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"I need smoked meat and beer!"

Have you ever said that? I did, and it was to some close friends of mine the other day. I just blurted it out after I saw a review for a new BBQ joint here in the Windy City. Chicago, a great food city as well the once proclaimed "Hog Butcher of the World," has not been recognized as a BBQ Mecca of the US. Even today, with the opening of many smoked and encased meat shrines, the city hasn't defined itself as a city with a definite BBQ style.

As for the other side of my craving, though, we do have a great reputation as a re-emerging beer city. Chicago has a steadily growing craft brewing community, and I could spend the whole day writing about local beer. Trust me, the research *alone* is worth writing the article. Think about how many beers you can taste that are made right here within the city limits. Not just what's on the shelf at the store, but also all of the brewpubs pouring fresh draft beer that can only be found at the bar.

By the way, I want to define "local" as being made in northern Illinois. Just because you have a local landmark on your label doesn't mean that you are a Chicago Beer. That "Island" moved to upstate NY. Thanks, Inbev! I digress, so let's go back to my original thought. What is it about smoked meats and beer that got me thinking about Chicago as a BBQ city? It's like this: I think we need to change our reputation from the Franco-file, Molecular City image we have had for awhile. Let's go back to our roots. Isn't the iconic Chicago hot dog basically smoked meat?

If you are a BBQ purist and lover of the art form like I am, you will probably want to puff out your chest and proclaim that you know the difference between Eastern and Western Carolina "Q". You are most likely proud to know that if you're eating at the Salt Lick, you know exactly where you are in Texas. You *can* get a tasting at the airport as you are leaving the "Big D," but that isn't the same. Even southern Illinois is known for a particular type of Championship BBQ as Mike Mills, 3-time Champion at the Famous Memphis in May, has his original 17th Street Bar and Grill in Murphysboro, IL. Their style is more typical of the St. Louis-style of BBQ, focusing on ribs glazed with a sweeter, heavier sauce. Places like this make me want to believe that there is a chance for Chicago to be known for its unique style of smoked meats.

Let 's look at what the BBQ experience really means. It is not just burning logs and throwing meat on the grill, sitting up all night drinking beer and watching a puff of white smoke billow out of a flue. The slow smoking of meats is a



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**BARLEY WINES,
SMOKED BEER &
OTHER THINGS**

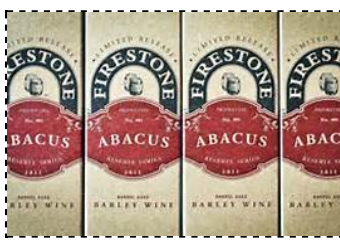
learned speciality craft that takes years of dedication to learn how to do it perfectly. Yes, specific regions have a certain style, and they all have BBQ joints that you have to drive miles off the main road to find. This traditional BBQ is a product of the daily alchemy of smoke, heat, salt and meat. It has also evolved from a social and economic history. Things can change, and BBQ reflects that as well as anything.

Does BBQ have to be found in an old garage with handmade pits, with the son of the son of the founder standing over those pits and guarding the secrets? That is *exactly* what true BBQ is about, but we are not in that situation here in the Great Lakes. Yes, there are plenty of examples of this from places like, Hecky's, Honey 1 BBQ and Barbara Ann's. However, think about any Chicago pit master who has used live wood in an outside pit over the last two months. You try smoking a brisket in -25°F wind chill for 18-22 hours and see how difficult it is. In the traditional BBQ states, temperature ranges are more consistent and you can smoke meats outside year-round. We have our challenges, but if you look a little deeper into the restaurants serving smoked meats and the products that are available to the consumer, there is definitely a BBQ that is Chicago style. That style can (and should) be discussed as unique and worthy of a seat at the table with the Carolinas, Texas, Memphis and Kansas City. This is about urban BBQ made right here in our backyard. There are new pit masters changing the perception of this art form. Danny Meyer created Blue Smoke in New York, and I think we have a place at the pit.

First and foremost, all of those long time Chicago residents who grew up thinking that Chicago-style ribs are ribs from Carson's that are now only available by mail order, that is not BBQ. I am talking about the slow smoked "Chicago" brisket from [Smoque](#). It's the succulent pulled pork and a collage of sauces from [Lillie's Q](#). It's the selection of slow smoked meats from new places like [Green Street Smoked Meats](#) and [Chicago Q](#). We also have chefs serving house made smoked sausages and whole goats or lambs, caterers doing whole hogs, and both creating various forms of pulled poultry. All of these are done in a classic style of "slow and low" over a combination of fruit and hard woods, but the dining experience is the difference.

What do all of these dishes have in common in our BBQ world? Local chefs are serving it in casual, communal-style dining rooms, in a simple approach with a lot of thought about the cold adult beverage that goes so perfectly with it. Our style of BBQ focuses on the skill of the urban pit master serving great meats, and on each restaurant's beverage specialist selecting the perfect pour. Whether a smoky stout, a barrel-aged barley wine, or even a locally distilled rye whiskey, you can always enjoy some kind of artisan meat and a local brew. Not every restaurant is going to serve beer or bourbon, but you can definitely find it somewhere. This is what Chicago-style BBQ is: smoked meats and beer served at a local joint that is a little more sophisticated than sawdust on the floor or a pile of logs in the parking lot with a sold-out sign on the door.

Go out and eat at some of these places, but make sure you



spread the word when you do. Tell everyone you know that you just ate at a great BBQ joint serving Chicago-style BBQ, not Texas, not Carolina, and not St. Louis, but *Chicago*. Remember what one of our favorite Chicago "sons" said: "Grab a brew, it don't cost you nothing."

- Chef John Reed, CEC, CCA, ACE

This particular [Barley Wine](#) was just released in January and previous releases received 100/100 points from the *Beer Advocate Magazine*.



If you don't like the heavy smoke in your BBQ try having it in [your beer](#). This is one I had many times while I was in Germany during the Culinary Olympics.

If you need to feel like a backyard BBQ junkie try this.



I just use it to tame the fire in the smoke box because I think that is "what it is good for."

A TRIBUTE TO MIKE MILLS

Here is his [book](#), from which I have tried many great recipes.



I particularly like the Fried Pickles on page 44.

