



Jordan Poteat, chef de cuisine at Sea Island's new Market, smokes salmon for the resort's restaurants.

# Smoke Signals

SMOKY FLAVORS SPARK CREATIVITY IN FOOD AND COCKTAILS AT RESTAURANTS AROUND THE COUNTRY.

BY SARAH GLEIM

**W**here there is smoke, there is good food.

Long before there was refrigeration, smoke was the most common way to preserve and extend the life of food—particularly meat. But the introduction of the refrigerator and freezer certainly didn't put an end to smoking. Chefs around the globe can stand the heat. In fact, they relish it, continuing to elevate this age-old form of cooking to an art, and experimenting with new foods and flavors.

In more recent years, smoking has made its way across lines of traditional cooking methods for meat and fish to something altogether more exciting. Murray's in New York offers a variety of seasonal smoked cheeses; Fran's Chocolates in Seattle has won awards for its sumptuous smoked salt caramels; and Williams Chase distillery in Herefordshire, England, is offering a limited edition run of its English oak smoked vodka.

And, when discussing smoked foods, it would be remiss to ignore the slow-cured bacon and ham from artisan purveyors like Tennessee-based Benton's, which has never been more popular. In addition to these handcrafted gourmet foods, chefs also have been at the forefront of the smoking phenomenon, perhaps as a way to return to more traditional cooking methods. "All you need is a fire," says John Helfrich, executive chef at The Lodge at Sea Island. "Smoking food is pretty primal in its origins and so much about Southern cuisine is going back to its original roots."

But it's not just in the South. Chefs and



The Oak Room's Georgia barbecue tacos incorporate smoked pulled pork for a distinct flavor.

mixologists from San Francisco and New York to Los Angeles and Vail, Colo., are smoking everything from pork and beef to all types of fish, seafood and vegetables, and using handheld food smokers to infuse cocktails and even desserts for an intriguing flavor.

#### Low and Slow

As any pit master knows, there's a science to smoking foods. And one of the most critical aspects is knowing—and regulating—the proper cooking temperature. Cold smoking, for instance, is used to simply add a hint of

smoky flavor to foods like cheese, vegetables, fish, shrimp and even chocolates. Cold smoking isn't meant to actually cook; food is simply placed in an unheated space where smoke pipes cover it from an offset firebox.

Hot smoking, on the other hand, is used to cook foods—albeit low and slow. Cooking at low temperatures (anywhere from 210 to 275 degrees) for hours and hours breaks down the tough fibers in meats, making it fall-off-the-bone tender. But it also takes a long time to achieve that smoky flavor, says Executive Chef Joe Schafer of Atlanta's King + Duke





Colorado Campfire at Restaurant Kelly Liken uses ice cubes melted in a meat smoker and refrozen.



Chris Barry at Sel Rose and Station adds smoky spirits and products to signature cocktails.



Restaurant Kelly Liken's Smokey Michelada is made with mescal and muddled jalapeño.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF RESTAURANT KELLY LIKEN; CENTER PHOTO BY JUAN PATINO

restaurant. “You need the temperature to be low because you want to generate smoke. If the fire is too high, it just becomes an oven and you won’t get the smoke you want.”

Schafer is passionate about smoking foods and cooking over wood. All of the menu items at King + Duke, which was named as one of the Best New Restaurants of 2015 by *Esquire* magazine, are cooked over wood or in the smoker using hickory and other fruitwoods. The restaurant features a 24-foot open hearth on which chefs cook in full view of guests. “The wood and smoke impart great flavors to the foods, and it’s a challenge to do properly, which I like,” he says.

Jordan Poteat, chef de cuisine at Sea Island’s new Market, knows the challenge well as he oversees the smokehouse at Broadfield, A Sea Island Sporting Club and Lodge. He has the ability to both cold and hot smoke everything from salmon and bacon to bologna and ham for the resort’s many restaurants, typically smoking 25 slabs of bacon per week and about 25 hams every two weeks. “Our ham is the most labor-intensive,” Poteat says. “We brine it for 12 days in a saltwater solution and hot smoke it at 225 to 250 degrees for 10 to 15 hours.”

Helfrich also smokes baby back ribs for an appetizer and pulled pork for the Georgia barbecue tacos served at the Oak Room. “The pulled pork tacos are a different way to present the typical Georgia barbecue,” Helfrich

says. “They’re served with pico de gallo, jalapeños and cilantro pecan pesto.”

#### Liquid Smoke

When it comes to smokers, chefs are limited only by their imagination. “You can put anything in the smoker,” Schafer says. “We make a lot of yogurts, crème fraîche and butter, so we smoke a lot of heavy cream.”

But chefs aren’t the only ones getting in on the smoking craze. Mixologists across the country also are tapping in. At Restaurant Kelly Liken in Vail, where the staff members behind the bar consider themselves to be more mad scientists than bartenders, several of the signature cocktails have smoky elements, including the Smokey Michelada—Vida mescal with muddled jalapeño, fresh citrus and agave nectar, topped with Bonfire IPA—and the absolutely delicious Kelly’s Original Tomato Consommé Martini.

Chris Barry, a bartender at Sel Rose in New York and bar manager and general manager at Station, a seasonal restaurant in East Quogue in the Hamptons, says smoke can be added to cocktails in a number of ways, the most obvious being to use smoky spirits like Islay scotch or mescals.

Another, Barry says, is to infuse a spirit with a smoky product. He has taken trimmings from an Adams Fairacre Farms country ham (which is both salt-cured and smoked) and let them infuse into Zucca amaro (an

Italian digestif that has leather, smoke and chocolate notes) for a week before filtering it off. “It [imparts] smoke, as well as texture and umami [a savory taste] to the cocktail, which also [uses] blended scotch, Aperol and chocolate bitters,” he says.

Just like in cooking, Barry says it is important to balance the richness of the smoky flavors in cocktails with something acidic, so juice or shrubs (vinegar-based syrups), or bold spirits are often mixed in. And when it comes to pairing these cocktails with foods, it all depends on the drink. “Lighter, citrusy cocktails work for anything, especially seafood,” Barry says. “The darker, spirit-forward drinks are better before and after dinner, or with richer desserts and foods.” The cocktail he created with the ham-fat amaro pairs well with a dry-rubbed and smoked pork shoulder.

#### Bringing It Home

These chefs and mixologists have years of experience cooking with smoke, which is why diners flock to their restaurants. But home cooks can achieve delicious results, too—with a little time and practice.

“Cooking on an open fire is challenging,” Helfrich says. “You have to factor in the wind, the type of cooker you’re using, and the product you’re smoking. It isn’t as easy as it seems.”

Poteat suggests starting out with a fatty cut of meat like a bone-in pork butt. “It’s easy



Everything from salmon to bacon and bologna can be cold or hot smoked in the smokehouse at Broadfield, A Sea Island Sporting Club and Lodge.

to learn on because it's inexpensive and the bone adds a lot of flavor," he says. "And the quality of the meat is critical. I recommend going with Berkshire pork." He adds that different woods will impart different flavors, as well, but hickory is ideal.

"Use dry hardwoods because they burn hotter and cleaner than anything else," explains Ben Lang, owner and founder of Lang BBQ Smokers, based in Nahunta, Ga. He advises at-home cooks to choose smokers that can get hot and hold the temperature evenly.

"Clean heat is important, too," Lang says. "You don't want it too smoky. Smoke is just a layer of flavor."

Lang BBQ Smokers were the first to use a

reverse flow system with offset firebox, and they also utilize a griddle that, Lang says, "punches up the moisture and true flavor." Pick the right size smoker that suits your needs, as well. "And most importantly, clean it after each use. When it's still hot, just spray it with a hose to create steam and brush it down with a stainless steel wire brush."

From acclaimed chefs and bartenders to home cooks, people across the country are embracing the flame and giving smoking some time in the limelight. And with artisan smoked ingredients, top-notch barbecue restaurants, smoke-infused cocktails and easy ways to smoke at home, this ancient cooking method has been reignited in a whole new way. ○



### PECAN-SMOKED BEEF TENDERLOIN

John Helfrich, executive chef at The Lodge at Sea Island, offers up a recipe that's sure to please those seeking smoke for supper.

Servings: 6 to 8

- 1 whole beef tenderloin, cleaned and trimmed
- 4 ounces brown sugar
- 1 ounce salt
- 1 tablespoon fresh cracked black pepper
- 2 cups pecan chips (soaked in water)
- 3 charcoal briquettes
- Aluminum baking pan
- Aluminum foil
- Roasting rack

**METHOD:** Combine brown sugar, salt and black pepper. Mix well. Coat the entire beef tenderloin with rub and let sit for a minimum of two hours in the refrigerator.

To cold smoke the beef, start by making a packet out of aluminum foil to hold the charcoal and wood chips. Heat the charcoal using a charcoal chimney, then add the hot coals to the aluminum foil packet. Place the packet in one corner of the baking pan. Add the pecan wood chips on top of the hot charcoal. Set the roasting rack in the pan and place the tenderloin on the roasting rack. Cover the entire pan with aluminum foil, piercing a few holes in the top to vent. Allow the beef to cold smoke for 45 to 60 minutes in a well-ventilated area or outside.

Remove the beef from the smoker, wrap and return to refrigerator. Once the beef is chilled, remove from the refrigerator and cut into 2- to 3-inch thick steaks. Grill the steaks to the desired temperature. Serve with your favorite accompaniments.