

The Subtleties of Steak

细说牛排

By Ian Wong



For all its glories, talking about steak rather than simply eating it can be stressful and tenuous. There are just too many concerns, questions, and speculations. Why are steaks often so much tastier when cooked in a restaurant than at home? Is it a particularly special seasoning they add? Why are two steaks of the same cut often so different? What are the grades, what is marbling, and where do I find the best steaks? All of these questions, valid in their own right, have a variety of answers that despite the trouble, should be discussed.

In each country, government organizations often offer voluntary grading systems by certified experts to help farmers organize the quality of their beef into categories. The difference in the grading between the steaks is primarily dependant on marbling, which measures the degree to which fat is evenly spread throughout the meat, and maturity, the physiological age of the carcass. Together, these two factors contribute to the texture, flavor, and ultimately the quality of the steak.

In the United States, there are eight grades of beef, with the top selections classified as either: U.S. Select, good steaks that are sold in supermarkets and butchers, U.S. Choice, higher quality steaks that are widely available to retail markets and those in

the food industry, or U.S. Prime, the highest quality of steaks that make up just roughly 3% of all cattle slaughtered in the country. U.S. Prime steaks usually have a higher fat content, as well as more evenly distributed and intramuscular strains of fat. Steaks marked as U.S. Prime are usually reserved solely for consumption in five star hotels, or upscale restaurants.

Straussburger Steaks, a family-run company that has over five generations of history in the United States, has recently began selling custom cut selections of U.S. corn-fed beef to the Hong Kong and Mainland China market. They select solely from the top 3% of U.S. Prime steaks, making their cuts amongst the finest available, and customers can specify the thickness of each steak. It has been proven that the consistency and ingredients of the feed which are used to nurture the cows is of great importance when determining the extent of the marbling, and corn-fed cows develop more even spreads of fat, which allows them to reach the desired level of marbling at a younger age.

The company is now run by sisters Andrea and Suzanne Straussburger, the latter of who operates the influential industry website "The Sirloin Report". Ingrained with experience from



a young age, not only are they the only female owners of a meat company in the country, but they bring a distinctly feminine approach to business, with their taste and ability to discern the best from the best a defining characteristic of their products.



The most popular cuts that Straussburger sells are rib eye, filet mignon, NY strip, and porterhouse, as well as of course, hamburger meat. These are all aged to perfection, which is an essential part of the preparation and overall quality of the steak. Aging is important because it causes some of the moisture in steak to evaporate, which concentrates the flavor of the beef in the remaining weight; it also breaks apart some of the tissue in the muscles, effectively tenderizing the meat.



After the premium selections of steak are aged, they are already full of flavor and do not need much other than light seasoning like Kosher salt, butter, pepper, and delicate herbs, such as thyme, rosemary, or parsley. Less tender cuts of meat such as flank, skirt, top round, and chuck shoulder steaks can still be delicious, but should be marinated for at least 6 hours for the best results.

In restaurants, these first-class steaks are then either grilled or broiled, the process in which heat is radiated either from below or above respectively; this is generally accepted as the best way to cook steak. The intense heat that is able to be generated from industrial ovens makes up the final difference in the enjoyment of the meal. The process of searing causes the fat on the steak to caramelize, which sweetens the meat and forms a crust on the outside, creating texture and sealing in the juices. Many home grills cannot reach even half the temperature these specialized ovens can, in a way justifying the continual popularity of steakhouses.





Still, while cooking at home on a simple coal grill may not give the same level of crispiness in a steak as an industrial oven does, the fact remains that in the end, the majority of the flavor is derived from the quality of the meat. Choose carefully, season lightly, and cook quickly.

If preparing for a barbeque or picnic outside, please note that Strausburger Meats also sells Berkshire Pork.

就牛排来说，谈论它比吃掉它更令人倍感压力，因为关于牛排的担忧和质疑从不缺少。为什么餐厅里的牛排永远比家里做的更好吃？因为他们加了什么特别调料么？为什么同样切出来的两块牛排有那么大差别呢？级别是什么？大理石纹路又是什么？我上哪里去找最好的牛排呢？所有这些问题纷繁复杂，却仍值得一一讨论。

各个国家的政府经常会组织专家提供志愿的免费定级系统来帮助农民将他们的牛肉分化为不同等级。牛排的评级方式主要取决于大理石纹路——也就是说脂肪平均分布的程度和成熟度。这两点会决定口感和味道，也就是牛排的质量。

在美国，牛肉共分八个级别，而最高级别则为在超市和肉店销售的U.S. Select，在零售业以及饮食业有售的U.S. Choice，或者最高级别占销售总额3%的U.S. Prime。特等牛排通常会有更高的脂肪含量，更匀称的分布。U.S. Prime只提供给五星级酒店和高档餐厅。

五代传承的Strausburger Steaks是一家美国家族公司，最近开始向中国出售玉米牛肉（以玉米为饲料的牛）。他们选择美国高等牛排，经过最细致的加工，顾客甚至可以选择每片牛排的厚度。饲料的来源和其稳定性已被证明会严重影响牛肉的大理石花纹的多



寡。吃玉米长大的牛会有更均匀的脂肪分布，能使他们在幼年时候就达到预期的纹路级别。

公司现在由Andrea Straussburger和Suzanne Straussburger两姐妹经营，Suzanne还负责打理业界知名网站The Sirloin Report。年纪轻轻却经验丰富，作为肉类公司少有的女性经营者，她们给公司带来了独有的女性文化，而她们优中选优的能力和品味也成为了其公司出品牛排的特质。

Straussburger最受欢迎的产品包括肋眼、里脊、纽约条、牛柳、T型骨和当仁不让的汉堡肉。成熟到最佳时间，这也正是牛排准备环节和整体质量保证的关键。成熟度之所以关键，是因为这一过程能使牛排的水分蒸发，令剩下的部分滋味更浓郁，同样还能断开肌肉中的一些组织，使肉质更加鲜嫩。

在精挑细选的部位成熟后，这些牛排已经滋味丰富而不需要添加过多调料，只添些许清淡调料例如盐、黄油、胡椒以及精细香料，比如百里香、迷迭香、欧芹。肉质不够软嫩的部位，比如牛腩、裙带、后腿和前肩肉仍然拥有美妙滋味，但在上桌前需要至少六小时的烹调。

在餐馆中，这些上等牛排通常都是以烤或煮来烹饪的，也就是热量传输从上而下或反过来从下而上，这样作牛排是最好的方法。餐厅专用烤箱的高热度能决定牛排成品的滋味。加热过程令脂肪融化，使得肉质更香甜，而外表则会变得香脆，不光口感更好也使肉汁融在其中。许多家用烤箱只能达到餐厅用烤箱一半不到的温度，这也解释了牛排店一直以来的受欢迎的原因。

尽管在家烹制牛排无法达到在餐厅烘烤出来的香脆度，但是最终牛排的滋味还是很大程度取决于牛排本身的质量。仔细挑选，细心调味，快速烹饪。如果准备户外BBQ或野餐，Straussburger同样出售伯克希尔猪肉。