

Love me tender...or not

There's more to steak frites than flank. At Toronto's Cowbell, chef Mark Cutrara promises more cow for your meal, switching up his cuts as often as he changes shirts. Generally speaking, the more tender the cut, the less flavour. Get ready for some tough decisions

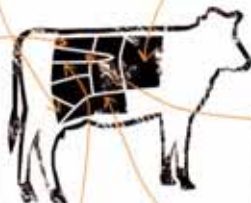
Tri-tip A triangular-shaped cut from the bottom sirloin. Leave the fat cap on for added flavour and juiciness



Rib-eye The most flavourful of the prime cuts, if a little less tender



New York strip Significantly less expensive than rib-eye, this cut still ranks high on flavour and texture



Filet mignon This lean cut from the tenderloin is superbly tender, but low on flavour. Hence the traditional bacon wrap



Top sirloin Cut from a section between the loin and the round, this steak is much cheaper than a New York, but nearly as tender



Vacio In Argentina, this full-flavoured flank cut is slow-cooked whole over a wood fire. When grilling, cut across the grain to ease the toughness

PAN-SEARING THE PERFECT STEAK

DIY

- 1 Sprinkle the steak with sea salt.
- 2 Place a well-seasoned cast-iron pan over high heat. It's gotta be cast iron and it's gotta be smoking.
- 3 Add a little grapeseed oil.
- 4 Place the steak—best side down—in the pan and lower the heat to medium. Sear 3 1/2 minutes for a one-inch steak. Flip and cook 3 1/2 minutes more for medium rare.
- 5 Let rest for five minutes in a warm spot.

To look at most steak menus, you'd think a steer was a loin on four legs. The most popular cuts in North America—New York strip loin, rib-eye, filet mignon—all come from the prime muscle along the back. So what happens to the other 95% of the 360-kilogram beast? That was the question that began to plague Mark Cutrara—a young Toronto chef who had done time in Jamie Kennedy's kitchens—after he read Michael Pollan's revolutionary book, *The Omnivore's Dilemma*.

Pollan takes a hard look at the state of the modern food chain and points out the many wrongs of conventional beef: It's hard on the environment and on the animal itself, which is forced to eat vast quantities of corn—a food the ruminant wasn't designed to eat—all in the service of creating a few cheap, tender pieces of meat. And so, about a year ago, Cutrara left his post as chef at Toronto's critically acclaimed Globe Bistro to learn the dying art of butchering. "I wanted to challenge myself by cooking the whole animal," explains Cutrara, whose own restaurant, Cowbell, opened in July and has been luring devoted carnivores ever since. "I wanted to improve my skills, shrink my footprint and help the farmers."

The result is a chalkboard menu full of surprises. Case in point: On any given night, your steak frites might employ a different cut of the cow. Cutrara's favourite is vacio, an Argentinian-style cut from the flank area. But steak is merely a starting point for Cutrara's love affair with beef—shanks, brisket and beef jerky all take turns on the menu. But why stop there, when everything but the cowbell is edible? In Cutrara's kitchen, even the trimmings are air-dried to be sold as dog treats. —Sasha Chapman



Chef Mark Cutrara: making carnivores happy again