

STYLE & TRAVEL

Ways to Add Some Sizzle to Your Steaks This Summer

BY CHERYL LU-LIEN TAN

Steaks are an easy crowd-pleaser when it comes to summer grilling. But it can be easy to fall into a rut of just throwing the meat on the grill.

Alan Ashkinaze, executive chef of Gallagher's Steakhouse in New York

TRICKS OF THE TRADE

City, believes with a little planning and some creativity, it's easy to take your steaks from good to

great. "The flavor when you have a good steak—it can just be phenomenal," says Mr. Ashkinaze, who typically cooks almost 300 steaks each weekday at the restaurant and more than 500 on Saturdays. He usually likes to make steaks for his family as a Sunday treat in his New Jersey home.

For starters, before deciding on the treatment for a steak, Mr. Ashkinaze looks at the type of meat he's using. "A rib-eye is going to be a lot fattier," he says, which means it may have more flavor than a leaner cut such as a filet mignon. "What's trendy right now is the tomahawk rib-eye, which is a long-boned rib-eye steak. People like drama."

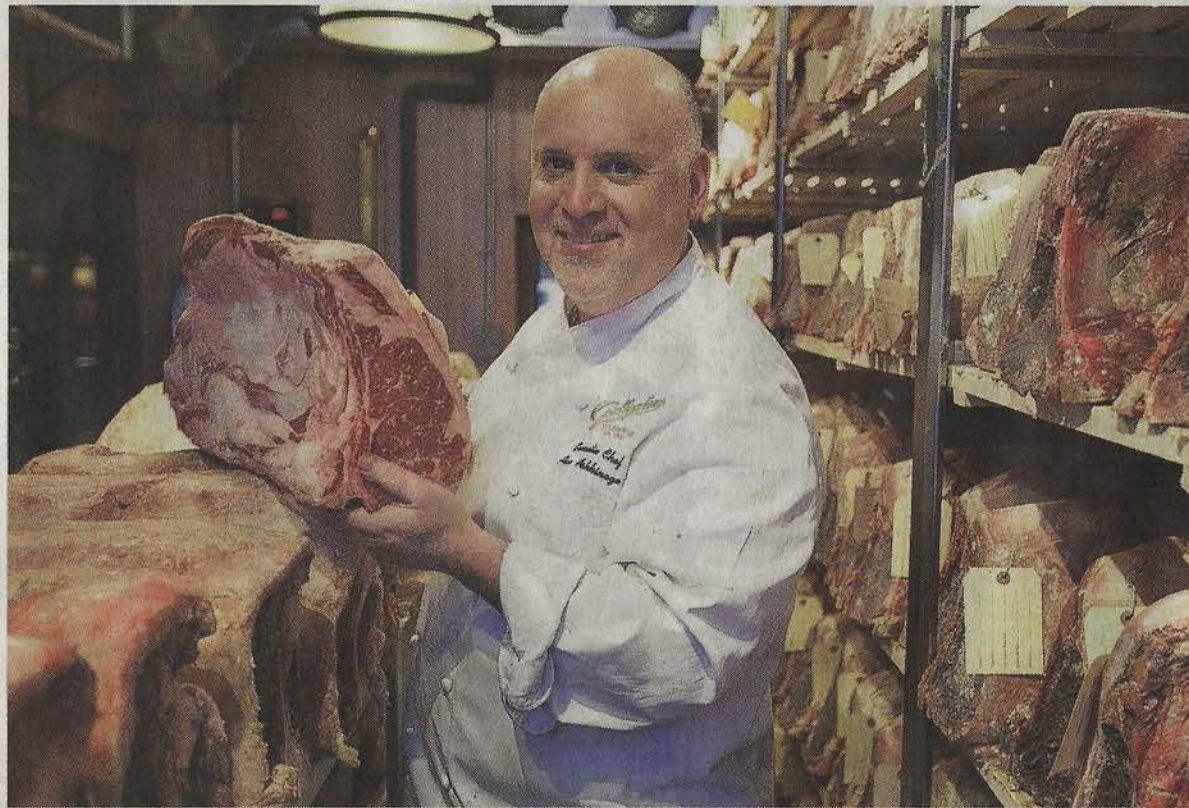
Whether the meat has been aged or not is important. "When you age meat, you're taking the moisture out of the meat, so you're intensifying the flavor of the steak," says Mr. Ashkinaze. "If you're able to buy a nice dry-aged meat, you just want to get the flavor of that meat, so don't put any marinade on it."

If you can't find good aged meat, "you can do a mock version at your house," Mr. Ashkinaze says. "Put it in your refrigerator uncovered—that will take the moisture out of it. Do that for a couple of days" before cooking the steak.

A simple marinade Mr. Ashkinaze favors at home involves blending soy sauce with lemongrass and fresh ginger or sesame oil, shallots and garlic. He says the sugar in the mixture has a nice caramelizing effect when the meat cooks. "When the fat melts into it, you have that salty, sweet fatty type of sauce," says Mr. Ashkinaze.

Rubs can be a way to add a new flavor profile to your steak, he says. Mr. Ashkinaze makes a coffee porcini rub sometimes, saying "you get that earthiness of the coffee." He makes a sweet chili rub that features four types of chilis and sugar. "Be careful when you're cooking it when you have a little sugar in it," he cautions, as the rub could burn more easily if you're searing the meat in a pan.

Before cooking the steaks, Mr. Ashkinaze makes sure the meat is at



Alan Ashkinaze, above, of Gallagher's Steakhouse in New York, in the restaurant's dry-age room. Below from left to right, rubs including Cajun spice rub, coffee, porcini mushroom and sweet chili; rub on a steak; sauces including buttery foam sauce, Gallagher's steak sauce, Szechuan pepper vinaigrette and ginger-ponzu sauce.



room temperature. Home cooks, he says, often make the mistake of cooking a piece of meat that has just been taken out of the refrigerator. "It'll cook unevenly, and you may overcook it on one side and then flip it over and think it should be done, but it's still raw inside," he says. "Next thing you know, you're putting it back into the oven so you can cook it."

Mr. Ashkinaze generally prefers grilling his steaks, sometimes adding different kinds of woods such as hickory or oak to the charcoal and perhaps scattering some fresh rose-

mary or thyme around the sides so the smoke will add another layer of flavor to the meat.

But he likes other cooking methods as well. Pan-frying meat by searing it first on a cast-iron pan and then sticking the pan in the oven to finish cooking it "makes a great crust, and that's where that flavor comes in, as you're caramelizing all that fat," he says. "For a nice medium-rare steak, if you have an inch-thick steak, just put it in the oven for a minute and a half to two minutes at 350 or 375 degrees." Sometimes, he'll

add a little butter to the pan with chopped garlic and fresh thyme, so it "adds a glaze to the meat."

Once the steaks are cooked, it is essential to let it rest for five to 10 minutes, depending on the thickness of the steak, before cutting or eating it, he says. Also, he notes, "I've never been a fan of steak being so hot. To me, when the steak is warm, that's when you get the full flavor."

Condiments can be another way to jazz up your steak, says Mr. Ashkinaze. He likes to whip up "a quick steak sauce in my house that has a

Sirloin Tips

◆ Avoid using rubs or marinades on aged steaks.

◆ When grilling, add scented wood such as hickory or herbs such as rosemary to the coals.

◆ Make sure steaks come to room temperature before cooking.

◆ If you marinated the steak or used a rub, avoid condiments.

◆ Drink vodka and lime with a steak—the citrus helps cut the fats.

hint of barbecue sauce, tomato ketchup, vinegar, molasses and sugar."

He also likes a Sichuan black pepper vinaigrette. "I take a reduction of veal stock and infuse it with Sichuan peppers and black peppers and a splash of vinaigrette and maybe some butter from cooking the meat" if butter was used, Mr. Ashkinaze says.

This works well with steaks, because the acidity of the vinaigrette helps cut the richness of the meat, he adds.

A creamy foam made with an electric beater can be an unusual offering, he says. He likes to do a version that has butter, a little cream and "a little foamy tomato infused into it. Blend it and it's light and airy, almost like a mousseline." This works particularly well with leaner cuts such as filet mignons, he notes.

"There's a richness to it, and it's light, airy fat that you're putting on a piece of meat that doesn't have the fat flavor profile that you'll have on a rib-eye."

Condiments and foams should be paired only with steaks that haven't been marinated or treated with a rub. "If you're marinating or putting a rub on it, you're adding flavor and if you add another condiment to it, what are you actually eating?" he says.

Because Mr. Ashkinaze likes the steak to be the focus, he keeps his sides simple. "Potatoes and corn or a salad with arugula and grapes" are go-to's, he says. Sometimes he may do potatoes with bacon lardons and pearl onions "all sauteed together with veal jus."

While wine is the drink typically paired with steaks, he prefers vodka on the rocks with a little bit of lime. "It's refreshing," he says. "And when you have that citrus in it that's cutting through the fat, it's nice."

For marinade and rub recipes, please go to WSJ.com/Food.