

Sinnipee Smoke

By Danny Fairchild

Health risks aside, what's not to love about barbecue? It gets generally sedentary folks like me up and outside for a change. Not that it necessarily offsets the aforementioned health risks, but still. And it's a communal thing that stretches across almost all cultures—gathering a bunch of people to dine on large quantities of meat cooked low and slow. Even if you're not sharing your barbecue with your neighbors, it's *still* a communal thing because it makes the whole neighborhood smell amazing.

All that stuff is secondary, of course. It's all true, mind you, but we wouldn't bother with any of that crap if it didn't taste so... damn... good. That sweetly smoky umami flavor doesn't come easy. First of all, it takes a special kind of weirdo to dedicate themselves to the task. When was the last time you met someone who avidly barbecues and DIDN'T think, "I'm not sure I'm going to be friends with this person." It takes a lot of time. You can't just whip up some more on short notice. When it's done, it's done, and when it's gone, it's gone. It takes attention. Attention not just to your fire for not-dying reasons, but also attention to the meat itself. A watched pot may never boil, but a watched meat thermometer makes for succulent BBQ.

The point I'm trying to make is that while meat is where barbecue gets all its protein, the No. 1 ingredient is love. Or if not love, then ambition because the goal of anybody—ANYBODY—who barbecues is nothing short of making the Best Barbecue in the World. Love is love, but ambition is pretty tasty, too.

I've waxed poetic about barbecue enough, I know. But I had to because these thoughts were all inspired by one of the newest barbecue joints in the



Tri-States: SinnipeeSmoke in Benton, WI. I've only ever traveled through Benton on the way to a camping or tubing trip. Cute place. But with SinnipeeSmoke filling the air, I now have a damn good reason to stop. Or hell, make a special trip. As I've said before, barbecue travels very well, so even if you live on the other side of the Tri-States, your food will still be amazing when you get home.

Whether you're all about the meat and *just* the meat or are a bit of a sauce fiend, SinnipeeSmoke will make you happy. If you're looking for a variety

of different cuts, you're SOL, but they serve the Big Three: pulled pork, chicken, and brisket, and they're all delicious, so quit your griping. If you're looking for a variety of different sauces, you won't find a wider selection anywhere else closer. Like mixing sauces? You're going to have a ball. More on the sauces later.

The meat.

Let's start with the brisket because brisket takes talent. I tried breaking in a new smoker by doing brisket for the first time. Oh, the hubris. I'll say no more on that ill-fated attempt. I mean... I still ate it, but...

Usually you get brisket sliced thinly. At SinnipeeSmoke, the brisket comes served in almost burnt-end-sized pieces. No, not pieces. Morsels. They are morsels of brisket. Yeah. That's a good way of describing it. It kind of hits on the barbecue idea of "meat candy" and is just a delicious sounding word. Good writing, Danny. And it's true. SinnipeeSmoke serves morsels of brisket.

The pulled pork. I can't remember where I saw it, but I once saw a show that had a barbecue event montage, and at one point, it shows a pitmaster lightly pressing down on a smoked pork butt with the back of his



meat fork and the whole butt just fell apart. No pulling necessary. All connective tissue had given up the ghost to this moist, smoky puddle of meat. Maybe that's NOT the best way to describe SinnipeeSmoke's pulled pork. Sounds appetizing to me, though. I suspect some actual pulling is used by SinnipeeSmoke, I mean duh. But the way it practically melts in your mouth? That's what I want that TV pork to taste like.

The chicken. Dry chicken can go suck it, right? Moist chicken is probably the most satisfying thing to bite into. Moist chicken is so perfect, it's like the vanilla of meats,

and I mean that in all the ways it suggests. Biting into moist chicken is like two puzzle pieces coming perfectly together. Biting into DRY chicken, however, is like chewing on a rag. You know what's easy to dry out? Chicken. I mean... chicken isn't suuuuuper hard as far as barbecue goes, but if you're going to offer it up on your menu, it takes consistency. Which comes with experience. If you're going to serve me dry chicken, what are we even doing here? We got the pork and the chicken with sauces on the side. I love a good sauce, especially when I'm served dry chicken, but honestly? I

LEFT PAGE: BRISKET MAC ATTACK, PULLED PORK ON TEXAS TOAST, LOADED POTATO BOMB, COAL-FIRED CHICKEN ON A BUN, BAKED BEANS, COLE SLAW, AND SAUCES

TOP: JIMBO

BOTTOM: COAL-FIRED CHICKEN STREET TACOS

didn't really need any sauce on SinnipeeSmoke's chicken. Luscious chunks of bird, that. I still put sauce on the chicken because again, I like barbecue sauce, but that was some moist chicken, yo. Ever have a steak so good you didn't need steak sauce, but you still put some on because you like steak sauce? No? Me neither, but it's a thing people do, probably.

I covered the meats, so you probably think I'm done talking about entrées, aren't you? AREN'T YOU? Nope. Because once you've chosen your meats, you need to figure out how you want it served. Just the meat? What a treat. Plonk, there you go. On a bun? I think you just won. Plonk, there you go. On Texas toast? You'll love it the most. Plonk, there you go. On a taco? Hold on to your sock-o. Yeah, you heard me. Yes, I know this is a visual medium, but you heard me. You can get your choice of meats on deliciously messy (barbecue is supposed to be messy) street tacos. Two flour tortillas, coleslaw, chipotle aioli, cilantro, and feta cheese. Yeah. Feta. I was a bit skeptical too, but I got shut up pretty quickly by the chicken tacos we got.

Aaaand there's a few little specialty entrées featuring the meats because of course there are. They know how to feature their meats, and they're right to show us. First we got the Mac Attack. What are we dealing with here? We've got alleged terrorists in Nakatomi Plaza, friend. We've got some *Die Hard* stuff. Creamy Wisconsin mac and cheese topped with your choice of smoked meat, plus barbecue sauce, crispy onion straws, and jalapeños. Don't worry, they aren't heavy handed with the jalapeños. This is still the Tri-States. We got it with those yummy brisket morsels and damn, hoss. Meat successfully showcased. There's also the fan-favorite Jimbo which features that lovely brisket with melted Wisconsin cheese on a hoagie bun.

The sauces. I'd like to spend just a whole day mixing and matching. In the name of journalism, I sampled all of their offerings, but I didn't get to try all the permutations. SinnipeeSmoke boasts five sauces: traditional BBQ, creamy horseradish (obviously

for the brisket, but good on other things, too), and three aiolis—garlic (even more garlicky than a normal aioli), chipotle, and pesto. Hell, yeah. A creamy, pesto-y sauce to go on your barbecue. I know. I didn't even know I wanted it in my life either.

Surely you can see the potential for mixing sauces at SinnipeeSmoke.

One thing you should be aware of is that this place is best described as a barbecue shack. You're going to eat outside if you're dining in. No big deal, I know. That's common with barbecue joints. In fact, it was very pleasant with a nice deck and foliage. It's important to me that you know this place is actually quite nice because when you Google this location, the property image is *bleak*! Rest assured that it's a totally different place now.

And boy howdy am I glad it's a place. The Midwest has some BBQ talent outside of KC and STL, yo. It's right here in the Tri-States. ■



SinnipeeSmoke

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Hours: Tue-Sat: 11 AM-6 PM (or until sold out); Sun-Mon: Closed

DANNY FAIRCHILD

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