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SPRING 2026

FIRE and FLESH

The science and lore of steak

THE DISH

THE SEMESTER NEWS

WINE 101

TWO LOCAL EXPERTS TAKE RELISH THROUGH THE INS AND OUTS OF WINE IN CENTRAL IOWA

THE VALUE STALKER

PROTEINS' BANG FOR THE BUCK





The semester news

By Jim Duncan

Des Moines' food scene got some respect, particularly from **James Beard Awards** where **Ian Robertson** of Oak Park, **Nick Hanke** and **Phil Shires** of Masao were named top 20 chefs in the Midwest and The Contrary was a top 20 new bar. USA Today honored **Alba, Oak Park, Prime & Providence, The Station on Ingersoll, Aposto,** and **Lua** with national "bests." **Egg Roll Ladies** owner Captain **Trang Pham** deployed to Iraq for one year with her Army guard troops. Her restaurant remains open... **The Ingersoll**, a dinner theater, opened on New Year's Eve. Sold-out crowds have been the rule there. The kitchen is manned by **Chase Johanson**, who used to be America's top chef... **Ben Bourland** moved from Harbinger to **The Contrary** where he crafted the menu that James Beard noticed... **Ford's Garage** (Florida), a "full-service, 1920s garage-themed burger and craft beer restaurant inspired by the heritage of The Ford Motor Company" announced intention to build three locations in Iowa and are looking at Davenport, Iowa City, Cedar Rapids, and Des Moines... Rising star **Gabe Stover** moved from Tom Archer's Supper Club to **Masao** where he is sous chef to **Phil Shires** in the city's most creative new restaurant since Harbinger... **Nick Tillinghast** opened **Des Moines Athletic Club** in the Equitable Building... **Mallory Holt** and **Ryan Nicholson** opened **Littleleaf Luncheonette** on the square in Waukee... **Roger Ibarra** moved **Mariscos El Capitan**, with its reputation for really big seafood platters, from Sixth Avenue to much larger spaces in the former S.E. 14th venue of **Mariscos El Pirata**... **Spectator Sports** closed Nov. 26... **Triple Crown Sports Bar** closed... **Panera** (Missouri) announced it is closing its Jordan Creek Town Center outlet... Wildly successful **Kura Sushi** of Osaka announced plans to bring its popular conveyor belt cafeteria to Jordan Creek... **Chikin Lickin** opened in the Local Bites food court with Korean takes on fried chicken... **Dave's Hot Chicken** opened in Ankeny... **Teriyaki Eats** opened in Windsor Heights... **Bonfire** opened on South Ankeny Boulevard... **Django** announced a March 14 closing

date... **Kwik Star** announced a new store near Westtown Parkway and Valley West Drive... **Tribute** (Coralville) opened its first central Iowa restaurant, in Ankeny... Convenience-store operator **RaceTrac** struck a deal to purchase **Potbelly** for roughly \$566 million, aiming to continue growing the Chicago-based sandwich chain... **Highland Underground** and **Bar Martinez** opened... The versatile **Gloria Henriquez** added a Salvadoran menu to her Peruvian kitchen at **Tulpa** while becoming the head of the Iowa Latino Restaurant Association... **Carly Dascoli** replaced Sam Tuttle as Wine Director at **Oak Park** and its 7,000 bottle wine cellar. Dascoli moved from Harbinger earlier. Tuttle moved to San Francisco... **Amruth** added Saturday and Sunday buffets noon to 4 p.m.... **Saffron Indian Café** moved into the former Mandarin Noodle House with daily buffets... **JBS USA** broke ground on a \$135 million sausage plant in Perry Industrial Park... **T.E. Alderman's** closed its gluten-free café in Nevada after one year... **Barista's Bouquet**, a West Des Moines coffee and flower shop, is expanding into a second location in Urbandale... **Taste of New York**, an "Ultimate Pizza in Des Moines" winner, moved its mother store into a larger bay in the same strip mall. They also expanded to Pleasant Hill... **Bamboo House** opened a second locale on Merle Hat Road... **Birdie's** took over the former JJ's space in Ankeny... **The Empire** returned to its 1906 home on Fourth... **Revelry Room** upgraded the Renaissance Savery's dining options... **Fairway Frank's B&G** opened in Norwalk... **Judges DSM** opened near the Courthouse... **Bubbies BBQ**, a barbecue joint, expanded... **Chowrastha Indian Grill & Eatery** in West Des Moines expanded to Ankeny with **Spice Rasta**... **Zeke's Rooftop & Grill** opened in Johnston... **Exile Brewing Co.** announced a new location inside the Kettlestone Social food hall and entertainment space coming to Waukee... **The Greenwood Lounge** sold to **Connor Delaney**, who actually deep cleaned and upgraded the place to reopen in March... **Mike Wedeking** sold his **Flying Mango**, which remained unchanged. ■



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FIRE and FLESH

The science and lore of steak



A FILET AT RUTH'S CHRIS.

By Jim Duncan

Freshly cut meat searing over an open flame wafts a primal scent — the one that encouraged our human progenitors to straighten their spines, walk on two legs, fashion spears, and domesticate fire. Roasting steak is the original form of cooking. In cave paintings that date back 40,000 years, Neanderthal artists depicted the hunting and cooking of aurochs, the progenitors of cattle.

In those paintings, mankind's ancestors were already unique amongst hunting species in that they did NOT stalk old, sick and weak prey. "Steak" author Mark Schatzer, speaking in Des

Moines last August, reasons that is because weak prey may be easier to kill but they are too lean. And even 40,000 years ago, the prehuman body sensed what it needed to eat in order to survive.

Schatzer thinks the calories in diets that matter most all come from fat.

"If more than 40% of one's energy comes from protein, the liver buckles and toxins enter the bloodstream."

Too much protein can kill us — a condition called "rabbit starvation" after Canadian explorers in the 19th century died from eating an all-

rabbit diet. (Rabbit has more protein than any other meat.) Neanderthals were the original diagnosticians, laying down the first nutritional rule of survival — "fat is where it's at."

The Pitjandjara of Australia's Outback will abandon an entire carcass if they find no fat in the tail of a kangaroo. Plains Indians' diets were 85% bison meat. It nourished them so well that in the middle of the 19th century, they were the tallest people on Earth, almost an entire inch taller than white people of the time. Of all bison steaks, they prized hump, which is the fattiest of all.



JAMES BEARD AWARDS' TOP 20 MIDWEST CHEF IAN ROBERTSON WITH A STEAK ON OAK PARK'S JOSPER GRILL. PHOTO BY BILLY DOHRMAN, COURTESY OF OAK PARK

STICKS AND STONES

We also learn from Neanderthal artists that the first steaks were cooked on sticks over open flames. That is still the preferred method for many steak eaters. In Spanish this method of called “a la parilla,” parilla being the fire. In Argentina, where more steak is eaten per capita than anywhere else on Earth, the word “carne” means only beef. All lesser meats, like pork, lamb, mutton and protein-heavy rabbit, don’t qualify.

Etymologically, “steak” comes from a Viking word meaning stick, or the stick on which meat is impaled and cooked over an open fire. The word “kebab” evolved from Akkadian through Aramaic, Persian and Arabic and means “meat grilled on a stick over fire.” We honor the primeval cooks with words in most all languages.

Flame grilled aurochs was an easily acquired taste. We know now that even monkeys, who don’t even know how to cook, prefer cooked steak to raw. Today in metro Des Moines, Prime & Providence cooks all its steaks, and some seafoods, over glowing embers. Oak Park takes charcoal cooking to its most celebrated level with their Catalunya-built Josper charcoal grill-oven. Hardee’s, Carl’s Jr., Burger King and B Bops all distinguished themselves from other burger chains by searing their beef over flames.

High heat sears better than lesser temperatures. The essential char on a great steak is the result of a Maillard Reaction which is to proteins’ amino acids what caramelization is to carbohydrates’ sugar. It produces much of what we call flavor in a steak.

When cooking with wood, the wood must first be burnt down to glowing coals because the “yellow flame stage” of fire leaves particles on the char that are quite unpleasant and, probably, carcinogenic. Hard woods like oak and ash burn the hottest. Dry and aged woods burn hotter than fresher woods. Lump charcoal burns hotter, but shorter, than briquettes. Argentines prefer quebracho wood from north Argentina so much that it is sold in most all supermarkets in Buenos Aeres.

My first trip to Buenos Aeres seduced me with its seductive aroma. There are so many Argentines cooking steaks on parillas that the whole city is swamped in its primal scent, at least in warm months. Woods burn at 1,100 to 2,000 degrees F. In the best restaurants, steaks sear quickly and then are finished in ovens. Seryna steakhouse in Tokyo pioneered the cooking of steak on rocks from the sacred Buddhist town of Nikko. Those are heated for 8 hours to reach 200 C (392 F). Cooking time on Nikko stones is just seconds.



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DOES STEAK HAVE FLAVOR?

Steak’s flavor profile is complex. There are 340 flavor compounds in steak — compared to 386 in red wine. Yet, steak critics don’t write arrogant reviews about its “notes of raspberry” and “hints of mustard seed.” Steak’s flavors come from its amino acids, and they are not what wine writers like. For instance, butanoic acid lives in steak and also in body odor, vomit and Parmesan cheese.

A well-done steak has 80% less umami, the pseudo flavor that enhances other flavors, than a medium rare one. Three beefy tasting substances, especially thiamenes, are found in steak and roast beef and nowhere else. These are “volatile,” meaning they are created by heat and disappear when heat is removed. Reheated steak creates new, less pleasant molecules. Beef should be room temperature before cooking because colder meat will experience “thermic shock” that blocks key flavor compounds. According to Scotland’s equivalence of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a good steak should last five to six chews before losing juiciness. More than 12 chews makes it a great steak.

Steak makes it to higher chew numbers because of its melting fats and its juiciness. Those are not the same thing, and their balance is essential to the best steaks. Melted fat induces salivation and the illusion of sustained juiciness, but real juice is the bloody stuff that covers the plate when cut. Juice is in muscle fiber. If a steak has too much fat, it has too little juice.



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STEAK IS IOWA'S HERITAGE

Between the Civil War and 1880, Midwest cattle populations increased 30 times over. Because Iowa's fertile soil grew the most grain, the state's fattened cows produced the gold standard of this new food economy, at a time when food drove all economies.

For a century, the status of Iowa beef extended to New York City steakhouses and beyond. In 1959, Des Moines' Harry Bookey, then 11, told Russian Premier Nikita Khrushchev that the U.S.S.R. might have an edge in satellite technology, but our beef was superior. Khrushchev, a staunch Russian chauvinist, conceded the point to the young debater. Coincidentally, Bookey would become both a lawyer and a restaurateur in Des Moines.

When Khrushchev visited Des Moines, Iowa beef represented the culmination of one of the great romances in the histories of both agriculture and human migration. After Europeans got word about the fertility of Iowa's black soil, immigrants flocked across oceans, mountains and hostile forests to realize the American dream of owning land from which they could make a good life.

By the end of the 19th century, they made Iowa a rich state built on fields of grain and pastures of plenty. That wealth was sustainable and a source of pride. Fields produced corn in such abundance that farmers fed it to cattle that grazed their youth away in alfalfa and clover. Those corn-finished cows moved short distances to packers and lockers. Our steaks were lowan from birth to aging lockers and famous for their superior marbling.

Since Khrushchev left, Iowa has gone from the No. 1 cattle state to No. 9. Cattle business moved south and west for cheaper land. This decade, however, Des Moines' steakhouse scene grew like a force-fed duck's liver — even as America's cattle population declined to a level not seen since before Khrushchev visited, when there were only half as many human mouths to feed as today.

The laws of supply and demand skyrocketed beef prices this decade. Yet somehow “all prime and aged” steakhouses popped up in Des Moines' metro like the purple flowers of the spring alfalfa that grassfed cattle love most.



RUTH'S CHRIS IN WEST DES MOINES HAS MULTIPLE CHANDELIERS THAT COST MORE THAN RUTH'S FIRST RESTAURANT.

Ruth's Chris built its largest store ever, at the time, in West Des Moines. Yet, locals Irina's and Prime & Providence moved in near them and Fleming's. Prime & Providence elevated steakhouse culture to Japanese levels with Japanese flights and steaks that go beyond just Kobe.

Steakhouses are now touchstones to the farms and small towns from which many of Des Moines-area families moved. Three-fourths of Iowa counties peaked in population more than 120 years ago while the Des Moines area grew continuously. Steakhouses used to cover the state. In smaller towns, they often became surrogate country clubs and were the nicest places in entire counties for people to celebrate special occasions of life.

Archie's Waeside in Le Mars became a bona fide Iowa legend with its dry aging room, two James Beard Awards, a garden and a nearby landing strip for private planes. 801 Steak and Chop House expanded out of Des Moines to Denver, Kansas City, Omaha, the Twin Cities, St. Louis and metro Washington D.C. A quarter of the way through the 21st century, Des Moines is again the focus of steakhouse culture. ■

Steak's dirty secrets

(mostly from food journalist Mark Schatzker)



- The last bull aurochs died in Poland in 1620. The last female followed him seven years later.
- Grass is what all ruminants eat in nature. It does not cause their livers to abscess or their rumens to turn acidic like corn does. A green leaf is alive. A seed head is dead — an inert package of starch intended to feed a blade of grass. Corn does not exist in nature. It required humans to coax grasses into developing large, starch seedheads. Rice, wheat, corn and barley are all large seed heads. Humans harvested them and ate them and eons later steamed and flaked them to feed to cattle.
- The first grain-eating cows were in 18th century Appalachia. Before WWII, one in 20 steaks came from grain eaters. Now, nearly all do.
- Feedlot nutritionists actually prefer to see a percentage of cattle get sick and die. It shows the herd is being pushed to the edge ration-wise
- The Chicago Mercantile Exchange sells 45,000 beef contracts a day. Each is for 40,000 pounds of beef. That's 1.8 billion pounds a day.
- The USDA employs 200 meat graders with 140 dedicated to beef. Texas Tech University offers a major in beef grading.
- The longer meat ages, the more time calpain enzymes have to bust up muscle fiber and tenderize beef.
- The French consider beef less than two years old to be insipid. Rather than hanging carcass from the hindleg, as is common, French butchers hang them from the hip bone, believing it stretches muscle in a way that benefits steak flavor.
- Continental breeds (Charolais, Limousin, etc.) that were used for centuries to pull plows and carts are full of fast-twitching muscle fiber, making them tougher and less flavorful than smaller less-bred Highlands.
- There are about 1,000 breeds of cattle today. Angus cattle make up just 14% of the Scottish herd, for which it is associated. Mostly Scottish cows are now Limousin.
- Thousands of people come each year to eat thousands of pounds of Chianina beef, mostly T-bones, in Cortona in Chiana, Tuscany. That is the world's biggest steak festival.

Wine 101

Two local experts take RELISH through the ins and outs of wine in central Iowa.



BARRELS OF WINE LINE THE WALLS INSIDE JASPER WINERY.

By Cyote Williams

A glass of wine is a symbol of class and elegance. It has its roots — or vines — intertwined with most of history, as the alcohol made from grapes has been around for nearly 10,000 years, an almost inconceivable amount of time. Depending on who you ask, even Jesus Christ made his own wine.

With such a rich history, both in its flavor and its origins, wine has remained a popular beverage. And, we can see how. After all, wine spans from boxed wine, wine coolers and wine in a bag all the way to barrel-aged, specialty-grown grapes and can cost thousands of dollars for just a single glass. There is also plenty in between.

But, entering the world of wine can also be a challenge and intimidating. Different flavors. Different colors. Different regions. The list goes on. We chose to talk to a local grower/maker and a local wine expert to get the long and short of the wine world from how it is

grown to how to taste it and what to buy.

We sat down with Mason Groben, the man responsible for wine production at Jasper Winery, located on Des Moines southside. Groben has a degree in viticulture and enology, which is grape growing and wine science. Jasper Winery was originally started by his parents, Jean and Paul, in Newton. In 2007, Jasper made the move to Iowa's capital and has been producing wine and hosting events at the winery ever since.

“That was nearly 20 years ago now. Things were very different in Des Moines back then. There was a resurgence in downtown Des Moines. There were not even any breweries in Des Moines. It was just a really different time in the Iowa beverage industry. That being said, it was very new, but there was a lot of excitement. People really didn't know that Iowa could have wineries and breweries,” Groben said.

GROWING GRAPES

Sure, Iowa is known as a farm state. But, that buck tends to stop after corn, soybeans and pigs. As for grapes? Who could know? Perhaps the man with the viticulture degree.

“We’ve really tackled all that stuff over the years, whether that’s sourcing ingredients, marketing and promotional, that kind of stuff. Having the wine industry in the Midwest, there are going to be challenges in that we can’t grow the same grape varieties that you grow in California,” Groben said.

Alas, there are grapes you can grow in the Hawkeye state. The ones that Jasper grow are French American hybrid varieties. Grapes like Baco blanc or Marquette’s.

“They’re varieties that are bred to withstand the cold temperatures of the Midwest. So, one of the biggest challenges is educating people what these different grapes are,” Groben said. “We can make dry wines or sweet wines, red or white. That’s a challenge, educating not only the industry but also consumers of what these different Midwestern grapes are.”

The Iowa wine scene was once a lot sweeter than it is today, according to Groben. Not that there was anything wrong with a sweet wine, but Groben and Jasper wanted to show the market that there is a whole world of wine out there to enjoy.

“We’ve always tried to use local grapes, make a high-quality, dry wine, barrel-aged stuff — trying to push an envelope,” Groben said.

Being limited by the climate, the type of grapes Groben and other wineries are able to grow in the area is limited, and this will also affect the taste.



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JASPER WINERY WELCOMES THOUSANDS TO ITS YARD EVERY YEAR FOR ITS SUMMER CONCERT SERIES.

“You couldn’t grow a Cabernet Sauvignon or Chardonnay here. It’s gonna die off during the winter. Because it doesn’t get so warm, some of the dry reds are a little bit more of a challenge for us, because it’s just really hard to develop the tannin that you would in the climate of California,” Groben said.

If Mother Nature obeyed his demands, what would Groben and Jasper be growing?

“My favorite white grape is Sauvignon Blanc. I like that a lot. For red, I like Zinfandel,” Groben said.

MAKING WINE

What is the wine-making process like? From start to finish, from the idea room to the vineyard, to the machines and to the bottles? White grapes and red grapes get different treatments, but the processes are mostly the same.

“With the white grapes, we’re going to harvest those, we’re going to bring them in, and we’re going to press those the same day that we bring them in. We press them into juice, pump that juice into the tanks in the back here. Then, add the yeast and start fermentation. It’s going to ferment for about three weeks. It’s going to sit for about a couple of months to stabilize, and then you’re going to filter it, blend it — if you’re going to do any blending — and basically get it ready for bottling,” Groben said.

As for red grapes, the main difference is that you crush and ferment the juice with the seeds and the skins. That will extract the color and the tannins from the red grapes. Then after fermentation is when they get pressed.

Jasper has also dabbled in making cider recently. The winery planted 300 apple trees to help produce the sweet beverage, which is not all that different from wine, according to Groben.

“There’s not a lot of difference, really. People really think that cider is more like beer, but really, cider is basically just an apple wine, the way it’s made. The biggest difference is that it’s going to be a little bit lower alcohol, because

apples start with a lower amount of sugars. Apples have about half as much sugar as grapes. So, it's like a lower alcohol wine, and it's carbonated. That's your other big difference," Groben said.

We also sat down with Jamie Farrington, who is opening up a new wine bar in the former Johnston Winestyles, now dubbed the Rabbit Room. Farrington is a man who has lived many lives. He went into the Navy straight out of high school. While he was working on his culinary degree at DMACC, he worked in a factory. He also worked at Stoney Creek, Gateway Market and Winestyles.

His love for the grape-made alcohol started simply with a bottle of Two-Buck Chuck from Trader Joe's.

"This is when Two-Buck Chuck was still \$2 a bottle. By the time I finished my first case, I was like, I need to move on to something better," Farrington did.

He first upgraded to a 2007 bottle of Chianti Classico Reserva from Banfi.

"That was my graduating year from high school. I fell in love. I was like, OK, yep, now I'm kind of ruined because I've got to buy good wine now. That's really when it started, in terms of my appreciation for good wine," Farrington said.

WINE BUYING

When looking to buy a wine to drink at home, or at a restaurant, knowing what to choose out of the hundreds of selections can be its own battle. You don't want to buy something that's too cheap and will disappoint, but you also don't want to buy something too expensive and waste your money.

It might not be as difficult as one might think. Even a wine guy like Farrington still gets some of his wine at the grocery store.

"I live literally a block and a half down from Aldi. That's where I do a third of my grocery shopping. And, you know, they've got their little wine section, and half of it, I don't want to touch it, but the other half, I actually am like, I want to take this home. And it's super cheap," Farrington said. "I also understand the Italian ratings, DOC versus DOCG."

Denominazione di Origine Controllata, or DOC, is a system of laws implemented in 1963 that regulates all aspects of winemaking in Italy. Then, a DOCG would indicate another guarantee of quality. Wineries receive this after submitting their samples to a testing facility for minimal alcohol content, aging requirements and grape quality. This is similar to French wine, which uses

WHAT IS YOUR IDEAL WAY TO ENJOY A GLASS OF WINE?

GROBEN

"It's going to be having a glass of red wine with steak. You're going out and having a nice dinner with a glass of red wine. The second way, I would say, is having a sangria down here (Jasper Winery) on a Thursday night in a concert-like atmosphere."



FARRINGTON

"I wanted to cook my dad a three-course dinner and have a wine pairing with every course. My first course was mushroom and scallop risotto, and I paired that with a Riesling cabinet. I bought a duck and I confit the legs on a bed of salad. For the main dish, I did the duck breast with rainbow carrots, and I think I did asparagus. With that, I had a burgundy, so a Pinot Noir from France. That was fun."

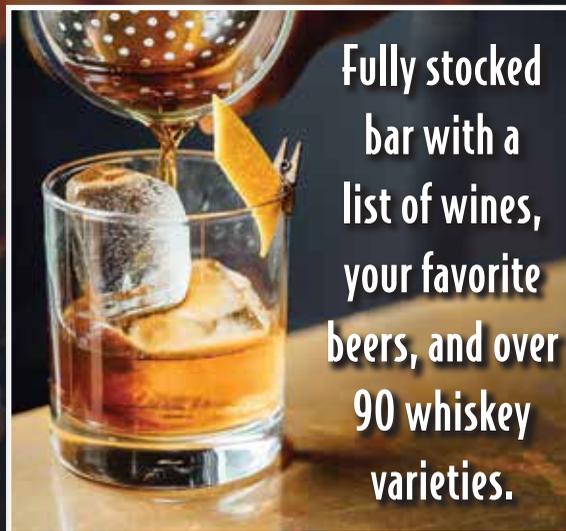
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8606 NW 121st St., Grimes

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4603 Dakota St., Norwalk

AOC. Look for those lettering systems next time you are purchasing a bottle. Farrington says he has found DOCG Chiantis at Aldi.

“For people getting into wine, they do tend to prefer the fruitier, almost sweeter wines, which is fine. I mean, that’s where I started, right? I would say, try to stay within a price range. If you want to go with a Moscato, going to that \$20 to \$25 bottle range, it’s a lot for Moscato. But Moscato that is that much is actually quite good. Oftentimes, what you find with Moscato is that it’s almost syrupy, and by the time you’re done drinking it, I feel like there’s a barrel of liquid in me,” Farrington said.

So, in a case like this with Moscato, going to the higher price range is going to equal a better product. If you want to bin the sweet stuff and find something drier, Farrington has a few regions he leans on.

“Spain and Portugal, generally between \$15 to \$20. If you want to skirt the sweet stuff and go into more of the dry components, Spain and Portugal are phenomenal,” Farrington said.

Also, depending on whether you will be having a glass on its own or with a meal can change which type of wine you should buy.

“If you’re going to be drinking it by yourself, sticking with in that \$15-20 price range, sticking with an American

wine, whether it be like Chile or Argentina, or you’re coming up into California, Oregon, or Washington, or even Australian wine, or New Zealand wine. If you’re going to be pairing with food, definitely go old-world. So, you’re either Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, anything in that price range, I would gravitate to that,” Farrington said.

WINE TASTING

Ever since Farrington got his taste, he has been honing his palate. He made it clear that he is not a sommelier, but he still knows a thing or two about what to look for when tasting a wine.

“Every time I go to try a wine, especially for the first time, I’ll do a sniff, swirl, sniff. So you sniff, now you’ve got that baseline. Your brain is like, oh, OK. Then you swirl it to oxygenate the water, and you sniff it again, and what ends up happening is your brain is like, Whoa. OK, now that’s nice. I’ll actually do that three times, but I think one is fine,” Farrington said.

He then breaks it into three different drinks. First, he is looking for any notes of fruit.

“Am I tasting blue fruit? Am I tasting red fruit? Am I tasting purple fruit? Am I tasting stone fruit? Am I tasting

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melons?” Farrington said.

On the second taste, he is looking for signs of what it might have been stored in.

“I’m trying to figure, can I get any oak notes on it, like, tastes more like stainless steel more than oak, or oak more than stainless steel,” Farrington said.

Then, on the third taste, he is looking for spices.

“Am I getting black pepper, or am I getting baking spices, or allspice and nutmeg, Anything like that, right? So that way, by the time I’m done, my brain has already essentially created that circuit of ‘this is what this wine smells like and tastes like,’ ” Farrington said.

Breaking it down into three different steps can help people differentiate what they are tasting instead of trying to find all of those complex notes in one go. That is Farrington’s process and is something that can be replicated at home.

Even the type of glass you are drinking it out of can affect the taste.

“The shapes of the glasses are important. The rim width, a thicker rim, you’re not going to have

as great of an experience with that wine as you would with a thin, Riedel, or even, like a Spiegelau glass. That makes a difference, because it’s how it rolls off into the tongue. It’s that first interaction that your tongue and your brain have with that wine. It all comes from the rim of that glass.”

When deciding what wine to eat with a meal, it can be easily determined by color. Red wine for red meat, like a steak. White wine for white meat, like fish or chicken. A rose can become a nice middle ground.

“Let’s say mashed potatoes and a roast beef. Something that’s really rich, right? Generally, red is what you would pair with that. You could pick a really good Chardonnay to pair with that. Let’s say mashed potatoes, chicken with a bechamel sauce. Super creamy, super rich. Are you looking for your experience to where your mouth is ingesting rich food, or are you looking for your wine to cut through that richness?” Farrington said.

Your choice of wine could be to match the flavor, and help wash it down, or, it could serve as a palate cleanser before the next bite. ■



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Ian Robertson's Grilled Steak with Romesco and Lemon

Start with a beautifully dry-aged steak (ideally from The Good Butcher!). Bring it to room temperature, season generously with kosher salt and freshly cracked black pepper, and grill over high heat until cooked to your preferred temperature. Let it rest before serving with romesco.

FOR ONE GENEROUS SERVING OF ROMESCO:

CHAR...

- 1 large ripe heirloom tomato
- 1 medium tomatillo
- ¼ small yellow onion
- Core and slice the vegetables. Char under a broiler or on a hot grill until blistered and lightly blackened on one side, then flip and continue cooking until softened and slightly smoky. If possible, let the vegetables dry slightly in a low oven for deeper concentration of flavor.

TOAST...

- 1 dried guajillo chile (stemmed and seeded)
- ¼ cup whole almonds
- Toast the chile briefly in a 350°F oven for 3–5 minutes until fragrant but not burnt. Toast the almonds until medium to dark golden, about 10–12 minutes.

BLEND...

- Charred vegetables, toasted chile, and toasted almonds
- 3–4 tablespoons good olive oil
- 1 tablespoon sherry vinegar
- Juice of ½ lemon
- ½ teaspoon smoked paprika
- Salt to taste
- Blend until smooth and silky. Adjust salt and lemon as needed.
- To finish, spoon the romesco alongside the steak and squeeze a fresh lemon slice over the top just before serving.

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Velveting by Shirley Fond-Torres

The late Shirley Fong-Torres, better known as “Wok Wiz,” wrote six books including “In the Chinese Kitchen.” This is her recipe for velveting — a common practice of Chinese chefs to tenderize cheap cuts of steak usually used in stir fry dishes but famous in Texas for chicken fried steak.

Cut steak (round, chuck, skirt, sirloin are best) into one inch pieces about a quarter to half an inch thick. Place in bowl.

Add a rounded tablespoon of baking soda per pound of steak. Massage it together with your fingers. Stir in two ounces of water or club soda and continue to massage. Allow the steak to sit for half an hour.

Thoroughly rinse the steak of all baking soda. Its job is done. Dry the steak with paper towels. It's ready to use in your wok for stir fry or your frying pan for chicken fried steak.

(Some dishes suggest marinating the baking soda in rice wine vinegar and soy sauce instead of water. That does not help in tenderization but adds new flavor.) ■

The value stalker

Proteins' bang for the buck

By Jim Duncan

Texan writer Larry McMurtry (“Lonesome Dove” quartet, plus 34 novels and 30 screenplays) often hits upon something ironic about human limitations. In “Leaving Cheyenne,” an old cowboy warns a young one that “the love of a woman is like the morning dew. It can settle just as easily on a rosebud or a horse turd.” In “Texasville,” a modern cowboy proclaims “Medicine is the softest science and nutrition is its melted butter. Whatever is gospel today will be anathema in ten years.”

McMurtry also wrote that “only a rank degenerate would drive 1500 miles across Texas and not eat chicken fried steak” and “I don’t believe in protein. I think it’s a myth, like vitamins. All nutrition is a myth.” He writes mostly about a distant past and its ethos — the hardcore character required to create Texas.

Today, his mythical cowboy is smiling while he cuts his chicken fried steak. Robert Kennedy and his minions at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) have turned old nutritional gospel upside down, again. America’s new food pyramid scorns the carbohydrates that previous DHHS administrators pushed down American throats. Proteins are the new gospel, and fats have gone from all bad to half good.

The nutritional gospel that cholesterol chiefly causes heart attacks was never ancient wisdom. In fact, heart attacks were not even recognized in humans until 1919. The next 30 years, not much of anything happened in medicine that connected diet with heart attacks, which kill a quarter of our population now days.

Then, all hell broke loose. In the mid 1950s, Ancel Keys proposed that dietary saturated fat and cholesterol raised blood cholesterol, leading to heart disease. In 1984, a major National Institute of Health (NIH) trial published findings showing that lowering blood cholesterol reduced the risk of heart attacks. Fats were suddenly anathema. Carbs were the new gospel, and, because the most famous proteins, animal flesh, are also high in previously dreaded fats, they were suspect.

After the American Medical Association

narrowly voted to recommend a diet low in fats and high in carbs in the early 1980s, more hell was unleashed on our diets. The government initiated huge subsidies to increase new, highly processed carbs like high fructose corn syrup (HFCS). They pretty much replaced cane sugar in all soft drinks, ketchups and jams by the early 1980s.

The problem was that HFCS doesn’t possess a satiety factor like real sugar does. People could drink drastically more bottles of Coke a day. Soft drinks went from being sold in six-ounce glass bottles to two-liter plastic bottles. That made America more obese and more diabetic. The rates of both those issues began rising the year after HFCS replaced real sugar in soft drinks. Now that gospels and anathemas have turned upside down, proteins are the craze.

The DHHS now recommends 20 to 30 grams of protein per meal. Yet, 88% of Americans don’t know how or where to get protein nor even how much they consume. Kennedy’s agenda and the effects of popular weight loss drugs like Ozempic and Wegovy have turned Americans into protein junkies. And, the big food companies are giving them what they want. Witness the cereal aisle, home now to Cheerios Protein, Nature Valley Protein Granola and many more protein-infused brands.

WHERE PROTEIN HIDES

Realistically, no one should eat cereal for protein. Poultry, red meat and seafood are the best sources. Legumes are the best bargains. Among that first category, chicken breasts are the bang-for-the-buck champion. They provide 26 grams of protein per three-ounce serving. Turkey breast also has 26 grams, but it almost always costs more than chicken breasts, which we found recently, skinless and boneless, at Aldi for \$1.99/pound.

Rabbit has more protein at 27 grams, but it is far more expensive and more difficult to find. Ground turkey and thighs are cheaper but not as rich in protein as breasts. Quail at 21 grams and duck at 20 grams are even more expensive. The best place to find them is C Fresh Market. They



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Seafood’s protein superstar is octopus. It could well be the next large-scale commercially farmed seafood. Farming in Spain is thriving and well received by the European press. Octopus is almost one-third protein — 25 grams per 3-ounce serving. We have enjoyed fabulous octopus recently at Panka, 801, Prime & Providence, Oak Park, Masao and Waterfront.

They call it “the new salmon” in Europe where it is wildly increasing its farmed production while all kinds of pressures are pushing Norway (where floating cages were invented) and lesser salmon farming powers to cut back. Three ounces of salmon provide 23 grams of protein, a lot but not as much as octopus.

Farmed salmon overtook wild salmon in the world’s diet in 1996 and now accounts for 70%. Coincidentally, salmon went from being one of the most expensive of all fish to one of the cheapest. Not all salmon are equal. Wild King salmon will cost two to three times as much as farmed “Atlantic” salmon at Whole Foods, Fresh Thyme and Waterfront.

All oysters are not equal either. A serving of three ounces, cooked or raw, can provide six to 16 grams of protein depending on the species of oyster and the season it was harvested. In general, Pacific oysters are bigger and have more protein than East Coast oysters. Waterfront has a Saturday special of half-priced oysters on the half-shell. Those are Chesapeake-sourced but are far bigger than all other East Coast oysters.

Other good proteins in the seafood section are tuna, mackerel, sardines, mussels, shrimp and eel. It doesn’t matter to protein if sardines and tuna are canned or fresh. Anchovies actually have the most protein when measured in three-ounce servings, but even Joey “Jaws” Chestnut wouldn’t eat three ounces. All the above provide more than 20 grams of protein in a three-ounce serving.

Of all grains and “pseudograins,” only teff and farro contain 10 or more grams of protein per cup cooked. Of all vegetables, only green peas, black-eyed peas and spinach have more than five grams per cup cooked. Among dairy products and eggs, Greek yogurt has 80% more protein than other yogurts. Cottage cheese, ricotta cheese and kefir have two to three times more protein

per cup than milk, from which they are all made. That’s “value-added.”

In order of most protein per serving, venison, bison, veal, pork and beef all have more than 20 grams per three ounce serving. Pig meat head butts the others when it comes to bargain protein.

WHY IS BEEF SO MUCH MORE EXPENSIVE?

A pork porterhouse at Fareway sells for as little as \$1.25 per five-ounce cut. A beef porterhouse at the same store sells for between \$17 and \$29 per pound, depending on its USDA grade. Wagyu is far more expensive beef. You can easily pay \$100 a pound, even in Des Moines.

It takes twice as much corn feed to produce a pound of beef than it takes for one of pork and eight times as much compared to chicken. It takes about four times longer, too. U.S. cattle population is at its lowest level since 1952. Beef has twice as many American mouths to feed now, too. Even at super-high prices, it is difficult for a cattleman to make a profit or increase his herd.

WONDER BARGAINS

In the Tuesday Touts section of our food column in The Daily Umbrella (www.thedailyumbrella.com), we have been touting a Wonder Bargain of the week. Here are some from the last six months.

- Pan fried chicken is disappearing from the American restaurant world — in Des Moines, but not in Indianola. At Crouse Cafe “homemade from scratch” cast iron pan-fried chicken is special daily but super special on Sundays. The gravy, the mashed potatoes, the baked beans and the coleslaw are also truly made from scratch. All those come with their Sunday dinner special for \$10.99.
- Bistro at Iowa Culinary Institute is open most Tuesdays through Fridays through May 1. Daily hours are 11:15 a.m. to 12:45 p.m., for lunch buffets or fixed price meals.
- Of all foods, dried beans and lentils provide the most protein for the dollar. Homemade split pea soup, made with smoked ham hocks, chicken broth, onion, celery, carrots, tomatoes, jalapenos, ginger, garlic and rice, cost us less than \$1 a serving. ■