

## THE WORLD OF

## Steak Cuts

A prime piece of beef is a beautiful thing. But Crave considers what meat on the hook looks like on the hoof.

Text by Tiffany Chan, photos by Samantha Sin

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When we sit down in a steakhouse, all we want is a beautiful piece of meat, cooked to succulent perfection – rosy red in the middle, the outside seared to a browned crust. Delicious as a steak is, what is often forgotten is that every one comes from a certain cut of meat.

We all know the classics – filet mignon, rib eye, sirloin, New York strip, porterhouse – seen on steakhouse menus all over the world. Few know that all come from the muscles that run along and below the spine of beef cattle – muscles which yield the most tender cuts.

Patrick Shimada, head chef of the Grand Hyatt Steakhouse, explains: "Picture a cow walking and standing. What muscles are they using a lot and what muscles are they hardly using? The more use from a muscle, the more flavour, but the more tough the meat will be."

There is more to beef cattle than their backs. "Everything else was eaten by the butcher or just a select few," Shimada says. But these days steaks from less common cuts of meat are appearing on menus. "Over the years, more chefs have been looking for different flavours for different uses," he says.

**The world of steak has opened up to encompass many different cuts. "You will now just as often see hanger, skirt and rump steak on a menu as you will tenderloin," says Aarik Persaud, corporate executive chef of The Butchers Club. "This is primarily due to the price, but also because they're just a bit more**

**interesting and have more flavour to them. I think chefs used to be scared to put these cuts on the menu, but as diners have become more savvy over the years those attitudes have changed."**

Alan Wong, executive chef of Morton's of Chicago, has observed changes in the breeds of cattle butchered for steak, and in the cuts taken for steaks. "We've seen more variety in breed, wagyu, for example, and cut, such as the tomahawk, in Western steakhouses, which were not available a few years ago. With diners getting more sophisticated and mature, steakhouses are offering more options," Wong says.

Secondary cuts can be made just as delicious as any filet mignon, Persaud says. On The Butchers Club undercut menu is prime grade certified Angus skirt steak, which is rich in flavour but has lots of connective tissue. Persaud cooks it slowly over hardwood charcoal and finishes it with flaky salt and lemon juice.

"Freshness and quality is key," he says. "Just like anything else you cook, you need to know your ingredient and treat it with respect by not adding too much or too little flavour."

With so many more kinds of steak appearing on menus, it is difficult to decide which is best. First, Shimada advises, consider grade, which is a matter of the age and diet of the cattle. "Look at the difference between veal and beef," he says. "Younger is more tender and soft, but has not as much flavour because of the diet."

The older the cattle, the tougher the meat, he says. Meat from cattle that eat grass is different from meat from cattle that eat grain.

Persaud adds that quality also depends on the breed of cattle and treatment of the meat. "Wagyu or Piedmontese are typically slaughtered at a much later stage and thus are much larger and have different texture, flavour and composition," he says. Tough meat from old cattle can be softened by hanging it up for a while.

Different cuts of meat have different qualities. "When we compare the three classic cuts of steak – filet, rib eye and New York strip – they are all very different in terms of marbling, fat ratio, flavour and density," says Wong. "The filet is the most lean and tender cut, the rib eye has the highest fat content and is the most flavourful, while New York strip has high marbling and the highest density."

What it all comes down to, however, is taste. And chefs are unanimous that price is no indicator of taste. For Shimada, it's all in the flavour. "I always say fat is flavour. My favourite steak is the rib eye, and my least favourite is the tenderloin," he says.

Persaud prefers a skirt steak or a hanger steak. "They both will take a bit more effort than a rib eye will, but are well worth the effort and generally carry a very reasonable price tag," he says. "The tenderloin is typically the most expensive by weight, as it is historically coveted as the best cut. No idea why, though – it's so boring." ■

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# THE WORLD OF

## 1. Top sirloin

Relatively lean and boneless, sirloin is considered an affordable steak for carnivores with big appetites. It comes from the back muscle, from right behind the short loin.

## 2. Hanger

Long popular in Britain and throughout Europe, hanger steak is known widely as butcher's steak because customers would turn their noses up at it, leaving it for the butcher. Hanger steak has found popularity on restaurant and bistro menus. It is perhaps the least tender steak, but has a rich flavour. Marinate and cook hanger over a high heat.

## 3. Tenderloin

Traditionally coveted as the best cut of steak – and the most expensive by weight – tenderloin is arguably the most tender of all beef, often described as having a butter-like texture. Unlike rib eye, it has a low amount of fat and is not well-marbled. Diners are also familiar with this steak under the guise of filet mignon or châteaubriand.

## 4. T-bone

A two-in-one kind of steak, T-bone is the tenderloin and strip steak separated by bone. While the size of each portion varies, the tenderloin is typically smaller, juicy and tender, and the strip bigger, more lean and beefy. A porterhouse is, in essence, a T-bone with a larger tenderloin part, and great for sharing.

## 5. Tomahawk

We have rib eye, and then we have tomahawk, a rib eye with the entire rib bone left in and French trimmed. When cooking, it takes a great deal of flavour from the massive bone. Apart from its dramatic appearance, this cut is also memorable for its remarkable size – often more than a kilogram.

*From top left:*

USDA dry-aged sirloin (price on request), hanger steak \$230/1kg, USDA prime tenderloin steak \$98/180g all from The Butchers Club; Canadian prime beef T-bone steak \$54/100g from city'super; Tasmanian beef Tomahawk from Cape Grim \$43/100g from GREAT Food Hall; bone-in 45-day dry-aged ribeye \$286/400g from The Butchers Club.

## 6. Rib eye

A favourite among diners, rib eye comes from the muscle along the spine of beef cattle and so is quite tender. It is perhaps most loved for its liberal amount of fat and luscious marbling, which give it a juicy, rich flavour. As such, rib eye requires little effort to be made delicious. Even with a quick treatment on the grill, it is juicy and succulent.

## 7. Short ribs

Short ribs have become trendy in recent years and are seen on menus everywhere. The end cuts of the prime ribs in the chuck are very tough and they are frequently braised, or slow-cooked, in red wine, tomato or barbecue sauce. In Korean cooking, short ribs are sliced thinly, marinated and grilled as delicious galbi.

## 8. Brisket

Beef brisket comes from the breast and foreleg, on which beef cattle rest their weight when they lie down, making it one of toughest cuts of meat. Full of connective tissue, beef brisket is barely edible when cooked like a steak. Marinating and slow cooking will break down the fibres and make it as tender as any other cut.

## 9. Strip loin

A confusing difference in the world of beef is that between strip loin and sirloin. Cut from the rump end of the short loin, strip loin is cut into strips and is also known as New York strip. It is lean and flavourful.

## 10. Chuck

Chuck steak is taken from the chuck or shoulder. Because the shoulder is a motive muscle, this steak is tougher than most, and marinating will help tenderise it. One of the more economical cuts of beef, chuck steak is typically for stewing, braising and pot roasting.

*From top left:*

Brandt natural beef prime boneless short-rib \$55/100g from GREAT Food Hall; beef brisket from The Butchers Club; US dry-aged boneless striploin from GREAT Food Hall; chuck from The Butchers Club.