

SALT & BONE

WORDS KAREN RESTA PHOTOS CLAY WILLIAMS

Walking past sun-filled tables outside Astoria's new Salt & Bone, the aromas of wood smoke, garlic, lemon and caramelized ribs fill the air. The spacious, light-filled, minimalist interior matches the amped-up drinks menu featuring unique cocktails, wines and beers from local brewers. Not exactly your usual barbecue joint.

On a recent visit to this brisket destination (opened in June 2017 by the Bareburger team), Bobby Boddell, the resident mixologist and drinks manager, placed an ivory-colored cocktail called the Dominican Girlfriend on the table. "This is like horchata, but with a hint of Fernet Branca on top."

Meanwhile, Pitmaster Spiro Kouridis tended the smoker in the kitchen. Tall, with mischievous eyes, his quick energy filled the space as he tossed wood into one of the seven-foot-tall smokers.

"I learned how to work these at Delaney Barbecue in Brooklyn. It was many, many hours spent smoking meat. But I grew up here in Astoria—we used to hang out here, lots of the Bareburger guys, when it [the space] was the Athens Café. So it's kind of fitting that we're back here now."

It's an apt follow-up to the Bareburger concept Euripides Pelekanos started here in Astoria in 2009; all their meats are locally sourced, antibiotic and hormone free. "We're reviving a traditional method of cooking," he said. "Everything that comes out of our kitchen is either smoked, baked or rotisserieed using wood-burning equipment fired by traditional whole white-oak wood slabs. This used to be seen all over the country and rarely in New York City."

Defying the usual all meat-fare expected at a barbecue joint, Salt & Bone boasts a vegan chorizo taco option (plus vegan pickles and pickled veggies) and some inventive gluten-free vegetarian options like a smoked beet salad with walnuts and feta, a grilled kale caesar and Mexican-style corn on the cob.

In the kitchen, Spiro explained what he was cooking up: "It's for the New York City Food and Wine Festival. Pier 92 at Chelsea Piers, 2,000 people. It's a competition. This event is all barbecue restaurants. We're doing a whiskey-glazed rib, and the baked beans we do here at the restaurant."

Tommy Smith, Spiro's right hand man, became interested in barbecue as a kid in California. "My dad, he was a fisherman, so he liked to smoke different kinds of fish, gravlax sometimes. He also did things like brisket or pork shoulder ... every Easter and Christmas we'd have smoked salmon on the table."



Beef ribs in
the smoker at
Salt & Bone.

Salt & Bone Smokehouse Brisket

(SERVES 6- 8)

This scaled-down version of the brisket we make in our two giant smokers is your key to enjoying this traditional Texas brisket in your home. Don't let the amount of salt and pepper deter you from making this juicy, flavorful brisket. Special equipment is required. See EdibleQueens.com for details.

INGREDIENTS

8–14 pounds beef brisket

Rub:

2 pounds coarse-ground black pepper

1 pound kosher salt

Barbecue sauce of your choice

PREPARATION

Prepare the rub by mixing the pepper and salt together until well distributed. Set aside. Trim off any excess fat from the top of the brisket. Pour half of the dry rub in a sheet pan, place the brisket in the rub and turn it so that the rub thoroughly sticks to each side of the meat. Pour more rub as needed to fully coat the brisket.

In a smoker, add oak wood (or wood chips for smaller smokers) and start your fire. Feed the fire until it reaches 250°F. Place a thermometer probe into the center of the brisket and place in the smoker. Let the brisket smoke for 7 hours. Once the thermometer reaches 160°, slather the brisket with the barbecue sauce to hydrate the meat.

Fill a 16-ounce spray bottle with water and spray the brisket. Use enough water to wet the brisket well 3 times, in intervals of 20 minutes. After the final spray, remove the brisket from the smoker and wrap tightly with butcher paper. This will seal in all the juices and fat that make it extra-tender. Cook the brisket until the thermometer reaches 205–210°. Remove brisket from the smoker and allow it to rest for 5–10 minutes.

Open the sealed bag and slice the brisket. Serve on its own for a true Central Texas experience, or with the rest of the barbecue sauce to spice things up!





Above: Cocktail master Bobby Boddell; Below: Veganator tacos.



With all the varied, hearty meats and exquisite sides on the menu, Spiro's favorite item is surprising. "You're gonna laugh when I tell you," he said. "It's the turkey. It's a different animal. It's, like, the moistest turkey you've ever had, hands down."

The Texas-style method of cooking with dry rubs—no sticky sauces—is down-home, yet sophisticated. At lunch, neighborhood regulars stop in for pulled pork, chopped brisket or vegan chorizo tacos and sandwiches. And the sides—traditional coleslaw, killer baked beans, a smoked beet salad and a grilled kale caesar—stand on their own. They make for a satisfying, complete meal even without any accompanying meat.

I asked Smith how a person becomes a pitmaster. "I'd say that the most important thing is to seek out your teacher. Learning from Spiro, I couldn't have asked for a better teacher because he threw me right into the deep end."

Boddell smiled at the suggestion that nobody would leave a bite on their plates here. "We do have food left over in the kitchen at times, so we partnered with a couple of community outreach programs. Rescue Leftover Cuisine helped us insert ourselves into the emergency system food rescue." 🍷

Previously an executive chef, **Karen Resta** has written about food and food culture at *Lucky Peach*, *Extra Crispy*, *Edible Manhattan*, *Paste Food*, *Best American Poetry* and more.

