


A photograph of four pieces of raw steak, including a tri-tip, a brisket, a brisket half, and a brisket point, arranged on a wooden cutting board. The steaks are fresh and show marbling. The background is a warm, textured wooden surface.

# STEAK MADE PERFECT

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Chefs and sommeliers from the nation's top steakhouses share their tips for getting the most out of your favorite cuts.

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Nothing beats a great piece of steak. From well charred, melt-in-your-mouth filets to juicy rib eyes barely kissed by the flame, there's something mouthwateringly primeval about cutting into a juicy hunk of beef. And while the simple wisdom of "red wine with red meat" certainly works, a little more attention to detail will ensure optimal wine-and-food synergy.

A steak's cut, aging technique and accompanying sauces can change its pairing parameters, whether with a white, a red or a libation from the back bar.

We'll help you match wine and steak with somm aplomb. Also, we tapped top chefs for their sizzle-worthy secrets, giving you the tools to re-create some of that steakhouse magic at home.

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## Filet Mignon

Though not particularly flavor-forward, filet mignon's luscious texture amply compensates.

"Filets are the most tender and lean cut," says Habteab Hamde, chef de cuisine at Bern's Steak House in Tampa, Florida.

To maintain that sought-after tenderness, Hamde says to trim any fat and connective tissue before cutting the filet to the desired size. Leave small filets in the refrigerator until just ready to cook, then brush the steaks with sweet, unsalted butter and season with kosher salt and black pepper.

Cook them on a very hot cast-iron grill over natural lump hardwood charcoal, using different concentrations of charcoal to create temperature variations on the grill. Relocate steaks if they are cooking too quickly. Large cuts require lower temperatures to avoid burning the exterior.

"Rotate the steak in slight angles, making sure to give the meat time to caramelize before each rotation, says Hamde. "This will allow an even crust across the whole steak. Turn the steak over and repeat the process."

Let the filet rest for five minutes after cooking, and then serve solo, or with a rich sauce like Hollandaise or Béarnaise.

### GET SAUCY!

Purists may eschew sauce, but others crave its added kick. STK steakhouses offer eight toppers, and Evan Puchalsky, corporate beverage manager for The ONE Group, says sauce definitely influences the sip.

- "The goal for pairing anything—including wine and steak sauce—is to always make sure there is balance," says Puchalsky.
- **Blue cheese butter** is the most difficult to match, he says, as it overpowers many dry wines. He opts for a dry Riesling, sweet style of Port or a light Pinot Noir.
  - Rich **Béarnaise** speaks to a full-bodied, oaky, unfiltered Chardonnay or a light-bodied red Burgundy.
  - Shiraz will play off a **horseradish cream**'s spice, while a Sancerre or other Sauvignon Blanc will match its acidity.
  - And bold, **traditional steakhouse sauces** scream for big Cabernets or Malbecs, says Puchalsky. "Not to sound clichéd, but something your father might have."



### The Wine

Filet mignon's understated taste lends itself to restrained reds, according to J. Michael Shields, a sommelier at Bern's Steak House.

"I look for something that is not going to overwhelm the nice, delicate cut," he says. "Skip the big, unctuous, heavy New World reds, and look more towards Old World aged wines."

A moderately aged Burgundy works well, like Domaine Roumier's 1999 Clos de la Bussière Premier Cru from Morey-St-Denis, says Shields. An aged Bordeaux from a bold vintage, like the 1989 Château Haut-Brion, can deftly stand up next to aged beef without overpowering the delicate filet.

"Bigger and fattier cuts can stand up to bigger, more tannic wines, but a nice soft-aged filet needs a more subtle wine," he says.

## DRY-AGED OR WET-AGED?

Wet-aged steaks become tender during their time in refrigerated, sealed vacuum bags, but taste milder than those hung to be dry aged, which take on nutty, earthy notes, according to Nathan Anda, chef and partner of Neighborhood Restaurant Group's Red Apron Butcher in Washington, D.C.

With wet-aged steaks, NRG Wine Director Brent Kroll reaches for New World wines with lush fruit. He opts for Rhône varietals or blends from Washington and California for rib eye, Chilean Carmenère with New York strip and Australian Grenache for filet mignon.

"Dry aging releases the water in the muscle, so it can handle powerful tannins, but doesn't need the body a wet-aged steak needs," says Kroll.

Old World wines with pronounced earth fit the bill, like Côte-Rôtie or Priorat for rib eye, Bordeaux for New York strip, and firm-tannin Burgundies from Nuits-St.-Georges for filet mignon.



## Rib Eye

Diners who attack a bone-in rib eye's ample marbling are rewarded with mouthwatering, intense flavor.

"[Their] added layer of protection and the natural connective tissues do render a slightly more succulent finished product, depending on temperature," says Gary LaMorte, corporate chef of the Mina Group.

The decreased surface area on bone-in cuts translates to slightly less caramelization. Bones slow the cooking process, however, so steaks end up tender and juicier—especially when grilled.

For boneless cuts, LaMorte recommends separating the cap from the eye, as their cooking times vary.

If dry-aged meat is unavailable, opt for a marinade or rub, says LaMorte.

Temper the steak in hot, clarified butter to decrease cooking and resting time. Sear the meat on a wood-fired grill over high heat before moving it to a cooler part of the grill to finish cooking.

"Brushing it with compound butter as you cook and while resting will increase the deliciousness factor drastically," says LaMorte.

Remember that large rib eyes cooked over high heat need to rest much longer than smaller ones cooked at lower temperatures.



## The Wine

When seeking wine to go with a rib eye, consider the cooking method, says Daniel Grajewski, beverage director for the Mina Group.

"Rib eyes handle smoke very well, so look for a wine that matches the flavor," he says.

Wood-fired steak is made for the smoked-bacon-tinged 2010 Jamet Côte-Rôtie, whose generous tannins and acidity swiftly cut through the steak's fat.

A more neutral cooking style allows the meat's character to better shine through, and provides pairing options like a Napa Valley Cabernet, or a California Syrah like

the 2011 Les Voisins Yorkville Highlands Syrah from Copain Wines.

Generally, rib eyes allow for full-bodied, unabashedly intense bottles.

"Look at the steak's marbling and its protein level—a wine's tannins won't seem so aggressive if there's protein on the palate," says Grajewski.



## New York Strip

Cut from an area of the short loin that does little work, the crowd-pleasing New York strip balances enticing tenderness and marbling-generated character.

“The filet is tender but not as flavorful; the rib eye is full of flavor and very juicy, but not as tender,” says Thomas Dritsas, vice president and corporate executive chef for Del Frisco’s Restaurant Group. “The strip is the best of both.”

A bone-in strip offers enhanced appeal, but it does require an increased cooking time and its larger size can be daunting to some diners. Don’t be intimidated, says Dritsas, as you’ll cut away about five ounces at the table.

New York strip is a forgiving cut when it comes to overcooking, but Dritsas suggests preparing it to medium doneness. It will liquefy the internal fat, rendering an ultra-juicy final product.

Simply seasoned with salt and pepper is preferable, Dritsas says, but a compound butter, classic Béarnaise or robust Bordelaise sauces are nice accouterments, too.



## The Wine

The perfect wine for a New York strip matches its substantial marbling.

“You need a wine with a good balance of acidity to cut through the fat and complement the flavors of the beef,” says David O’Day, wine director for Del Frisco’s.

The Robert Foley 2007 Claret from Napa Valley’s Howell Mountain has it all, he says.

“Power, structure, balance and complexity, all wrapped together with an elegant finish—this wine with a strip steak is a match made in heaven,” O’Day says.

Adding a drizzle of a shiitake mushroom demi-glace will pair with a blend that complements both the meat and the sauce, says O’Day. Try Tolaini’s 2006 Valdisanti, a Tuscan blend of Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese and Cabernet Franc.

## BRINGING THE STEAKHOUSE MAGIC HOME

Paramount to preparing a great steak at home is buying one aged for about 28 days.

“I always befriend a butcher,” says Dritsas. “He is my go-to guy when taking on a steak dinner at home.”

- **Choose a thick cut**, whose internal temperature is easier to control while you achieve color and caramelization on the outside.
- **Let steaks rest** at room temperature for 30 minutes before cooking, and season them with sea or kosher salt and freshly cracked pepper.
- **Preheat** the cooking source on its highest setting. Dritsas prefers a cast-iron skillet rather than a grill, as the steak’s entire surface touches the heat. For steaks 1–1½ inches thick, sear for eight minutes on each side, then remove from heat and rest it for five minutes.
- **Top the steak with a pat of butter**, which will melt and glaze the meat.



## Porterhouse

For cut-conflicted carnivores, the porterhouse offers the best of both worlds—tender filet mignon and juicy strip steak.

So what's the distinction between it and a T-bone?

"Both are cut from the short loin, where a T-shaped bone separates the filet and New York strip," says Sean Griffin, executive chef of Prime Steakhouse at the Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas. "The filet portion must be 1¼ inches thick or greater at its widest part to be classified as a porterhouse."

To prepare, start with high-quality beef, wet-aged for 28 days, says Griffin.

"The intramuscular fat will produce a steak that eats well and has loads of flavor," he says.

Cook it on a hot grill or cast-iron pan to caramelize the exterior. Move a thicker cut to a cooler section of the grill until it reaches the desired internal temperature.

Once it's done cooking, let the steak rest for 10 minutes. Just before serving, season with salt and pepper, brush with melted butter and put it back on the heat until it sizzles.

To carve a porterhouse, follow the curve of the bone with a knife and slice perpendicular to it. 🍴

## I'LL STEAK MANHATTAN

Grabbing the cocktail shaker instead of a corkscrew can lead to unexpectedly playful matches, but the pairing methodology is similar.

Think about the steak's natural juices, marbling and accompanying sauces, says Eric Quilty, bar manager at San Francisco's Smokestack. The Scotch-based blood and sand cocktail is a great partner for filet with Béarnaise sauce, with ingredient proportions tweaked according to the steak's doneness.

Quilty says gin's botanicals in a pearl onion-garnished gibbon play well with pepper-crusting rib eye served with caramelized Cipolini onions. Skirt steak topped with chimichurri sauce screams for an agave-based libation like a paloma with mezcal, rimmed with salt and dried sage.

H. Joseph Ehrmann, proprietor of Elixir in San Francisco, believes the type of cut dictates the cocktail.

"A fatty steak like a rib eye would benefit from some acid, like a whiskey sour or a dry amaretto sour, while a lean New York strip can be lovely with a vanilla-rich Maker's Mark old fashioned," he says.



## The Wine

How best to attack the wine pairing for two very different cuts of steak?

"Even though the filet side is a leaner cut, you still will want to have a full-bodied red wine as your pairing," says Jason Smith, Bellagio's wine director.

He's partial to bottles like Domaine Faury's 2011 Saint-Joseph from France's Rhône Valley.

"This Syrah-based wine is known for its balance of black pepper notes, earthiness and meatiness," making it a perfect partner for peppercorn sauce, says Smith.

Topping the filet with something rich like Béarnaise sauce will downplay its lack of marbling (which the strip has in spades). It allows the porterhouse to better hold its own next to fuller and more tannic reds like Lewis Cellars's 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon from Napa Valley.

