Start off with a Caipirinha, Brazil's national cocktail using cachaça, sugar, and lime. A few spoonfuls of passion fruit mousse ends the parade on a light, sweet note.



for squeezing softened cloves on your slices—beautiful in its simplicity.

GRASS-FED, ORGANIC NEW YORK STRIP at Croton Creek (\$38)

Mae West's famous quote, "Too much of a good thing is wonderful," is just one of the pithy remarks stamped on the brown papered tables soon to be heaped with a variety of steaks and sauces.

In 2006, Jim Stake and Liam Harvey created a boutique steakhouse that's a little bit city and a little bit country in North Salem's Croton Falls. Croton Creek Steakhouse & Wine Bar has an inviting atmosphere, somewhat reminiscent of a cozy West Village jazz club, with lots of knotty pine and warmly



CROTON CREEK STEAKHOUSE & WINE BAR
4 W Cross St, Croton Falls
(914) 276-0437;
www.crotoncreek.com

glowing red votives. In fact, Wednesday through Friday, a jazz pianist might accompany your steak.

Arguably the best steak to order here is the 16-ounce New York strip for \$38. While the center-cut 10-ounce filet mignon offers two inches of tenderness for \$42, and the surprisingly lean 32-ounce tomahawk rib-eye for \$75 (including two sides) is a sight, the strip garners raves for being tender, without compromising on bold beefiness.

On the flip side, the 14-ounce skirt steak for \$28 is well seared for a nice charcoal crunch and smoky flavor. It comes with a traditional Argentinian chimichurri, a vinegary condiment that can be used as a tenderizing marinade.

"We're in this weird vortex of low income, middle income, high income," says Harvey, and, because of that, "we're into versatility, so there's something for everybody."

That's especially true with the other six steak-sauces: creamy Gorgonzola cheese, green peppercorn brandy, shallot red-wine reduction, horseradish cream sauce, herbed truffle butter, and fresh guacamole.

PORTERHOUSE STEAK at Benjamin Steak House

(\$89.95 for two people; \$134.95 for three; \$179.90 for four)

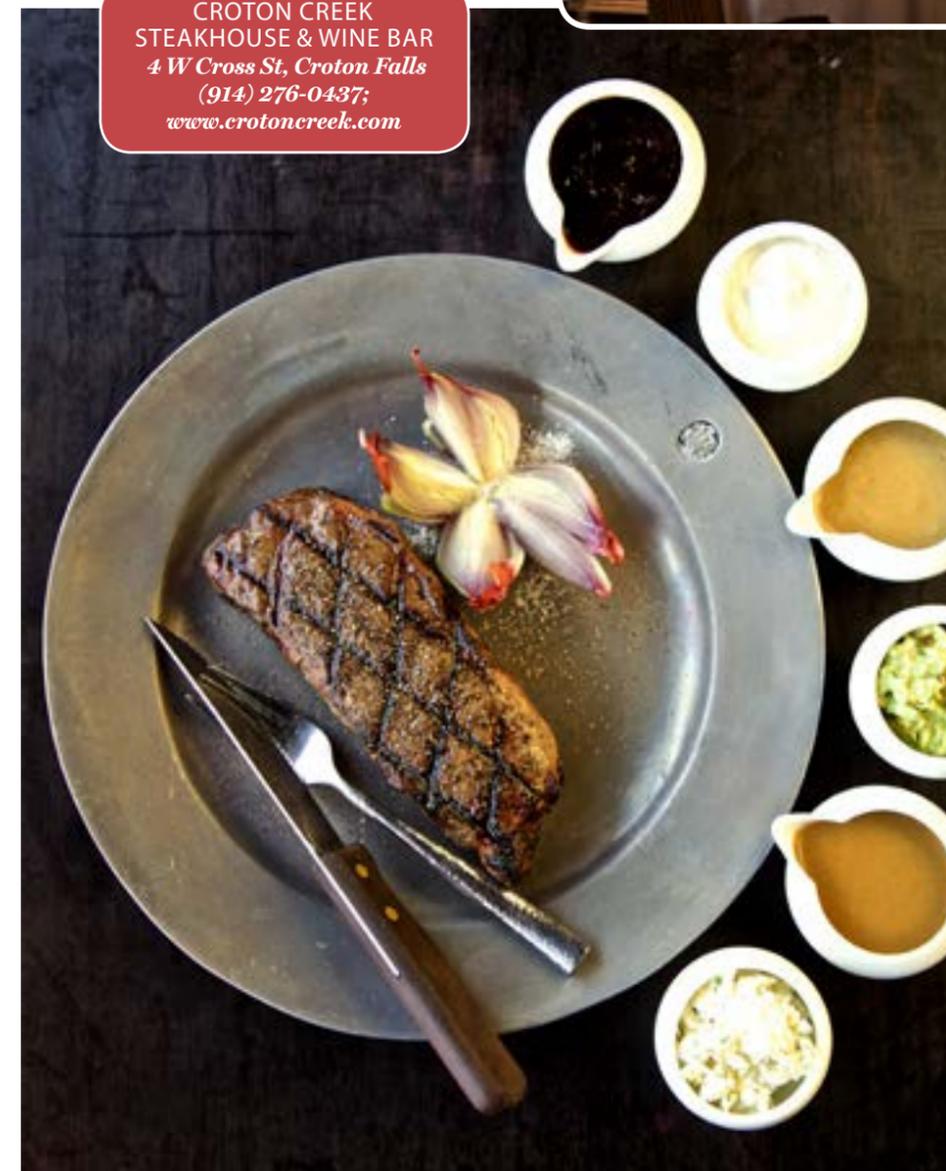
However many meat eaters are in your dining party, there's a porterhouse for you at the classic Benjamin Steak House in White Plains. Opened in 2010 by two Peter Luger alums, this 350-seat restaurant is the sibling of midtown Manhattan's Benjamin Steak House.

The bone-in porterhouse offers a top sirloin on one side and a filet on the other. If you select the porterhouse for two, expect a 32- to 34-ounce steak before it's cooked. The meat is dry-aged 23 to 28 days in the restaurant's cold aging box, so enzymes can break down the muscle fibers, creating a natural tenderness. The porterhouse is cooked at 1,500 degrees for five minutes to medium-rare, which results in crispy edges with a tender interior seeping with juicy flavor.

Family-style sides run the traditional lines of peas, asparagus, potatoes (mashed, fried three ways, baked), and creamless creamed spinach (made with butter and chicken stock instead of cream).

This meat comes from Master Purveyors in the Bronx, a butcher specializing in USDA

BENJAMIN STEAK HOUSE
610 Hartsdale Rd,
White Plains
(914) 428-6868;
www.benjaminsteak
house.com



WOLFERT'S ROOST
100 Main St, Irvington
(914) 231-7576;
www.wolfertsroostiro.com

DOPE 'EFFING STEAK at Wolfert's Roost (\$129, feeds two-three people)

You'll catch a whiff of the sense of humor wafting through Wolfert's Roost in Irvington when you scan the menu for meat.

The open kitchen cooks one steak, and one steak only: The Dope 'Effing Steak, a bone-in rib-eye dry-aged (28 days) tomahawk from Pat LaFrieda, one of America's most celebrated butchers (*New York* magazine called him "The King of Meat"), operating since 1922. If you like your steak well-done, this isn't the place for you; they won't cook this bad boy longer than medium for maximum juiciness.

The creative, casual eatery plays hip-hop, garage rock, and angst-y ballads that

mirror the eclectic cohesion of chefs Eric Korn, Jennie Werts, Willie Korn, and Jorge Ortiz. Because they're only offering one steak, they went all out. The 38-ounce behemoth is enough to feed two or three people and comes with a choice of two sides, such as sautéed herbed broccolini, which is cooked so perfectly, it loses none of its crunch or emerald color, and roasted carrots and parsnips, gleaming with fresh herbs and basil-infused olive oil.

The tomahawk (so named for its shape) is cut so the entire rib bone is intact, leaving a trimmed "handle." People have described the bone "as a Wiffle bat; it's so large," says Chef/Owner Eric Korn, swinging an imaginary bone through the air.

This two-inch-thick, highly marbled cut is cooked about 23 minutes, including the eight-minute resting time between presentation and cutting. Rosemary sprigs adorn the meat, and rock salt trumpets the steak's flavor even more than the bulb of garlic roasted

BOTTOM PHOTO BY JOHN TURIANO



SOLANO'S LINCOLN LOUNGE
209 Stevens Ave,
Mount Vernon
(914) 664-9747

prime beef, supplying the likes of The Four Seasons, Peter Luger, Wolfgang's, Christos, and 21.

Sporting black bow ties and a high-end demeanor, Benjamin servers use fat, spoon-shaped tongs to place the pre-cut slices you select from the sizzling gargantuan steak.

Avoid the Benjamin Steak House bottles of steak sauce on the table, better suited for cold shrimp. The light flurry of kosher salt it receives in the kitchen is enough.

SPECIAL STEAK
at Lincoln Lounge (\$28)

You don't have to get all gussied up to dine at a great steakhouse. Come as you are and sop up the sauce with a hunk of bread at Solano's Lincoln Lounge, the circa 1950s family-run eatery with wood-paneled walls covered in fading photos and kitschy memorabilia.

If you're not a regular or a local, you can thank us for helping you discover a steak so special, it's not on the menu. Simply ask your server using the not-so-secret code: "special steak." *Shhh.*

After a basket of sesame bread and a bowl of black olives and pickled peppers, you'll munch on romaine salad topped with pepperoni, mozzarella, tomatoes, spicy-sweet pepperoncini, and more olives.

Then, the charred shell steak arrives in a pool of buttery balsamic-herb sauce.

Your steak comes with a choice of potato, pasta, or vegetable, typically broccoli or spinach. This tender, juicy, one-and-a-half-inch-thick boneless steak sits on a hot plate buffered by a wooden board, and arrives perfectly rosy inside (that is, if you order it medium-rare). The kitchen buys the whole slab of meat and butchers it to order, so size and cut can vary. A few ripples of fat, mostly on the edges, lend their flavor.

SIRLOIN
at Frankie & Johnnie's
Steakhouse (\$46)

The feel of this steakhouse on tony Purchase Street is of a deep-pocketed secret club, a handsome, happening place to see and be seen.

Its allure comes in great part from its location in a stately old Rye Trust Bank building; a soaring balcony and wall-spanning copy of Edward Hopper's "Nighthawks" enhancing the grandeur. The hush-hush appeal is inherited, if you will; the original Frankie & Johnnie's on 269 West 45th (there's a third location at 32 West 37th in a townhouse where actor John Barrymore once lived) started as a 1926 speakeasy, complete

with door with narrow slot where whispers of "Frankie" and replies of "Johnnie" led to intoxicating sips of rum and other potent potables.

The other part of Frankie & Johnnie's allure is from the menu: buttery Dover sole, fresh-as-the-sea raw bar selections, heady desserts like bread pudding and apple strudel, and, of course, dry-aged in-house prime cuts complemented by a 650-label wine list.

Most of the cuts of steak mentioned in this article are from parts of the middle of the steer's back, which get the least exercise and are therefore the most tender. The F&J sirloin is a terrific exemplar of this: thick, succulent, and full of the intense beefy flavor only dry-aging can bring.

FRANKIE & JOHNNIE'S STEAKHOUSE
77 Purchase St, Rye (914) 925-3900;
www.frankieandjohnnies.com

And we'd be remiss not to give kudos to the professional waitstaff that makes the carrying of trays loaded with massive plates up and down stairs look relatively effortless.

BONE-IN PRIME SHELL STEAK
at Flames (\$47)

A genteel masculinity permeates Flames Bar and Grill in Briarcliff Manor, radiating from the restaurant's name and its hearty steaks to the glossy black bar and dark, opulent décor with well-spaced winged seating.

In the vestibule, look left for a presentation of hanging, chilled hunks of meat displayed behind glass like a museum exhibit. These USDA prime steaks are dry-aged three to four weeks. The bone-in shell steak, a top sirloin, is marbled so that it melts in your mouth but retains a bit of beefy chew, with excess fat relegated to the edges.

True to convention, the steak is served by itself, pre-cut on an oval plate tilted toward you on an upside-down plate, with sides ordered separately. The server will place a few strips on your plate and spoon on some amber-colored juice. He'll also fill your plate with sides of classic creamed spinach, as well as home fries, french fries, sautéed onions, or fried onion rings—all ranging between \$6.95 and \$12.50 each. Using the house steak sauce, a russet-colored horseradish concoction in a silver gravy boat isn't a horrible idea, but it's not necessary

FLAMES BAR & GRILL
533 N State Rd, Briarcliff Manor
(914) 923-3100;
www.flamesbarandgrill.com

for steak purists.

Dine under the medieval chandeliers with thick rope and exposed light bulbs, or book a private dinner party in the wine cellar.

MEILLER'S FARM FILET
at Restaurant North (\$38)

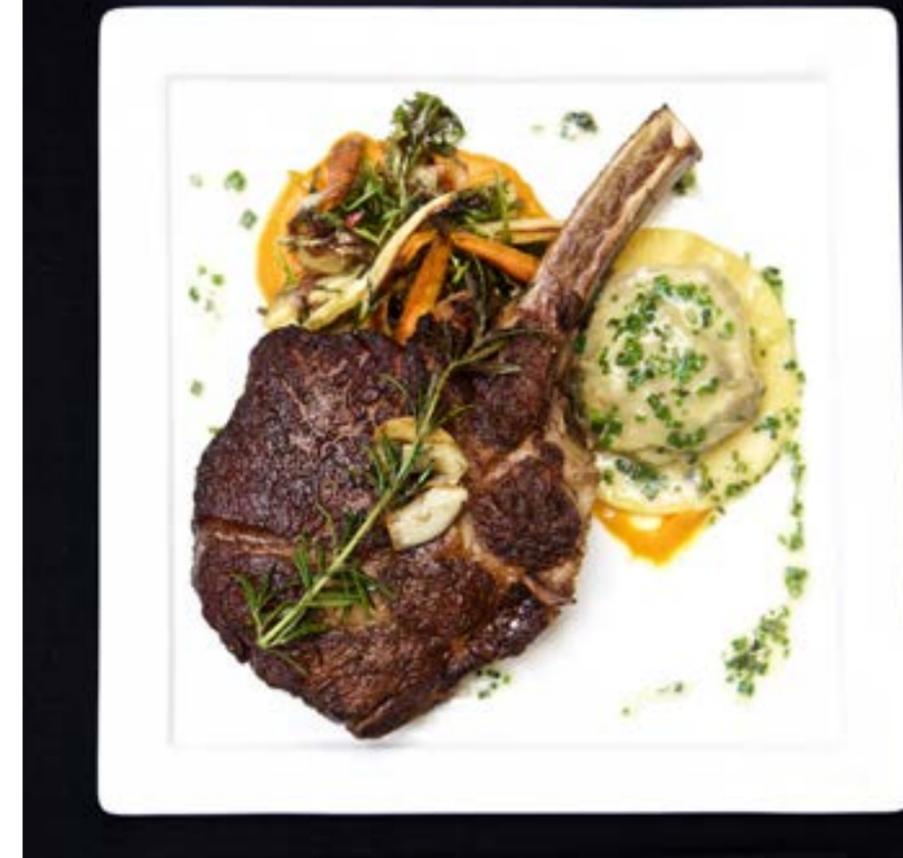
Chef Eric Gabrynowicz of Restaurant North in Armonk earned a James Beard nomination for 2015's Best Chef in the Northeast, his third Beard nomination. That doesn't automatically mean his steaks are awesome. But, oh, they are.

Restaurant North's menu is seasonal and farm-based, so expect a different steak each time you visit, even within the specified cut. This is no Outback Steakhouse; this is fine art, and each plate is an original.

We've been impressed with Gabrynowicz's hanger steak with chickpeas and, most recently, his Meiller's Farm filet from the chemical-free Josef Meiller Farm & Slaughterhouse, founded in 1971 in Pine Plains, New York.

The filet arrives as a fist-sized browned nugget surrounded by a creamy carrot purée and ginger beurre blanc. Roasted, unpeeled, and halved lengthwise, the carrots lean on the filet while a short-rib raviolo spans a third of the plate. The meat is one-and-a-half inches thick with a lightly browned crust and a gleaming, blushing center, tender as a filet should be.

Beyond the plate, you'll find white walls



RESTAURANT NORTH
386 Main St, Armonk
(914) 273-8686;
www.restaurantnorth.com

If you spot the seasonal Meiller's Farm filet on Restaurant North's menu, be sure to order it.

BOTTOM PHOTO BY ERIC ISSAC

STEAK-OUT

lined with photography, creating a clean, chic look inside the charm of a converted old house. Male and female servers embody the atmosphere of relaxed sophistication with pale denim collared shirts, black skinny ties, and chinos.

COWBOY RIB-EYE > at X2O Xaviars on the Hudson (\$80, serves two)

This grilled beast vanquished Bobby Flay, America's most celebrated grill master, on *Iron Chef: America* in 2007. Need we say more? Well, we will anyway.

Sporting a red handkerchief, the 40-ounce rib-eye at X2O Xaviars on the Hudson in Yonkers lassos some highfalutin treatment after it journeys from the 900-degree broiler to your table for a warm reception of *oohs* and *aahs*. The steak then disappears for a private slicing before returning to the table.

It takes two to wrangle this piece of meat amid the high-ceilinged dining room with floor-to-ceiling windows overlooking the Hudson. Created by 31-year-veteran restaurateur and Chef Peter X. Kelly, the rib-eye can also be tackled at Kelly's Restaurant X and Bully Boy Bar in Congers, New York.

Kelly ages his steak 21 days and then marinates it in a brown sugar and cayenne rub for three days. The red pepper's heat is barely discernible, but the smoky-sweet, crunchy char lends a satisfying contrast with the ruby inside, only broken occasionally by a layer of fat. If this meat isn't rich and juicy enough for you, a French invasion via gravy boat of creamy, tarragon-flecked Béarnaise sauce awaits for added decadence. Unlike other steak sauces, this one doesn't detract from the steak's rich, beefy essence.

Also unlike many other steak entrées, the X2O cowboy rib-eye automatically comes with two traditional sidekicks, served family-style: creamed spinach with nutmeg and luxurious potatoes au gratin covered in bubbly Gruyère.

So, go easy on those introductory mini French baguettes and blue cheese-chive biscuits served with cold, hard pats of butter. A wild ride is coming.

AMERICAN WAGYU



X2O XAVIARS ON THE HUDSON
71 Water Grant St, Yonkers
(914) 965-1111

RESTAURANT X AND BULLY BOY BAR
117 N Rte 303, Congers, NY
(845) 268-6555;
www.xaviars.com

RIB-EYE at BLT Steak (\$92)

If any piece of meat is worth \$92, it's the American Wagyu rib-eye at BLT Steak in White Plains, where Chef de Cuisine Andy Schilling presides. Yes, that's a high price, but this velvety steak is a special find: the highest grade (A5 BMS 11 Kagoshima) on offer in the

US and only available at BLT White Plains and Manhattan. Called the caviar of beef in Japan, Wagyu indicates cattle breeds of a pure, traceable, and direct bloodline.

"The steak is going to be more tender than a regular rib-eye because of the way the cows are treated," Schilling says. "But the star of the show is the buttery flavor that comes from the rich marbling—the whole idea behind the Wagyu rib-eye is the rich, creamy, buttery flavor."



BLT STEAK
221 Main St, White Plains
(914) 467-5500;
www.blsteak.com



Schilling serves his American version of this delicacy with a whole garlic bulb, crowned with a circular pat of herbed butter. Any other sauce is an insult. Refrain from the sacrilege of slathering this regal piece of meat with any of the eight sauces offered on menu.

There's a fine-textured mouth-feel to the rib-eye and no wobbly fat in sight, not even blanketing the outer edges. The marbling melts while it's broiled at 1,700 degrees so that meaty juices erupt in your mouth as you chew.

Looking for a delicious steak with less stick-er shock? Consider the 28-days-aged, naturally raised Black Angus steaks, such as the New York strip, either bone-in (20 ounces, \$57) or without bone (16 ounces, \$48). That strip is broiled so well, the fatty end stays buttery after resting on the table for 20 minutes, without congealing.

While you're waiting for your perfectly prepared steak, bask in the rich, modern ambience—complete with gleaming blond-wood floors and mod but comfy seating—and enjoy the fluffy-inside, crunchy-outside popovers with nutty Gruyère baked in that cloud of dough. And just when you think it can't get any better, Pastry Chef Jason Sturdevant's desserts give Chef Schilling's steaks a run for their money. Opt for melt-in-your-mouth banana and ginger ice cream or pleasantly sweet and smooth huckleberry sorbet. **W**

STEAK-IN

The pros on serving your favorite steak at home

So much to know, so little info. Go beyond the buzzwords—rib-eye, strip, filet mignon—and it's a whole other, um, animal, to comprehend. Wet-aged, dry-aged, grass-fed, prime, choice, boneless—the options seem endless. And that's before you start cooking—another challenge. So here, a primer to educate, clarify, and recommend, to literally find and choose the beef, season it, and cook it like a pro.

Making the Grade

As with British television and New York ZIP codes, class in beef matters. The USDA designates three retail grades based on an animal's age—18 to 24 months when grain-raised, grass-finished; 24 to 28 months for grass-raised-only—and its marbling content. Oh yes, marbling: another buzzword. The USDA defines it as “fine threads of fat,” the white veins that run through the beef to impart flavor, juiciness, and tenderness. Steaks graded USDA prime, just 2 to 3 percent of retail cuts, have the most marbling; those graded choice, 54 percent of retail, have less. And those cuts marked select—well, just be prepared to chew.

Cuts, of course, are the great divide. Most chefs and butchers I talked to were devotees of rib-eye, bone-in, and dry-aged (we'll get to those). To wit: Ethan Kostbar of Armonk's Moderne Barn: “It's the blue cheese of steak, deep and intense.” A&S Fine Foods of Millwood owner and butcher Michael Competiello concurs: “Rib-eye is tender, fattier, juicier.” Hemlock Hill Farm's Laura De Maria goes for its “nice marbling and fat.” BLT Steak's Andy Schilling likes “the meatier, earthier flavor that the bone gives to the meat.” The one outlier: Tarry Market Chef Patrick Lacey, who loves his skirt and hanger steak.

That's a lot of cut names, and, to further confuse us, they often refer to the same piece. Gary Parks, meat manager at Montrose's Cole's Market,

AGE GAP: WET VS. DRY

Aging is crucial for tenderizing beef. There are two methods, with no difference in quality, just in taste and texture. Approximately 90 percent of beef is wet-aged.

Wet-aging: The meat is vacuum-sealed in plastic and refrigerated for at least 10 days. It is moister and more mineral tasting since it's aged in its own blood and doesn't lose water. Because there is no loss in water weight or trim, and it's a quicker process, it is much less expensive.

Dry-aging: The meat is usually hung for at least two weeks. Water loss increases its beefiness, and microbial digestion affords a deeper, funkier flavor.

has been reciting them for 44 years: “New York strip, boneless shell, and Delmonico are all the same cut. With the filet mignon attached, they're a T-bone or porterhouse.” That's a basic explanation; for the geekier among us, know that the porterhouse is bigger because it's carved from the larger portion of the animal's short loin. The filet mignon lies at the tapered ends, the part of the muscle that's never exercised, provoking that great compromise: tenderness for flavor.

All of these are available to us thanks to the county's myriad markets—Whole Foods Market got a shout-out from several chefs I spoke with—though some are stand-outs. Cole's and A&S Fine Foods of

Millwood and Thornwood, for sure, where custom-cut complete lines have been offered for decades. Tarry Market lacks the history but not the quality; its porterhouse, strip, and hanger steaks derive from butcher to the stars Pat LaFrieda, who also supplies White Plains' BLT Steak restaurant. And then there's the De Maria family's Hemlock Hill Farm, which not only carves and sells all cuts but raises the animals they're from: 80 head of them.

Now You're Cooking

Get salty: Cut, grade, aging, diet—all important. But the crux of the matter is cooking. Start with crucial seasoning, that most prosaic of accouterments: salt. The kosher variety is best; it lacks additives and iodine, thus tastes milder and cleaner than table salt. Another plus: The larger grains let you control the amount used. The other essential is freshly ground black pepper. You could fancy up the endeavor with garlic and onion powders or the infinite array of steak seasonings on the supermarket shelf, but why? You want to taste meat, not flavorings. Better to focus your energy on cooking it right.

Mind your temp: BLT Steak Chef de Cuisine Andy Schilling has cooked a lot of steak. The first step, he says, is removing it from the fridge at least a half-hour prior to cooking to bring it to room temperature. “It will cook more evenly,” he explains. “The cold slows it down.”



OUR TOP MEAT MARKETS

A&S Fine Foods of Millwood
238 Saw Mill River Rd.,
Millwood
(914) 923-8485;
www.aandsfinefoods.com

A&S Fine Foods of Thornwood
986 Broadway,
Thornwood
(914) 747-1499;
www.asthornwood.net

Cole's Market
2147 Albany Post Rd.,
Montrose
(914) 737-7737;
www.colesmarket.com

Hemlock Hill Farm Store
500 Croton Ave.,
Cortlandt Manor
(914) 737-2810;
www.hemlockhillfarm.com

Tarry Market
179 N Main St.,
Port Chester
(914) 253-5680;
www.tarrymarket.com

POPULAR CUTS

The best and most expensive steaks come from the short-loin group, which appears around the lower waist of the steer, an area that gets little exercise.

RIB-EYE

This flavorful cut comes from the rib section (rib removed) between the short-loin and the chuck. (If the rib is left in it's a bone-in rib steak.) A cowboy rib-eye is a bone-in rib steak with a long extended bone.



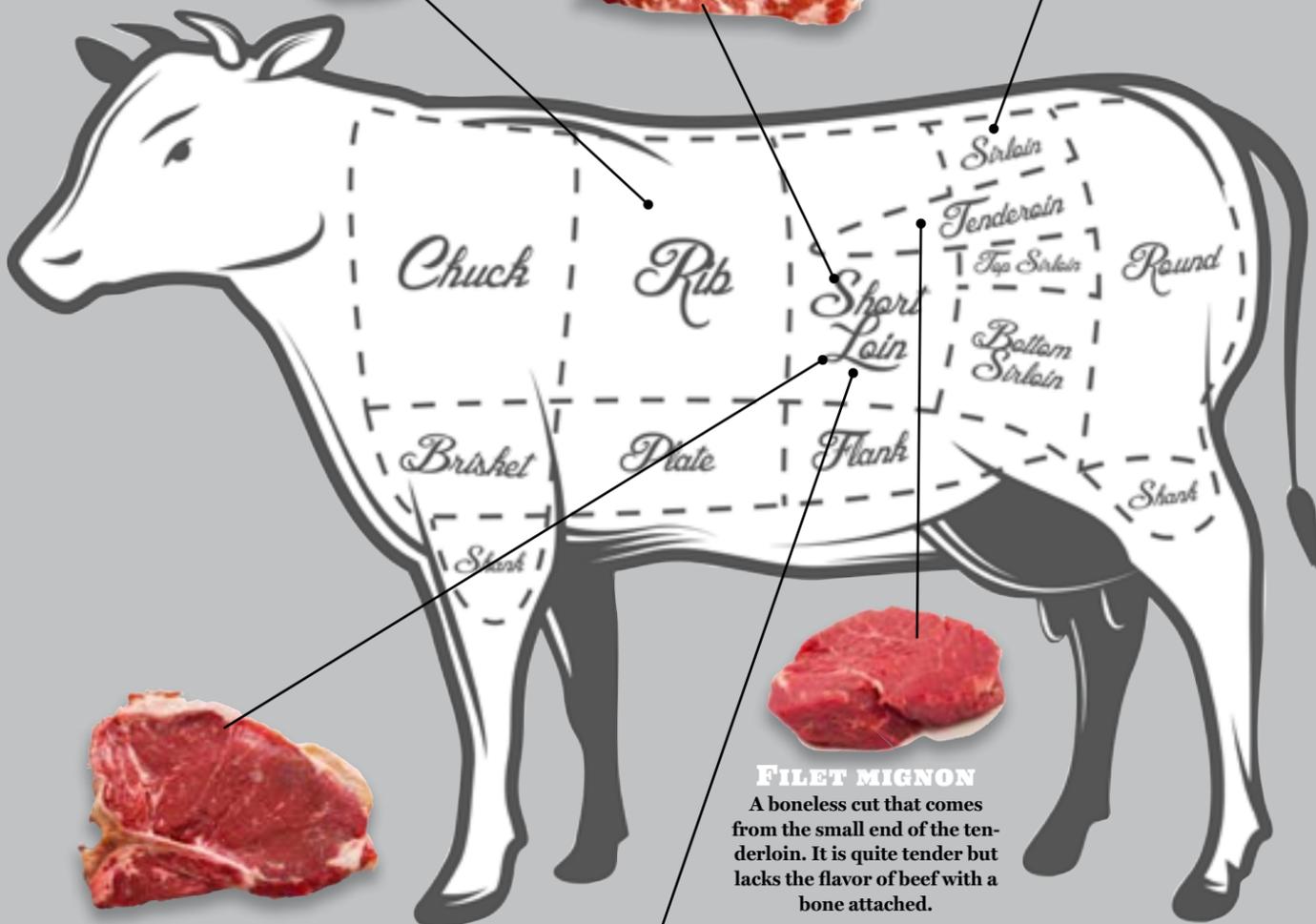
NEW YORK STRIP

This cut comes from the tender short-loin and is equivalent to a porterhouse minus the tenderloin or bone. It's also marketed as shell steak, strip steak, Delmonico steak, and Kansas City steak.



SIRLOIN

These steaks are more economical than the short-loin or rib steaks and come from below the steer's waist, around the top of the hip.



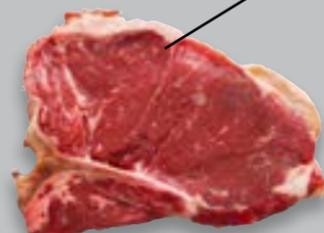
FILET MIGNON

A boneless cut that comes from the small end of the tenderloin. It is quite tender but lacks the flavor of beef with a bone attached.



PORTERHOUSE

The porterhouse is the king cut and includes a T-shaped bone with a full-size filet mignon on one side and full-size New York strip steak on the other. A porterhouse must be at least one-and-a-quarter inches thick.



T-BONE

Similar to the porterhouse (though a bit smaller, at least a half-inch up to just below one-and-a-quarter), it's two steaks in one with a filet mignon on one side and a bone-in New York strip on the other.



A STEAK EATER'S REQUISITE TERMS

Marbling: The lines of white fat visible inside the muscle of raw steaks. For beefeaters (if not dieters), more marbling is preferable, and the visible marbling at a specific point (the 12th rib) in the rib-eye provides the standard criterion for USDA beef grading.

USDA Prime: The fattiest, most desirable grading, followed by USDA choice and USDA select. There are five lesser grades (standard, commercial, utility, cutter, and canner), but consumers seldom see these.

Choice: One step below prime (and more affordable), choice has less marbling.

Select: The lowest label grade you'll find at the supermarket, select is the least marbled and can be on the dry side; it benefits greatly from marinating.

Heritage breed: Different from common commercial breeds, Heritage breeds are remnants of older traditions in animal husbandry. As beef production became standardized, traditional, regional breeds became rarer—and, in fact, some became endangered. Recent efforts to reintroduce these breeds to diners have been met with appreciation by many chefs, who value heritage breeds like Devon, Galloway, or Highland for culinary qualities.

Black Angus: Derived from four Scottish Highland bulls that arrived in the US in 1873, these cattle are one of the first specific breeds to be marketed at the consumer level. They're characterized by at least 51 percent black fur, and breeders must pay certification fees to market their meat as Certified Black Angus beef.

Wagyu: The name of an ultra-fatty, ultra-expensive Japanese style of beef culled from a specific mix of European and Asian cattle breeds raised in a tradition that includes beer meals and massage. The extreme marbling of this beef means that it can withstand higher cooking temperatures and still remain sweet, meltingly tender, and delicious. In the last decade, owing to its trendiness, American cattlemen have been raising Wagyu-style beef.

Kobe: The region in Japan that produces Wagyu beef

Corn-fed beef: Cattle grow quickly on this high-sugar, high-starch grain and bring highly marbled beef to market fastest. Nutritionists complain that this beef is less healthy for diners, with higher fat and lower Omega-3 fatty acids.

Grain-fed beef: The most economical and common beef on the market; grain-fed cattle are placed on vast feed lots to quickly fatten on soy, corn, and other grains.

Grass-fed beef: Cattle grazing on a variety of grasses in open pastures, as they have been for millennia

Organic: Organic beef comes from livestock that have outdoor access, are fed certified organic feed (no animal by-products, antibiotics, or genetically engineered grains or grains grown using pesticides/chemical fertilizers), are not given antibiotics/added growth hormones, and graze on certified organic land (land free of prohibited substances such as synthetic chemicals for 36 months).

THE SKINNY ON DIET AND AGING

Hemlock Hill's cattle are Black Angus, the top-quality breed common to all markets noted in the Top Meat Markets sidebar. The farm, though, is able to dry-age its own, while the majority of the others' steaks are wet-aged. The difference between the two is a function of modern technology: basically, plastics. Until about 30 years ago, all beef was dry-aged: hung in climate-controlled rooms allowing microbes to do their digestive work and tenderize the meat. The advent of vacuum-sealing plastic shortened both the time factor and the expense in water and muscle loss. The meat would now rest in contact with its own blood in an unbreathable environment: wet-aging. Sounds repugnant, but,

actually, even the experts concede that there's not much difference in quality. The taste, yes, with dry-aging the preference of most pros I spoke with. "It's a deeper, more concentrated flavor," says A&S' Competiello. But like with most things, it's all what you're used to, and what we're used to is wet-aged. It's about 90 percent of what we buy.

Though Hemlock Hill's cattle are dry-aged, they're fed the same as the others apropos to this article: a mix of grass and grain. But where those others are raised on grass and finished on grain, the farms' get a daily combo, and a coddled one at that. Their grain, served warm, is spent brewers grain sent daily from local Captain Lawrence and Peekskill breweries.

Bone-out, bone-in: As noted, Schilling and the other pros prefer their steaks on the bone for the extra flavor it imparts, but they advise beginners to stick to boneless cuts. They're less tricky to cook, easier to carve. Cole's Gary Parks recommends a boneless rib-eye: "It has some fat, which keeps it more juicy." Michael Competiello suggests a boneless New York strip, "a perfect balance of flavor and chew." And A&S' marinated skirt steak, he vows, is foolproof. "Even if you overcook it, it'll still be tender and flavorful." More experienced grillers, Competiello says, will want a bone-in New York strip, or, to feed two, a porterhouse. "You'll want to separate the meat from the bone first," he advises. "Cut a notch where the two bones meet in the curve. If you don't, the outside will sear, and the inside won't cook properly. The meat cooks more rare at the bone, so with the incision, it will cook more evenly." Like we said, tricky.

It's a matter of degree: What's not tricky is heating your grill or, if you're inside, cast-iron pan. Get it super-hot. Then oil it, place your seasoned bounty on, and leave it there. When it's well seared, flip it over and sear the other side. Thick steaks should then be moved to a cooler part of the grill to finish interior cooking, or you can just lower the flame. Indoors, move the pan to the oven; Competiello suggests eight minutes in a 250°F to 300°F oven, covered with foil. And forget anything you've heard about testing for doneness by pressing your palm or fist. All the pros agree: Use a thermometer. At 100°F and pepper. I'm a purist."

for rare, Competiello advises, remove the steak to a plate, then put it back in for five-minute intervals if desired (it's 105°F to 110°F for medium-rare).

Give it a rest: There's no instant gratification, gorgeous as your prize may look. "Let it rest for at least five minutes," instructs Gary Parks. "The interior keeps cooking, so the temperature will come up." Parks, who has grilled steaks at home for more than four decades—"rain, snow, I'm out there"—offers a doneness tip: "After flipping, when you first see juice on top, it's rare. The more juice, the more well-done." Parks doesn't use a thermometer, but you probably should.

Accoutrements

So there it lies, beckoning in all its glistening mahogany glory. But hold on—there's one last coddle. For our experts, that's sea salt—Maldon wins honorable mention—and more freshly ground black pepper. Tarry Market's Patrick Lacey will occasionally add a drizzle of grassy Tuscan oil, and Laura De Maria an accompaniment of garlic and herb chimichurri sauce. Could they whip up a red-wine reduction pan sauce with shallots, mushrooms, maybe some pancetta, finished with a silky swirl of butter? Sure. But why? "I don't want anything to mask the flavor of the meat," says Lacey, echoing a unanimous opinion. If it's sauces you want, BLT Steak offers many. But at home, it seems, simplicity rules. "If my guests want to," says Competiello, "they can add condiments or barbecue sauce. For myself, it's salt

Food writer Diane Weintraub Pohl prefers her steak rare and admits to a few shakes of Worcestershire sauce with her Maldon.