

# The Chef's Cut

Want to know how to choose, cook and store the perfect steak? **Yi-Hwa Hanna** sat down with Chef Prabakaran Manickam, Head Chef at The Meat Co, for his seasoned expertise...

**W**ith more cuts out there than we can count (the most popular eight: prime rib, T-Bone, rib eye, filet (also known as tenderloin), sirloin, striploin, rump and brisket or chuck, are just the tip of the iceberg), knowing how to handle a good steak isn't always the easiest task. While it may seem simple enough—just season, grill and serve—there is an art to cooking the perfect cut of beef, so we headed straight to beloved South African steakhouse, The Meat Co, for the low-down.

## CHOOSE WISELY

First, know what to look for. While beautifully aged meats can make for the most mouthwatering grilled steaks, they can be very tricky to navigate for novices and home cooks, and aren't likely to be found in a supermarket butcher shop anyway, as they typically only sell fresh meats there. So begin with some ground rules: "Always look for a nice, bright red colour. Next, choose wisely when it comes to fat levels—high marbling means more flavour and better softness, and

fattier cuts are excellent for grilling as the fat melts to keep it moist and juicy," says Chef Prabakaran Manickam, The Meat Co's Head Chef. Wagyu beef, where available, is always a good choice, with its plentiful marbling offering a seriously delicious end result. If you're planning to grill your steak (whether you're using a grill-pan or a barbeque), it's worth spending the money on a better cut, as cheaper cuts will be tougher with less flavour. A classic barbeque more your thing? Make sure you buy a thinner cut: "Tenderloins, or any softer, thinner cuts of meat work better on the barbeque as you're grilling it right there on the top of the barbeque and not finishing it off in an oven. Avoid big chunks of meat when you're barbecuing as they won't cook properly—and be wary of using too much oil, or you'll burn the outside while leaving the inside uncooked!" Chef Prabakaran says.

## SMART STORAGE

If you're not ready to cook your meat right away, make sure you get it vacuum-packed at the butcher's. Chef Prabakaran recommends against using a freezer, as →



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frozen meat loses its flavour by the time you've defrosted and cooked it. Instead, he recommends buying it fresh and vacuum-packed, and only storing it in a chiller or refrigerator. "Even when it's vacuum-packed, you should always consume it within ten days of purchase. Once it's cooked, it's best to eat it within two hours," he says. If you aren't able to eat your steak shortly after cooking it, consider a beef roast instead: Chef Prabakaran suggests half-roasting a cut of beef to cut down on serving time, then finishing it off later when you're ready to serve it—a handy tip for dinner parties.

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### PREP AND PRIME

Prepping comes next. With everything from butter, rubs, marinades, sauces and crusts available, this is your opportunity to be creative. Try a mustard marinade, crushed peppercorns with rock salt, a medley of Mediterranean spices, or a blend of coriander, cumin and thyme—the combinations are endless. "If you're planning on a crust, always marinate it first. Rub the marinade into both sides of the steak, to make sure it's evenly coated all over, then leave it to marinate for at least 30 minutes before grilling," Chef Prabakaran advises.

### SIZZLE IT UP

Then comes the fun part—cooking your steak. "When you're cooking a filet, don't cook it for too long—as it's already a soft piece of meat, you want to cook it quickly so it's more juicy," says Chef Prabakaran. Meanwhile, if you're cooking a brisket or chuck steak, slow is the way to go: this is also an ideal meat to use in stews, or even ground into minced beef for excellent hamburgers. Pan frying can lend a lot of flavour to a steak, but as Chef Prabakaran reminds us, just pan-frying isn't enough for a good steak—once you've seared each side in a pan, you have to finish it off in an oven. If you're after the perfect charred lines of a grilled steak—a signature of The Meat Co—make sure



you've invested in a good grill. Aside from a good set of steak knives—"essential for making sure your steak doesn't feel rubbery when you cut into it!"—a great grill that can reach a high heat is indispensable for a picture-perfect grilled steak. "For the most beautiful grill marks, choose a flat-shaped steak, then make sure you turn the steak over no more than four times in total. The best markings are shown on a medium-rare to medium steak, whereas well-done steaks don't show them as well," says Chef Prabakaran.



### GIVE IT A REST

When your steak is cooked to perfection, there's just one last step: letting it rest. By letting the meat rest, its moisture and juices—which have been driven towards the center of the steak during the cooking process—redistribute themselves more evenly around the meat again. This results in a juicier, tastier steak that holds its liquid better, rather than one that's juices run out too easily (leaving it dry and tough) when you cut into it instead. Worried about the surface of the steak getting cold? Cover it loosely with a piece of foil. Resting time varies between 3-6 minutes depending on the size and cut of a steak—just make sure you don't leave it resting so long that it gets cold!

Once all that's left is dishing up, it's time to pick your sauce. "People who really love meat will have it plain, served as it is—that way you really taste its flavour," says Chef Prabakaran. If you'd like to add some extra flavour though, classic sauces like mushroom and peppercorn are always a good idea. Looking for something more unique? Get creative, Chef Prabakaran suggests, with combinations such as peri peri, lemon and herb, olives and cherry tomatoes, onions and cognac, or flavoured butter such as mushroom butter or even bone marrow butter. Serve it alongside a classic side such as mashed potatoes (whether regular or sweet potatoes), spinach, asparagus or mushrooms, and tuck in. Bon appétit! ■