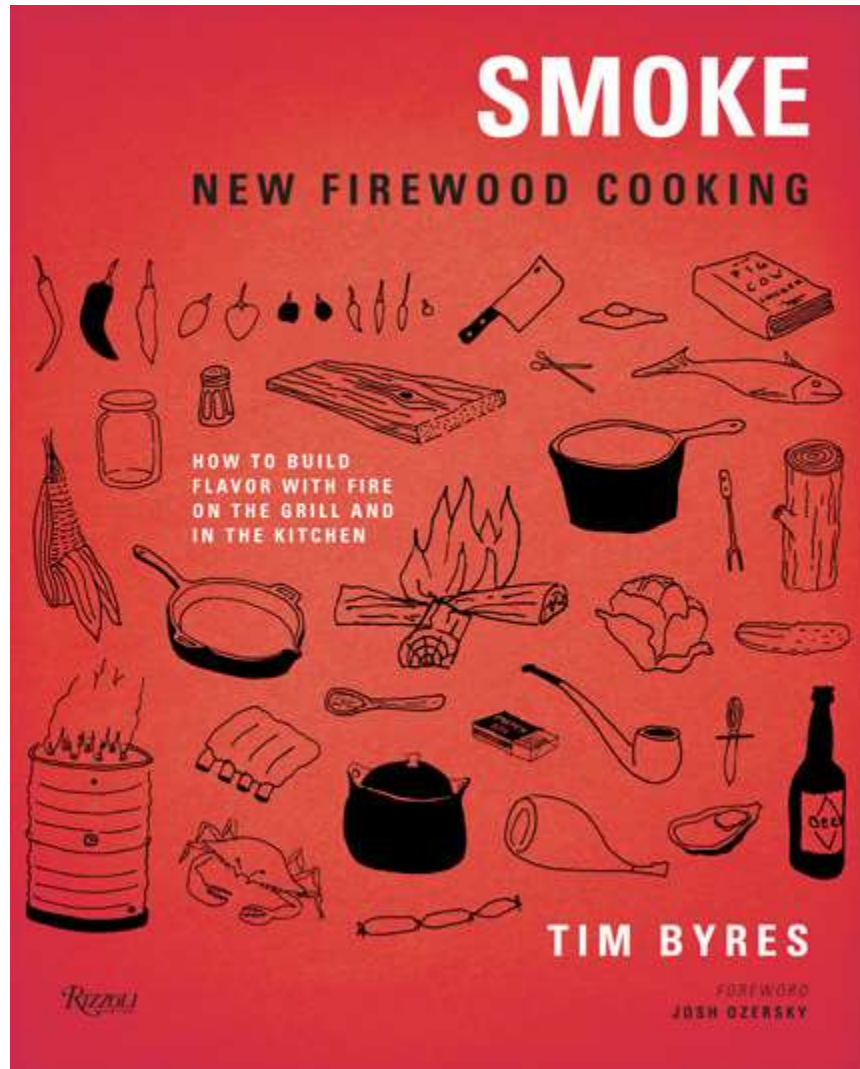


epicurious

## Chef Tim Byres on Barbecue, Smoke, and the Communal Spirit

by Esther Sung

on 05/28/13 at 09:00 AM



A few weeks ago, I found myself in Dallas. It was a quick trip and Texas barbecue wasn't on the meal itinerary. Thankfully, some last-minute juggling of schedules allowed me to stop by for some takeout from chef Tim Byres' restaurant [SMOKE](#) on the way back to DFW. The order: 2 [Chopped Coffee Cured Beef Brisket sandwiches](#) (which come with a side of salad greens; was that purslane I saw in mine?), 1 potato salad, and 1 Pimento Cheese Croquettes with Grilled Romaine. Not being a big meat eater (much less a barbecue fan), I was wowed by the beef brisket sandwich. If all beef brisket tasted like chef Byres', I would eat a lot more of it.

The timing of his book, [\*Smoke: New Firewood Cooking\*](#) (Rizzoli), really couldn't have been better, given the attention barbecue gets around now. You'll find spice rubs and sauces, alongside grilled pork and smoked oysters. And in the spirit of DIY, in addition to the smoking and canning/preserving instructions, Byres shows you how to make your own hominy, build your own shucking table, and how to build (and cook in) a campfire. The spirit in which he writes is pretty simple: "I wanted to stay true to my food voice, whether the critics got it or not." Byres' food voice has been heard, and it's a fresh and appealing one; it's one worth exploring.

In addition to providing a recipe for his [BBQ Beef Brisket](#), Byres took some time to explain why there's a carrot on his restaurant website and how he defines "balance."

***Epicurious:* Texas barbecue has been getting a lot of press lately ([Texas Monthly's new rankings](#), [Daniel Vaughn's new barbecue book](#)). Where does SMOKE, the restaurant, fit into the larger Texas--even national--barbecue scene? And how is this newer generation influencing barbecue, something that's so steeped in tradition and legacy?**

*Tim Byres:* To be quite honest, I hope the book to just fit in where it can and help readers get outside to cook and celebrate. I really believe one of the reasons barbecue is such a heated and spirited subject is that it is personal to a lot of people, they grew up with it and it's a fond memory. My take on things is really no different with the exception that I cook honoring old memories with the goal to create new ones.

My specialty is cooking with fire not just barbecue. The nostalgic flavors off the grill or smoker has a taste of American tradition (where ever region you hail from) and that is what I focus on. I hope to demystify and show readers how to get involved in a style of cooking lost to some but remembered by all.

*(Continue after the jump to read the Q&A with Chef Byres, as well as get his brisket recipe.)*

***Epi:* Why is there a carrot at the top of SMOKE's website? Seems so unusual, given its name and perception of what the restaurant is.**

*TB:* The carrot is there because we are all about fresh, clean and hand made foods. The carrot shows our love of our garden as well as the importance of bright fresh flavors like pickles, fresh radishes and herbs needed to balance the more abrasive flavors of charred or smoked meats found in this style of cooking.

***Epi:* Your recipes serve a large number of people (most look to be at least 6-8 people); what is it about sharing/communing that fits in with the food that you're making at SMOKE?**

*TB:* My book talks a lot about sharing, giving and receiving. The recipes are designed for all occasions from large fest parties of 20 or so, to quick grilled carne asado for the busy city griller. I also looked at the recipe to scale for whole foods, such as the tamale recipe is made with 1 whole duck, what would you do with the other half if the recipe was smaller? My goal was to make things accessible and friendly. I hope the reader takes my recipes and makes them their own.

***Epi:* What are your favorite places for BBQ?**

*TB:* It is way to hard to pick one. This falls into "the journey is the destination" category. The best BBQ is always where it just feels right, a little deep but true. Everyone's favorite seems to be tucked just out of reach of the masses and has a special secret only found there.

Mom and Pop family run generational joints always make me smile. After a while you can smell wood burning from miles away, it's like chasing the ice cream man as a kid--if you knew where the truck was that would ruin half of the adventure. For real Texas experience a grilled steak under the stars at [Perini Ranch](#) in Buffalo Gap, TX is pretty hard to beat.

***Epi:* When you're just looking for a place that has that "fun spirit of the dining experience" and embraces the "family-style, large-table feeling of community," where do you like to go?**

*TB:* Every region has a secret awesome place people go to bring friends from out of town. That's where I go...There is nothing like eating crab with a hammer in Maryland, lobsters in a fishing village outside of Boston, fried chicken meccas of the South or midwest, and country cheese and crackers in Napa. There are tried and true institutions everywhere. It's the spirit and ingenuity of a place that makes it so much better, a personalized hospitality.

Here are a couple gems I have found: [Q'ero](#) is an awesome little South American restaurant in Encinitas, CA where a personalized hand-written sign holds your table; and [Stella's Kentucky Deli](#) in Lexington, KY for a garden fresh "hot brown" sandwich in the once living room of an old house.

***Epi:* In the introduction, you write that you were looking for balance. When/how did you find it? What does "balance" look like for you now?**

*TB:* Honestly, I keep finding it. Now that the book is out, I am finding that it's all about connecting with people. It used to work balanced with family. Now it seems my life is naturally connecting at home, in writing and at the restaurants....I'll keep you posted.

**Recipes to try:**

- [BBQ Beef Brisket](#)
- [BBQ Beef Brisket Coffee Cure](#)

Tagged with: [Barbecue & Grilling](#), [BBQ & Grilling Cookbooks](#), [Books](#), [Chefs](#), [Cookbooks](#), [Esther Sung](#), [Grilling](#), [Interview](#), [Q&A](#), [Recipes](#), [Restaurants](#)

Read More <http://www.epicurious.com/articlesguides/blogs/editor/2013/05/barbecue-tim-byres-smoke-recipes.html#ixzz2bclgkD9B>  
<http://www.epicurious.com/>