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FEATURE

The Modern Steakhouse: Why Off-Cuts Are In



An oversized porterhouse, accompanied by an obligatory mound of creamed spinach, will always remain the clubby steakhouse's tempting calling card. But lately, more and more chefs are giving the once neglected offcut the limelight to spare both the environment and your wallet.

When acclaimed British chef Fergus Henderson opened **St. John** in London, the visionary restaurant was praised for its offal creations. While this nose-to-tail culinary approach has been embraced by myriad restaurants in the States since then, now even revered steakhouse classics are making way for underutilized yet craveable cuts of meat.

One of the highlights at the just-opened Japanese-tinged bistro **Bird Dog**, in Palo Alto, CA, is the four-ounce Wagyu ribeye "heart" with red peanut romesco. Chef Robbie Wilson transforms the entire middle of the ribeye into a refined slab of beef resembling a loin. Likewise, while New Orleans steakhouse **La Boca** offers guests the choice of an always satisfying prime flank or Angus T-bone, the Argentine-style grill also turns out the Entraña Fina con la Piel, a gamey skirt steak specialty shellacked in a crunchy membrane.

Quality Eats, the newest addition—and first downtown venture—for New York-based Fourth Wall Restaurants, exemplifies the modern, boundary-pushing steakhouse. With its patty melt burgers and scalloped sunchokes, the vibe, befitting of its location, is decidedly more casual than swank Midtown siblings **Quality Meats** and **Maloney & Porcelli**. The stars of the dining room, however, are chef Ryan Bartlow's untraditional steaks, including a bavette cut, top sirloin-culotte and long-bone short rib (pictured at top).

"I don't think it's unconventional as much it is expanding on convention," says Fourth Wall president and founder, Michael Stillman of Quality Eats' mission. "Diners have a growing interest in sustainable eating and the nose-to-tail cooking movement has opened minds to new options."

With the most expensive steak on the menu at just \$29, Quality Eats is also turning the special-occasion splurge normally equated with a wood-paneled steakhouse into a meat-fueled nightly possibility. "We want to create more delicious, affordable options that are less about the gut-busting richness and more about everyday enjoyment. Quality Eats is a complement to our current steakhouses. Price point is certainly an alluring way to stand apart, but we are also demonstrating the breadth and diversity of steak offerings. We want to show the variety that meat can offer," Stillman adds.

One offbeat cut especially gaining prominence is the aforementioned culotte. Also known as deckle steak, spinalis dorsi or the ribeye cap, it graces the menu of [Andiron Steak & Sea](#), the airy newcomer in downtown Summerlin, Nevada. Charred over an apricot-wood burning grill, it's bolstered by blistered shishito peppers, roasted cherry tomato and peppercorn sauce. Chris Pandel, executive chef at the recently opened [Swift & Sons](#) in Chicago, serves a ribeye cap "because it is a piece of meat that is incredibly well marbled, tender and beefy. If you look at the entire cow it's a very small portion—just 72 ounces. That said, it's not just the best part of the rib eye, it's one of the best parts of the entire cow. It's really taking the best of the best and using it just for that purpose." But for Pandel, it's usually the "off-the-beaten path" cuts that are the most flavorful: "I'm a true believer because it's sustainable, but also because using the entire animal makes you a better chef."