

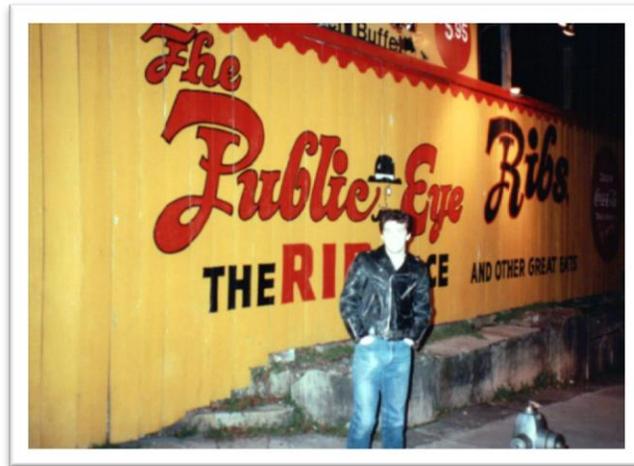
# MICHAEL HOCHMAN

## THE MAGIC OF BARBECUE TURKEY BACON (THE BACON CRITIC)

extracrispy.com

Barbecue may be the only true American art form.

And barbecue's National Gallery of Art is any streetcorner in Memphis, Tennessee. My favorite restaurant to ever exist is a BBQ joint in The City of the Blues called "The Public Eye". For a while, The Eye's résumé even included a decade of ownership by the late, legendary Don Pelts, who went on to found the world-famous Corky's Ribs & BBQ. It's got 'cue cred.



My friend Barry during my first visit to The Public Eye, Overton Square, Memphis TN (March 1993) – Courtesy me

So why are we talking about barbecue in a bacon article? Because while one can easily get lost in a world of barbecue all-stars like pulled pork, baby back ribs, and baked beans at any great BBQ eatery, the most underrated meat to smoke in a professional pit is the humble bacon. Imagine that smell, that delightful odor that emanates from the pan as you fry up a perfect slice or five. Now, picture that exponentially better with the addition of the aroma of beautiful, sensual, aged hickory smoke. Better, right? Yes, you bet your *barabicu* it is.

Like Oprah and her bread, I love bacon. It's nature's perfect food; entrée, side, or topping. Every meat-eating mammal agrees (well, maybe not those of the porcine persuasion). So rarely do I polish off a pristine sandwich, stack of pancakes, or slice of pizza without the addition of a slab of cured and fricasseed pork belly. That's doubly true with the Great American Burger. And friends, The Public Eye produced some killer Memphis-style dry rub burgers.

One evening, I had myself a thirst for one of their willowy, melty patties. I sat down and asked for the BBQ Burger; pink on the inside, covered in swiss, settled under a couple tranches of that fat, fine, smoky, low-and-slow bacon.

"Sorry, hun. Out of bacon tonight."

I'm sure my ears did not hear that right. Those aren't words the NSA allows to be said in that order. There is not a sentence worse one could...

"...But we do have some smoked *turkey bacon* we've been trying out. Wanna sub that, hun?"

NO NO NO NO turkey bacon is not an acceptable substitution for *bacon* bacon. This shall not be allowed, this shall not...

“Lemme give’ya a sample, it’s real fine.”

Big sigh. “Sure, ma’am. I’ll give it a shot.”

The waitress disappeared into the back and reemerged, sauntering towards me with two slices on a plate. It looked like bacon. It smelled like bacon. It quacked like bacon. I swallowed hard and tried a piece. No way was this going to taste...

OMG OMG OMG. (Strike up the band, set off the fireworks, cue the heavenly choir.) This is a revelation. I’ve been lied to my entire life.

My compatriots, I’m here to tell you: Don’t rebuff the idea of your bacon being made from something not pig-initiated. Now, I’m not saying you should eschew your favorite fatback forever. But for a change-of-pace, every-now-and-again, find a fine establishment (doesn’t have to be barbecue, but damn I recommend it) that will cook up that bacon-most-*fowl*, and indulge.

When done right – smoked, fried up, baked, touched by angels – turkey bacon is *GOOD*. Like, sitting on the same podium as pork good. *SAVE THE PIGS* (sorry, turkeys, you had your chance). From this moment forward, the mighty turkey stands side by side with the proud sow. Dammit, Ben Franklin, you were right.

But if you find yourself in Memphis craving The Public Eye, to quote Marty DiBergi, “Don’t look for it; it’s not there anymore.” Sadly, it closed in 2000, and the building was destroyed by fire in 2001. Best smelling fire ever.



The Public Eye, Overton Square, Memphis TN, on fire (October 2001) - Courtesy memphisfire.net