

Bryan Schaaf:

Back here on the Meat Speak Podcast, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand, coming to you from the world headquarters of premium beef, Wooster, Ohio. Somewhere south of Cleveland, north of Amish country. Brian Schaaf here. Joining me, meat scientist, Diana Clark. Diana, how're you doing?

Diana Clark:

I'm pretty good today. Can't complain.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. Excellent. Excellent. I'm so glad you're here. Because what we're going to talk about today, basically, it's an amalgam of everything that you are. Meat science, other kinds of science, barbecue, because you know a thing or two about smoking briskets. I'll tell you what. For a suburb kid in Chicago, you make some mean briskets. But our guest today also knows a thing or two.

Bryan Schaaf:

Actually, he's literally written books and done documentaries on smoked brisket. Let's go ahead and tear into it. Our guest today holds the power to single handedly make a barbecue restaurant. Known with a stroke of his keyboard as the Barbecue Editor of Texas Monthly, which is the proverbial bible of all things Texas. He spends his days writing and reviewing the most unique barbecue joints in the Lone Star State as well as documenting his own barbecue trials along the way.

Bryan Schaaf:

Released every four years, he's also one of the main drivers behind Texas Monthly's Top 50 list of barbecue joints, the most recent of which came out last month and since it's only released every four years, it's much more enjoyable to debate than any presidential election. In addition, he's authored the Prophets of Smoked Meat: A Journey Through Texas Barbecue and co-authored Whole Hog Barbecue: The Gospel of Carolina Barbecue and is featured in our own George Motes and Certified Angus beef production called The Science of the Smoked Brisket, which you can find on YouTube. I just watched it earlier today as a nice refresher. Please welcome to the podcast, the man who actually went to high school literally like a half mile down the road from where I'm standing right now, the barbecue snob himself, Mr. Daniel Vaughn. Welcome, sir.

Daniel Vaughn:

Thank you. Thank you for that lovely introduction.

Bryan Schaaf:

My pleasure. We always say, it doubles as an obituary of if-

Daniel Vaughn:

That's right. Yes.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah, we've got you covered. Wow, super excited to have you on here. Before we get into really the subject matter of today's episode, top 50 lists. It's gospel in the Lone Star State. You're the editor. You're

the guy behind that. Tell me about this year's list. Of course Goldie's in Fort Worth got number one. What is it like I guess in the lead up to and the following weeks after that thing comes out?

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah. Well, the lead up to it, of course, it's a lot of work on our part, to put it together to do all the writing and editing. It's also... It still surprises me sometimes how quickly we turn it around from finished product online, just in PDF format to actually get in a printed magazine. That was essentially like three weeks this time around. In that three week segment, it's just me just sort of dreading conversations with pitmasters who I know are going to be really disappointed. I've met a lot of the people who I'm writing about or not included in the list and people who are not included in the list.

Daniel Vaughn:

I know a lot of them are going to be disappointed. Some of them are going to be incredibly happy, obviously. Yeah, it's just me dreading all of that. A lot of the pitmasters say the same thing, is that they are just certainly eagerly anticipating the list whether they're honored or not. Yeah. This time around, we made it even more difficult on ourselves by having three different Texas Monthly barbecue events with...

Daniel Vaughn:

It was basically a way to celebrate the 2017 top 50 list, which is our last one, to celebrate it one last time before the new one came out. We invited a lot of those barbecue joints together for three different events in... We had one in Brownsville and Lubbock and in Tyler, Texas, three smaller cities in Texas. I knew that some of those places were going to make it on the list again and some of them weren't going to. Just trying to try to act natural whenever the questions come up.

Daniel Vaughn:

By and large, even when after the list comes out, certainly there's barbecue fans that love this place or aren't so sure about that place and have their arguments. There are some barbecue joints who are really upset or unhappy that they're not on the list or maybe not as high as they want to be on the list which is kind of a new thing this year. But by and large, for the most part, barbecue people, they're just... They're classy people. They have a lot of class they handle with grace. There's a few outliers, but for the most part, it's really not that dramatic.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. It's that beauty of the barbecue culture if you are a frequent podcast listener, we invite you all to go back to Season Two. We did an episode. Actually, it was all about sausage and sausage making. But Arness Robbins was our guest on that episode. He talks about how a visit from you when they still had the roadside trailer before Evie Mae's became a brick and mortar, that overnight, really just... People started lining up. They were considering getting out of the business and that just cemented them in. What's it like being on your end knowing that Man... That's a lot of power. Do you feel it? Do you feel the weight of what you have behind you? No?

Daniel Vaughn:

No. Yeah, sure. You say it's a lot of power. All it really is that I've got a big megaphone in Texas Monthly. I don't have any more power than the barbecue joint itself gives me. If they are making incredible

barbecue, I'm just reporting that news. I'm not out there telling you or amping up a place that isn't any good. It's like the barbecue joint has to do the work.

Daniel Vaughn:

They're the ones doing the work. Certainly if I find them and it's good timing and I get a great meal or maybe a couple of great meals and end up writing nice things about them, then it can bring a lot of customers to a place. There are a few places that I feel a little bit more of a connection to their specific success. Because they've shared with me that before my write up came out, that happened to bring a lot of business their way, that they had been considering whether they had made the right choice in life by opening a barbecue joint. [inaudible 00:07:15] is one of those places. But it's also like the Certified Angus Beef Business of the Year. Is that right?

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah, barbecue. Yeah. Barbecue establishment? Yeah.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah. Well, that's the most important one. So it might as well be establishment of the year, right?

Bryan Schaaf:

Amen. Amen. Well, I guess one last question regarding this list is you're an Ohio boy. Actually, we're from the same neck of the woods. Although I was a little closer to the Amish folk, a little south of Worcester than I think you were.

Bryan Schaaf:

But this idea of good barbecue and great barbecue, when you go around the state of Texas. I just was at the Jack Daniels World Barbecue Championships a couple years ago. The judging is... Everybody there is an eight or a nine on a scale of 10. Does the rest of the world understand what's happening in Texas, that there are great barbecue joints in that Top 50 list, of course, but it's always even the ones who aren't in that Top 50 that I know I've been to I'm like, "Those are amazing, too." Does the rest of the world understand this?

Daniel Vaughn:

I think pitmasters around the rest of the world or aspiring pitmasters do recognize it because so often when a barbecue joint opens up outside of Texas or really outside the country, chances are they're going to be doing Texas style barbecue for a good reason. The brisket is incredibly popular and a guy named Aaron Franklin wrote a book basically how to make the most famous smoked brisket in Texas.

Daniel Vaughn:

You certainly have a good starting point to go from. There's still some folks that I pity in Kansas City and then in Memphis who still argue for the supremacy of their style of barbecue and I pity them because if they are able to make an honest argument about that, it's because they haven't yet gone to Texas to eat barbecue. That is pitiable.

Daniel Vaughn:

I don't know if... It's hard for me as the Texas multi-barbecue attitude to sound unbiased because of course I am biased. So it's hard for other folks outside of Texas to really, I guess take my words to heart but I eat barbecue all over the country, all over the world. There is nowhere like Texas for just the sheer amount of incredible barbecue joints. Like you said, we have our Top 50, we also have 50 honorable mentions. I even got to the point at the very end of putting the honorable mention list together of like, "I can't believe this place isn't in there." It used to be, "Gosh, we only have 50 spots." And here's like, "Gosh, we only have 100 spots." That just goes to show not only the quality of barbecue all over Texas, but just the sheer number of great ones that have opened up recently.

Diana Clark:

I have to add, I love the barbecue passport that you guys said to have as well that you could go in and check them off your list because to me, that's the fun part behind all of this together. It's like yeah, these are great establishments. You need to get there and try them. But here's this little travel guide that you could walk through highs and lows and you rank them as like... To me, that's me to go to and then I can rank them at where I see fit. Or you go to one and then you see hey, there's another one down the road that he didn't mention. Let's stop in there. That to me is the beauty behind that list and the beauty behind barbecue, it is a family. It's let's just all get together and have a good time. Regardless of which one you're going to go to, you're going to eat well and just enjoy the fact that you're there. That's kind of the greatest part.

Daniel Vaughn:

All right. Where's the first spot on your list you're going to get your passport stamped on?

Diana Clark:

I feel like I should start with number one. If I'm going to start anywhere, that's got to be... But, I don't know. That is a good Snow's. I've never yet to be there and the fact that they have free Bloody Marys, that was there. I saw that and my I'm like, "Why have I not been there yet?" This is a good question. That might actually trump Goldie's.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yes. Well, the list has only been out for like two weekends now. Goldie's on their first day back, they're only open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, at least for now. They're only open Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We'll see if that expands at all. But their first Friday, after that list came out, they posted an Instagram story that said at 10:00 AM, they open at 11:00. At 10:00 AM they posted like, "Don't come. We're sold out. We've already gone down the line. We've already checked on what everybody's going to order and we aren't going to have enough food for any more customers. Please don't come." At 10:00 AM, they were sold out an hour before they opened.

Diana Clark:

Gosh, that's awesome though.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's amazing. That's amazing.

Diana Clark:

Awesome.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's amazing. Let's talk about smoking. I don't know who wants to handle the first talk, but let's talk about the origins of smoking. At the very beginning, it had very little to do with adding flavor. It had more to do with preservation, correct?

Daniel Vaughn:

Right. It's like the the offset smoker that you so often see at Texas barbecue joints is a relatively recent invention as far as terms of the history of cooking meat. Really probably about a little over a century old. For the most part, barbecue in the early, late 19th century, early 20th century was done over direct heat. It was trenches dug in the ground and you built a fire, burned it down to coals and you cooked large pieces of meat directly over that fire. Sorry, directly over those coals. The fire was long gone. Really, the only smoke flavor that was being developed was the fat dripping down onto the coals.

Daniel Vaughn:

There's still a few barbecue joints that cook like that. In Texas, it's something you're going to find more prevalent in like the Carolinas where they're doing the whole shoulders of the whole hog. Those are directly over the coals. Back in those days, it was like you were going to cook barbecue that way or you were going to smoke something. By smoking, it wasn't to put into an offset smoker and cook it at 250 degrees or whatever, it was to place in a smokehouse large pieces of meat like a ham or bacon, put a belly in there and try and preserve the meat as you said and preserve it through both the smoke that is encasing the outside of the meat but also then the drying action of hanging there and having that really super low heat, what we would differentiate these days as cold smoking.

Daniel Vaughn:

Back then, they wouldn't call it cold smoking. That was simply how you smoked meat. It was for preservation. It was for longevity of being able to have something to eat through the winter. The hog slaughtering time and the beef slaughtering time would have been in the wintertime when it was getting cold. I even read specifically about the conditions in Texas being a bit of a challenge for that depending on the year, whether it was warm enough for... I'm sorry, whether it was cold enough in the winter.

Daniel Vaughn:

If it wasn't, the flies could really get to the meat that was hanging there, whether it was December or not. That's really where the origin of liquid smoke came from, is that when they first sold liquid smoke, which was first marketed out of Dallas, when they first sold liquid smoke, that's what they sold it as, was like a barrier that you would paint on the outside of a ham before you hung it and that would keep the flies off of it. If in fact the weather wasn't cold enough yet to or all the flies were dead already.

Diana Clark:

That's pretty amazing.

Bryan Schaaf:

That's fascinating.

Diana Clark:

It's funny that liquid smoke I always heard that that stuff is... It can be potent. It's a lot in one little drop. When I was at Sara Lee, we were making hot dogs. You actually had a dip it in liquid smoke, but it was particular on how long you dipped it for and everything just to get that penetration but we actually have someone on our staff that when she told me she was making a crock pot recipe, one of our recipes that called for liquid smoke but it didn't say the amount. She thought the bottle is so little, just dump the whole bottle in the crock pot.

Daniel Vaughn:

No.

Diana Clark:

So she did that, goes to church, comes home and she said her house, like they couldn't get rid of that smell forever. She said she hasn't touched liquid smoke since. I can only imagine how horrible that scene was walking into it.

Daniel Vaughn:

It is smoke particles. They burn the smoke particles and they essentially use like a... It's like an air conditioning system almost, the cooling tower where you get water raining down through the smoke that's capturing the smoke particles that are coming up through, bringing it down into the water. They then heat the water to even further concentrate it. Yeah, that stuff is highly potent, highly concentrated. Certainly I would never use it to cook with on its own.

Daniel Vaughn:

But for anybody who says that they never eat liquid smoke, do you buy barbecue sauce at the grocery store?

Diana Clark:

You do. Yeah, you definitely do.

Daniel Vaughn:

Because if you do, then there's a very, very high chance that it has liquid smoke in it. It's not called hickory flavored barbecue sauce because they put hickory chips in it.

Bryan Schaaf:

Although, I don't know. Is there another food condiment additive that gets thrown under the bus more than this? It came from noble beginnings. We're trying to preserve meat to keep flies off.

Diana Clark:

I feel like all of the things that have been that are for preservation really get thrown under the bus when it comes to meat. If you think about it, like nitrites... Come on. There's nothing wrong with that. It's like if you go back to the beginnings of why they were added or belonged in need, it is for preservation and it's still going to help the quality of the food. Clearly it was never made to kill someone because that would make no sense. And we wouldn't have anyone eating the product. So you kind of don't win in that

situation. But it's always amazing, that bad side of things that I feel like meat preservation gets into... If you just really look to the roots of it, it's all for good. It's for you.

Daniel Vaughn:

Well, yeah. I guess MSG, you can throw that in there with a much maligned ingredient which is... We eat a lot of Tostitos here in the house but there's another brand of chips here in Texas called Julio's. They've got a little bit of spice seasoning on them, they're a little salty. Every time you break them out, and people who have never had them are like, "Oh my God. These tortilla chips are so good." I was like yeah, MSG is the first spice ingredient. You know why your Doritos are so delicious, right? It's the MSG.

Diana Clark:

That's why they are good.

Bryan Schaaf:

Yeah. The off brand Doritos just never quite do it. That's it. Going back to the little documentary that we talked about in the very intro, The Science of Smoked Brisket. Daniel, one of the things that really caught my attention was this idea of the different types of wood. You talked about in the early days, burning coals down, using that residual heat as barbecue but when you introduce wood into that equation, you've mentioned this thing called lignin that exists in all kinds of wood. Can you expand on that idea? You said that's the flavor that you get from each of these different woods?

Daniel Vaughn:

Right. All wood has lignin in it in different concentrations of it. The amount of lignin in the wood is going to have an effect on just how robust the smoke that comes off of it is. I wrote about it in the context of Texas barbecue where we really have four main hardwoods that people use in barbecue. Oak is heavily prevalent especially post oak wood, pecan wood, hickory wood and mesquite wood. Mesquite kind of gets a bad name because it supposedly gives off a much heavier smoke. Or it puts a much heavier smoke on meat than other woods do.

Daniel Vaughn:

Now, it does give off more robust smoke for sure, because it has a higher lignin content. If you just pick up a piece of Mesquite compared to a piece of post oak, the mosquito is even going to feel more dense. It does take some longer curing time to expend some of the moisture inside the wood from Mesquite than it does other hardwoods as well.

Daniel Vaughn:

But if you know how to cook with mesquite and you don't try to use it, just like you would use other woods, you can still get really great tasting smoke off of that and get a really great taste in smoke on to the barbecue. In a situation where you have an offset smoker. Now, in Texas, a lot of the times when people are cooking with mesquite wood, they're doing direct heat barbecue too. Because of that high lignin content and that denser structure, it makes really great hot wood coals, good for shoveling right under the meat and some of the direct heat pits.

Daniel Vaughn:

But all these different places will tell you that maybe one wood tastes better than the other wood and that's why they use it. I am seeing that a whole lot more now and choosing post oak wood because it's become so popular in Central Texas. But as far as Texas barbecues history goes, the reason you would choose a wood, one hardwood over the other is simply because it grew prevalently wherever you were. You'd have hickory wood up in North Texas and pecan wood up in the Northeast, and you'd have post oak and other oak woods down in Central Texas and mesquite, pretty much everywhere west and south of San Antonio, because that's pretty much all you had.

Daniel Vaughn:

Now up in the panhandle, it's kind of choose your own adventure because you've got to truck it in anyway, because there's no trees up there. You pretty much choose whatever you want to choose. For a long time, a lot of those a lot of those places chose hickory wood. But you can get good barbecue out of each one of those if you know how to properly maintain a fire and that you understand that a denser wood like a mesquite is going to give you a hotter fire.

Daniel Vaughn:

So if you try to build a fire with the same amount of logs of mesquite as you do with the logs of oak, you would use to get a certain temperature in your smoker, then you're going to have a huge heat spike. What an amateur cook is going to do in response to that is to close down the dampers, to close down the exhaust and try and knock that temperature down. Instead, what you're going to do is create a bunch of dirty smoke because you've cut down all the... You've cut down all the fire and so you don't have that ignition and all you have is dirty smoke being created.

Daniel Vaughn:

That's why when I'm cooking at home, I prefer to cook with just the vents all the way open and certainly, never close the exhaust off. If close off the top of that exhaust, you're not smoking meat anymore, you don't have the airflow that you need to actually smoke the meat. So you're only going to get a big buildup of dirty smoke.

Bryan Schaaf:

Excellent. We look at the top 50 list that just came out and one of the general themes and I thought you really addressed it really gracefully and a state where there's so much history wrapped up and it's barbecue. A lot of it is this sort of new wave of barbecue. You look at the guys, obviously Goldie's, Leroy's and Lewis. Evie Mae's, we already talked about. People who are in that Top 10, how much of what they're doing is involved with this sort of understanding this mixing or this sourcing of the different kinds of woods that aren't necessarily where they're at. Is that something that they are taking into account or is that still largely, "We're located here, so we use this wood."

Daniel Vaughn:

I would say that certainly we're getting... There's far more barbecue joints who are choosing to use post oak wood no matter where they're located in Texas or in the rest of the country. Because Central Texas barbecue now has a great reputation for really great barbecue and that's what they use. Yeah, there are more places that are choosing to use post oak wood. Same goes with their beef choice, too. There's so many more places that are...

Daniel Vaughn:



10 years ago for somebody to say that they're using Certified Angus Beef, it's like, "Oh, man. Big spender." Nowadays, it's like Certified Angus Beef, if you're serious about the barbecue you're putting out, something like a Certified Angus Beef or that upper two thirds choice, that's like your baseline. That's where you need to start from. There's others who choose to use a prime product. Some who even use some of the Creekstone stuff that's no hormones, no antibiotics. But the quality of the beef that's being used is another thing that's being copied along with the wood and along with the smoker style as well, the big 1,000 gallon smokers made from propane tanks with a firebox on one side and a massive exhaust pipe on the other side.

Diana Clark:

I think it's amazing to see where the industry's come just from the science standpoint of stuff. Though the science behind just wood, choosing that is phenomenal. Like you said, that that was something that was never even thought about before. It was just, "We've got to cook the meat, let's do it. Hey, it happens to taste really good, too. This is great."

Diana Clark:

They probably were more concerned about salty net than anything to make sure that they're knocking out any bacteria or anything like that, that you possibly have on it. Now that you have that whole component that people actually have a better understanding of, because it's not... Barbecue just hasn't exploded there where it sees these little restaurants doing it, it's exploded. Because it's exploded there, it's gone everywhere.

Diana Clark:

So now you look at your Arby's that has to have barbecue on the menu because they have the meats. So if they have the meats-

Daniel Vaughn:

Chipotle.

Diana Clark:

Yes. Let's not talk about that company. But because of that, they need to understand a little bit more of these components because they can't afford to, okay, let's know... They need to know exactly the heating temperature of this wood in order to manufacture all of these items to be exactly the same in every location across the United States. But to me, that's the beauty about these small niche restaurant barbecues is even if someone down the road has the same smoker, the same wood, the same starting material, it's going to taste a little different because they have their own little recipe that they do.

Diana Clark:

It's just the right amount of salt that they put on it or how they played it up, how they cut it. I think that uniqueness of it just makes it incredible. But seeing these newcomers come along with this added education and study behind barbecue is phenomenal, just seeing the change that they can make in a restaurant. And the demand for quality beef is by far large and all consumers right now. So you see that pressure to even go in the barbecue level because they expect it everywhere.

Diana Clark:

But it's really neat to see that that change slowly occurring. Even as you see some of those establishments that have generations behind them, you see that slowly, they're ticking the needle one way versus the other. But again, you have to work with your past history while you try to move to greater and better things, but still holding true to that tradition. It's kind of give and you'll probably see, I'm guessing that's you'll see some people get a little bit frustrated as they're moving and growing pains. But it's all for the good in the end of it.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah. What you're talking about there as exemplified perfectly by the place I had lunch at yesterday, which is Smokey Joe's barbecue here in Dallas. The owner there Chris Manning, the place used to be run by his dad and his dad's friend Joe, who opened it together and they had an old brick pit and that's where they cooked everything. They built a brick pit back there in the kitchen and it's pretty small, didn't have really great airflow, caused some fires up on the roof a few times.

Daniel Vaughn:

He just ripped it out completely and he put two big Moberg Smokers to offset 1,000 gallons smokers, build a new pit room just for them. One of them, he still runs with hickory because that's what he cooks the ribs and chicken on and that's what Smokey Joe's, that's how they've always cooked their chicken and ribs. He uses the same massive spare ribs, the same spice rub on those and the chicken. But the other smoker is for the brisket, which they do completely differently now. He uses either an upper choice or a prime brisket and uses oak to smoke that with and uses a much more central Texas style seasoning with a real heavy emphasis on salt and pepper.

Daniel Vaughn:

He still has the traditions, you still go into Smokey Joe's and you get the same ribs that they've always been smoking, that people loved him for. But you also are able to get some really great sliced brisket too, which is something that up until a few years ago, didn't really exist there. He's found a really good balance between those two. I don't think that's anything to be afraid of, these places that want to try and improve what they're doing and try and follow what some of the other popular spots are doing. Like what other restaurant type, what other cuisine doesn't do the exact same thing?

Diana Clark:

Yes, yeah.

Daniel Vaughn:

You had mentioned like the wood, like the hickory. I was talking to Chris Manning there and he said that when we had the freeze back in February, that all these places, all these people, these homeowners were just searching everywhere they could for firewood and they bought up all the firewood. It took several months after that massive buy up of all the firewood for any other wood suppliers to actually have seasoned wood. All the wood that they got delivered was wet wood. It was still green, still a lot of moisture content. If anybody is listening who's unfamiliar with the challenge of that, it's that the wood itself can't ignite. It's not going to burn until it is able to release all of the steam or release all of the water within the wood as steam.

Daniel Vaughn:

So until that steam is released, you're not going to really get good ignition of the wood. Most people who run our barbecue giant, they have a wood supplier that supplies them with wood that's already been aged, has sat out and has been able to dry out some. Even those things that just doesn't even seem like it would affect the cooking of barbecue all that much really has a pretty massive effect on in fact.

Daniel Vaughn:

For me, seeing that mixing of tradition and seeing these young guns come up and do some of their new stuff, it's still rooted in smoked brisket, pork ribs and sausage making. That's still the emphasis of Texas barbecue. We've got a young guy here too, Evan Leroy, Leroy and Lewis, who is like, "You know what? Maybe we should question the whole brisket thing." As you talked about, we got Chipotle, we've got Arby's, we've got all these other places that are latched on to brisket now because it's this really powerful marketing term.

Daniel Vaughn:

If you remember, back in the days when every fast food place had an Angus burger. They said nothing about the quality of the Angus beef they were using, but the fact that it was Angus was their marketing ploy. Now, I see that same thing happening with brisket. There's no emphasis on the quality of that brisket or whether it's been smoked well or anything about it other than the fact that it is from this specific kind of meat. When you only have two on every animal and you have all these different multinational corporations trying to service their customers with that specific kind of meat, it's like could you not just say barbecue beef?

Daniel Vaughn:

Texans were happy saying barbecue beef for really like a century before we ever latched on to having to smoke brisket specifically. That's Evan Leroy was... Leroy and Lewis was like, "You know what? We're just going to find the meat that works for us that we don't have to deal with all the volatility of brisket prices." And they went with beef cheeks instead. He still cooks brisket on the weekends, but they're open Wednesday through Sunday and Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, it's all beef cheeks. He does them chopped for chopped beef cheek sandwiches as well as sliced for sandwiches to really mimic like a slice brisket sandwich, as well as like slice beef cheek on a platter.

Daniel Vaughn:

Some people are really threatened by that. These people who call themselves like Texas barbecue, traditional and straight. They are threatened by the idea that somebody is not going to be serving brisket all the time. I just have to go back to this book that Roy Perez at [inaudible 00:34:12] Market gave me back in 1999. He gave me his calendar book where he marked every cut of beef that he put on the pit for every day. It was like how many ribs? How many slabs of ribs? How many briskets, how many shoulder clods.

Daniel Vaughn:

In 1999, I'm talking 22 years ago, he was cooking three times the amount of shoulder clods as he was briskets. If you're a traditionalist then yeah, maybe you should be worried about this newfangled cut of brisket that's overtaking everything and is taking away from our rich tradition of smoking shoulder clods. Except I never hear that argument.

Diana Clark:

Well, it's funny because we just had a proper pig down here. They were kind of going through the same conversation of the brisket prices, they're rough and sometimes, we more need to worry about feeding the masses than anything because a lot of times, barbecue here in Ohio as you know, it's... People love it, but sometimes it's you're living more on catering events and weddings and everything rather than just having that following of people coming for the weekend.

Diana Clark:

It's how can we do this and they have a food truck as well. So just properly keeping that to move around. Mainly, they need a chopped beef sandwich is what it comes down to. You could have a fantastic choppy sandwich without brisket. You're still getting the smoke off of it. I realized because when we're at the Culinary Center, we break down a lot of sites of beef. You can throw so much in the grinder and give it away as ground beef. But people can only eat so much ground beef and it's not the summertime, they really don't want it as bad as they do in the wintertime.

Diana Clark:

But we have this fantastic smoker. I could take the same cuts that I throw in the grinder and throw it in the smoker and cook to the point where it just shreds and there we go, we have amazing smoke shredded beef for anyone to utilize, great to reheat. There's just so many applications around that. I'm glad that they're looking elsewhere and not getting so hooked on... When people are complaining about beef prices, I get that they're high, but everything's high. Any meats that you look at, anything is high right now. So it's how do we work around that and still utilize the animal appropriately versus just getting upset about it and paying more for brisket. Yeah.

Daniel Vaughn:

Well, that's the roughest part about the brisket prices right now. Is it's still like one of the cheapest cuts of meat you can get. It is. Every other cut of beef is just a lot more expensive. It's like, "Well, what if we use Chuck?" It's like well, you're not going to really be doing any better there.

Diana Clark:

It's a loss right there.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah, you're not going to be doing any better there. I even did sort of a funny computation where I smoked a boneless New York Strip. Just a whole strip loin. Smoked a whole strip loin to medium rare and basically took its cost per finished ounce versus the cost per finish ounce of a brisket. Because a brisket, there's a lot more trim involved, there's a lot more loss, you're cooking it way beyond the medium rare point, you're cooking to where you've got a ton of moisture loss.

Daniel Vaughn:

It was almost a wash of just of serving New York Strip, instead of serving brisket. I was at... All right, so I'll admit this. I went to the American Royal and I really wasn't all that hungry for barbecue by the end of the day.

Diana Clark:

I can't imagine that.

Daniel Vaughn:

I wanted to go eat somewhere else, anywhere else. Anything but barbecue for dinner. I went... I'm looking at all these chain restaurants. It's like out there where the Royal is, it's out by this speedway. There's nothing out there other than a chain restaurant. It's Chili's and Hooters and that's what you've got to choose from. Red Lobster, they have lobsters, right?

Diana Clark:

They're real, right?

Daniel Vaughn:

I can just go in and get a lobster. I go, I asked what the market price is for this pound and a quarter lobster that comes with two sides and of course Cheddar Bay Biscuits. It's \$32. Man, there's a lot of barbecue joints that are charging that for smoked brisket, right now and that doesn't include the two sides in the Cheddar Bay Biscuits.

Daniel Vaughn:

Maybe we all just need to be looking for Lobster.

Diana Clark:

Smoked lobster.

Daniel Vaughn:

I do want to add into the fact too that the other really big challenge with the brisket prices is really not just in overall beef prices but in overall meat prices. All the meat prices are going higher. Even if Texas barbecue joints were paying a premium for really great brisket like two years ago, they still... The economic landscape was different back then. People weren't going to have it, if you actually needed to charge what you should charge to be profitable for brisket.

Daniel Vaughn:

Nowadays, the barbecue joints are like, "Whatever. I'm going to charge whatever I need to because I'm going to go out of business, if I don't." Back then, they were much more conscious of keeping the prices as low as they possibly could for a pound of brisket. And so they did, they can't make any money on brisket but we can elevate the price a bit on pulled pork and on turkey and on chicken and sausage and ribs and all these other things that you can get much more cheaply.

Daniel Vaughn:

Well, now all the prices on all those things have raised too. And so you can no longer get your lost profit from brisket out of these other items by just elevating the price a little bit. You just simply have got to go up to your whatever, \$28 a pound \$30 a pound for brisket that you need to charge in order to make a profit just from that, because you're not making it up anywhere else.

Diana Clark:

It's amazing because I feel like [inaudible 00:40:51] and it kind of is. They're like a little meat shop. It's cooked meats, but essentially, that's what they are. It's the same conversations that are happening in retail too. Retail, the meat department in a grocery store is definitely not the breadwinner. They are drawing people in, but they are not making that much money. It's more just to get the people in the store and to shop. It's the same thing. Maybe we could buy get a decent buy on beef, but we'll make more money when people also add something else to the cart or just really drill them in on this. Now, they're they're facing those exact same challenges of like okay, well, we got them into the store, but can we get them hooked on anything else? It's kind of crazy to see that throughout the industry that people are struggling with that same thing.

Daniel Vaughn:

Well, that's the curse of Central Texas style barbecue of sliced meat on a platter. It's like the worst, the least profitable way you can serve barbecue. It's like please put it on anything except a tray. Put it on a potato, put it on a bun, put it on a tortilla, put it on anything other than just put it on the tray.

Bryan Schaaf:

Continuing with the theme of smoking, talk to us about when the smoke hits the meat, there's a smoking ring that forms over time. Whether it's direct, offset smokers, you name it, reverse flow smokers, what's going on there? Diane, I've heard you explain this multiple times. What's actually going on there?

Diana Clark:

Daniel too, you probably actually know more about this than I do to be completely honest. But really, you're just using the pigment within the meat that that myoglobin is changing and you're causing that pink to form. It can only penetrate so far based on the denaturation that's happening within those proteins, because that's how far it could actually travel into the meat.

Diana Clark:

But it happens to the extent of that temperature. When that surface gets so hot, it no longer can penetrate any further. That's why you have that ring that could be really narrow or it could get out a deeper ring. I was talking to meat scientists that actually, she works at a establishment that produces a lot of briskets for mass quantities. But she was saying that they actually start their briskets, their pits out at about 120 degrees and just let them coast there pretty much for 12 hours to really get a giant ring to form because they are not a barbecue joint by trade at all, but they want to have pristine barbecue.

Diana Clark:

I think a lot of people visually see the ring and they think, "This is going to be good. This is there." But really, you can create that ring with any smoke. It doesn't matter. It's really more that temperature gradient that you see those differences there.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yes, yeah. It's like I try to explain to people, as you said that it's not a color that's introduced, it's a color that's already in the meat that you're basically just seizing that color. It does doll. It gets pink rather than remaining red. But yeah, I mean if you... There are ways to cheat that. Not to cheat but if you really want a really thick, dark smoke ring, then start with really cold meat.

Daniel Vaughn:

You start it as you said on a colder smoker. The rotisserie smokers that you can just set a temperature, like a lot of people set those like 225 almost all the time if you go into a place that's using a rotisserie smoker like that, you're going to get a better smoke ring because it stays at that low temperature for a longer period of time. You can smoke with wood that's got more bark on it because it produces more of the compounds in the smoke that bond to the meat, that are able to seize that myoglobin color.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah. You can do all these different things to make sure you get a really great smoking but one of the trends or overarching trends really in Texas barbecue is cooking hotter, it's cooking more like 275 in the offset smokers and that does produce a less pronounced smoke ring. And also really the emphasis on burning a really clean fire. You are producing less of those volatile compounds out of the smoke, more of them are burning up before they make it into the cook chamber. And so there are fewer of those to really latch on to the meat as well.

Daniel Vaughn:

For both of those reasons, I think a lot of the newer barbecue joints, especially the ones that are cooking a little hotter, don't give you that more pronounced smoke ring. But yeah, I think you were looking for the word nitroso-myoglobin. That is when nitric oxide replaces the oxygen in the myoglobin molecule and seizes that red color. I'm reading directly from my notes on an article that I wrote like five years ago about it.

Diana Clark:

It's on the tip of my tongue.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah, yeah. Exactly. I've got the cheat sheet right here in front of me.

Bryan Schaaf:

I knew it. I knew it.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah, you can do the same thing with carbon monoxide too if you dare.

Diana Clark:

Yeah, let's not try that one. Do not try this at home.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah, don't do that. We're already playing with fire here, so we don't need to make it any worse.

Diana Clark:

Goodness.

Bryan Schaaf:

Outstanding. I'll tell you what, as we are approaching kind of the witching hour when we need to put a bow on this, Daniel Vaughn I would be remiss if I didn't ask you a couple of questions here before we rolled. The first, as the editor of Texas Monthly's barbecue section, we like to get... A good friend of ours is a past podcast guest. He made this case of their goal in their restaurant is not necessarily to be "the best" on these lists or Beard Awards, all these. They want to be people's favorites. I won't even ask you to talk about your favorites in Texas. But if you are an outsider coming to Texas looking to eat barbecue, I guess are there three joints that you can showcase to say, "You know what? If you eat in all three of these, you're going to get the Texas barbecue experience."

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah, sure. Well, yeah. I did have a favorite. It was Goldie's. It can't be my favorite anymore because I can't go there for a while now because it's [inaudible 00:47:54].

Diana Clark:

Does that ever make you not want to put it as a favorite because you're like, "Man..."

Daniel Vaughn:

No, never made me want to do that. It would never make me want to do that. I know of people who find a great place and don't want to tell anybody about it. But the best way to tell a barbecue joint owner that you don't care about them or their livelihood is to say that you want to keep them a secret so you don't have to wait in line there.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah, Goldie's was my favorite there for a little while because I could just go over there. They're just like 45 minutes from my house. I could just run over to Goldie's and I would get there at 11 o'clock when they open. I was second or third in line and walked right in and get my big tray of barbecue. It was no surprise to me that when they made number one, that it was a huge surprise to a lot of people because I knew that a lot of people had not heard about this place yet.

Daniel Vaughn:

They didn't really start off with the biggest bang. They opened in February of 2020, quickly shut down to become a takeout only business before they ever built up a following and were really just starting to build a following when we named them number one. With all that out of the way, I'm going to give you more than three because I'm going to give you a few different reasons for these.

Daniel Vaughn:

For like overall experience going to Truth BBQ in Houston. It's a beautiful place to eat barbecue. They have a line. But it is very efficient. They have a lot of cutters, they have incredible barbecue, they also have incredible specials, incredible specialty items like a brisket boudin or a Burrington brisket boudin. They do whole hog on Saturdays in sort of hybrid North Carolina, South Carolina style, which is just amazing. They've got incredible desserts and sides and the dining room is great and their sauce is awesome and they've even got this lime cucumber Agua fresca thing going on which is awesome.

Daniel Vaughn:



It's like a full experience. It's just an incredible place to go. For like that classic Central Texas experience, going to Louie Mueller Barbecue in Taylor. There's not many places that really match that. Like if you want... What does a small town legendary Texas barbecue joint look like? Yeah, that one's going to be the one. For that special occasion, going to Snow's BBQ. There's no place that is more exciting. There's so much buzz around Snow's BBQ on a Saturday morning which is the only morning they're open.

Daniel Vaughn:

It's honestly gotten to the point of almost being like a circus these days. It's just so massively popular. But for good reason. Go and get an incredible platter of barbecue and see Miss Tootsie at work and Clay Cowgill back there cooking the briskets and the pork ribs. You get the free Bloody Marys. They've even got a whole building built just for the merch and bathroom's outside. They build a new facility just for shipping that's got a freezer and a cooler and storage for all their other coolers and their vac seal machines and all of that.

Daniel Vaughn:

Here, I'm going to go back to Fort Worth and talk about how cool it is to go to a place like Panther City BBQ and be able to get that real Tex Mex feel to the barbecue as well as the classic barbecue. You get things like the brisket elotes, brisket tacos and then these pork belly poppers, which is half a jalapeno filled with cream cheese with a big chunk of pork belly burnt end and then wrapped in bacon and then smoked. And so the bacon is crispy, the pork belly burnt end underneath, it's like meltingly soft and then you get a little bit of heat from the jalapeno. They take out all the seeds and everything so it's not too much.

Daniel Vaughn:

But being able to get that full meal there. They've got the bar next door. You can get a drink either while you're waiting in line or with your meal, either one. That's a really cool place to go. Here in Dallas, because it's so close, it's only open Thursday and Friday and the first Saturday of every month. The Cattleack BBQ is one of those rare places where you can go. I can't recommend what to get because it's all fantastic. It's like, you're not going to be disappointed with anything. For most barbecue joints, it's like yeah, they're a little weak here, there. Maybe skip that part and that just doesn't exist there.

Diana Clark:

That's awesome. I love that.

Bryan Schaaf:

Outstanding. From the man himself, right there's your passport, Diana.

Diana Clark:

I know.

Bryan Schaaf:

Boom, done.

Diana Clark:

It's my starting point.

Daniel Vaughn:

That'll get you a few stamps right there.

Bryan Schaaf:

Done. Done. All right. All right, last question to appease our social media guru page who handles all of our promotions and social media stuff. She's a millennial, right? I don't deal in these things. That said, Daniel Vaughn, editor of Texas Monthly, the barbecue editor I should say specifically, cut of meat, if Daniel Vaughn is picking out a cut of meat... Well, let's go ahead and cross off brisket right here because there's so much of that running around.

Daniel Vaughn:

I'm not going to pick a brisket if I'm cooking at home. I've got great ones, 10 minutes that way and 10 minutes that way.

Bryan Schaaf:

Well, what's your cut of meat? What are you cooking?

Daniel Vaughn:

Well, is some beef company sending me whatever I'm asking for because if so, I'm getting a rib-eye cap.

Bryan Schaaf:

I know a meat scientist who can make that happen.

Diana Clark:

[inaudible 00:54:01] It's possible.

Daniel Vaughn:

I mean, I'm going to ask for a rib-eye cap.

Diana Clark:

Nice.

Daniel Vaughn:

For Christmas, I usually get a whole rib-eye so that I can take the rib-eye cap off, cut down, trim around the eye a little bit, save all that... That's such great fat there. Save that fat, melt it down to tallow, take the bones off but leave plenty of meat on there and smoke those as the best beef crackers you'll ever have.

Diana Clark:

Yes, best beef crackers.

Daniel Vaughn:

Smoke the eye and then grill the rib-eye cap as an appetizer. That right there is just... That's heaven for me.

Diana Clark:

That is incredible.

Daniel Vaughn:

If I'm cooking at home though, I'm more likely to go get a New York Strip because when I cook at home, I like to just serve it already sliced. You don't need a steak knife to eat in my house. It's already sliced up and the portioning on a New York Strip works really well. It is the cut that I pretty much only buy prime of though. I love a prime New York strip. A choice rib-eye is fine for me. But the difference between a prime and a choice New York strip, I think there's a big difference there. I love lots of different cuts of meat.

Diana Clark:

I'm with you on that one.

Daniel Vaughn:

Yeah. And skirt steak.

Diana Clark:

Of course, of course.

Daniel Vaughn:

I think as the steak... It's the most dangerous steak. Because you cut it into small pieces, you cut it into small chunks so you can cut it against the grain, cutting off little slices and each one of those slices is just... It's gone before you get to the next one and before you know it, you've eaten a pound and a half of skirt steak. That's a dangerous one.

Diana Clark:

You still have five guests to feed. It's like, "Oh, crap."

Daniel Vaughn:

Right. Yeah. Just put a lot of guacamole in that tortilla and you'll have enough skirt steak for it.

Bryan Schaaf:

Perfect. You heard it here first. Daniel Vaughn knows more than just brisket and short ribs, of course. That's it. Before we let you go, can you give us some plugs? Where can people find you? Where can people follow you?

Daniel Vaughn:

Well, I am BBQsnob on both Instagram and Twitter. And then we've got our own barbecue channel right on the Texas Monthly site. So if you just search for Texas Monthly Barbecue or just hit the barbecue button right there on the Texas Monthly front page, that will take you to all of our barbecue content.

This transcript was exported on Nov 04, 2021 - view latest version [here](#).

Bryan Schaaf:

Outstanding. On that note, Danny Vaughn, barbecue editor of Texas Monthly, we appreciate you for taking time to join us here on the Meat Speak Podcast powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand. If this is your first time tuning in, we appreciate you if you could know that we're available across all of your major podcasting platforms or by visiting [certifiedangusbeef.com/podcast](https://certifiedangusbeef.com/podcast).

Bryan Schaaf:

But if you could, we're putting a particular emphasis on the Apple Podcasting app, which is that little purple icon on your phone. If you could go, leave us a review, leave us a star ranking. Again. It's not about my ego. It's more about helping us be visible to the greater podcasting audience. That said, Daniel Vaughn, Texas Monthly, Diana Clarke, meat scientists. Thank you guys so much for joining us and you all take care.

Daniel Vaughn:

Thank you.