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BADDEST BARBECUE IN THE WEST SET FOR SIZZLING SUMMER

Acclaimed Santa Maria Style BBQ Shines with Local Wines, Enchants Hungry Visitors

SANTA MARIA, CA—With unseasonably high temperatures reaching 85 degrees across California’s Central Coast during the second week of March, the “Santa Maria Style Barbecue” season enjoyed an early jumpstart this year, offering a taste of things to come as locals rounded up the red oak and fired up their grills. Indeed, here in the heart of the Santa Barbara County wine country, the 150-year-old tradition of regional barbecuing reaches a crescendo each spring and summer, resulting in what *Sunset Magazine* once called “the best barbecue in the world.”

“The weather is already screaming ‘Santa Maria Style Barbecue,’ but late spring and summer is when visitors will enjoy the full spectrum of our barbecue season,” said April Tunnell, manager of the Santa Maria Valley Visitor & Convention Bureau.

From celebrated local restaurants such as The Far Western Tavern and The Hitching Post to the freelance virtuosos serving up streetside treats along Broadway in downtown Santa Maria, the legacy of Santa Maria Style Barbecue is advanced by a multitude of expert grillers whose masterpieces are offered daily. Better yet, the emergence of the Santa Maria Valley as one of California’s premier wine regions now inspires a perfect pairing of local flavors.

“Between our local barbecue and local wines, you are talking about a distinctive dining experience that is literally home-cooked and homegrown,” Tunnell said. “It’s something that keeps a lot of visitors coming back for more.”

The roots of Santa Maria Style Barbecue date back to the mid-1800s, when massive ranches occupied the hills of the Santa Maria Valley. Local ranchers regularly fed their crowds of ranch hands by barbecuing meat over earthen pits filled with oak wood coals. According to one source, “The Santa Maria Barbecue grew out of this tradition and achieved its ‘style’ when local residents began to string cuts of beef on skewers or rods and cook the meat over the hot coals of a red oak fire.”

In 1931, the Santa Maria Club started a “Stag Barbecue,” which was held on the second Wednesday of every month, with up to 700 patrons attending each event. Presiding over the superheated oak coals was considered an honor, with local doctors, lawyers, farmers, bankers and other businessmen taking turns—inspiring one patron to observe, “There are four millionaires cooking tonight!” Over the years, the legend of Santa Maria Style Barbecue grew, turning a local treasure into a major attraction.

The signature cuts for Santa Maria Style Barbecue are top block sirloin and the triangular-shaped bottom sirloin known as “tri tip,” a cut that originated in the Santa Maria Valley. The meat is rolled in a mixture of salt, pepper and garlic salt just prior to cooking. The red oak—a species of oak native to the region—contributes to a hearty, smoky flavor. Once the meat is trimmed and sliced, the only condiment needed is fresh salsa. The traditional menu also includes French bread dipped in sweet melted butter, tossed green salad and slow-cooked pinto beans, a small pink bean that is grown exclusively in the Santa Maria Valley.

– See Next Page for Santa Maria Style Barbecue Facts and Wine Pairing Recommendations –

Home-Cooked and Homegrown: Santa Maria Valley Wine and Barbecue Pairings

Wines available at Santa Maria Valley tasting rooms, restaurants and wine retailers

Byron 2002 Pinot Noir – Santa Maria Valley

A smooth, lightly textured Pinot Noir with smoky accents that appeal to the red oak flavors of Santa Maria Style Barbecue. A signature wine from a few of the valley's finest vineyards.

Cottonwood Canyon 1997 Synthesis – Paso Robles

A classic Bordeaux-style blend whose rich flavors and spicy, smoky character pair perfectly with Santa Maria Style Barbecue. A limited-production wine sold only at the winery tasting room.

Cambria 2000 Syrah – Tequesquet Vineyard, Santa Maria Valley

A showcase for one of the valley's premier vineyards and varietals. Concentrated flavors of blueberry with accents of cedar, chocolate and leather. A smooth, supple and complex complement to barbecue.

Foxen 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon – Santa Barbara County

The ripe, complex varietal flavors of this Cabernet Sauvignon are an excellent match for grilled meats. Aged for 22 months and blended with a percentage of Merlot for added complexity.

Rancho Sisquoc 1999 Cabernet Sauvignon – Santa Maria Valley

A mature, full-bodied Cabernet Sauvignon with complex flavors of blackberry, leather, oak and spice, all of which balance nicely with the rich taste of the barbecue. Special sale price offered at winery.

For more information on the wineries of the Santa Maria Valley, please visit the Press Room at www.santamaria.com or call Mooncatcher Communications at (805) 239-0020

The Basics of Santa Maria Style Barbecue

Cuts:	Top Block Sirloin or Tri Tip
Seasoning:	Salt, pepper, garlic salt
Heat source:	Red oak (native to Santa Maria Valley)
Traditional Sides:	Fresh salsa; French bread dipped in sweet melted butter; tossed green salad; slow-cooked pinto beans

Where to Enjoy Santa Maria Style Barbecue

The Santa Maria Valley boasts an abundance of unique venues for enjoying Santa Maria Style Barbecue. **The Far Western Tavern** in Guadalupe is located in the historic Palace Hotel, which was built in 1912, and specializes in high-quality beef prepared in the classic Santa Maria Style. The restaurant has been owned by the Minetti family since 1958. Another local legend is **The Hitching Post** in Casmalia, which is also located in a historic hotel building that once served workers during the oil and railroad boom times. The restaurant was established as the first oakwood barbecue restaurant in 1944 and has been owned by the Ostini family since 1952. Up the road in Shell Beach, **F. McLintocks** is famous for ranch-style steaks, hearty portions and spirited service. A leading supplier for Santa Maria Style Barbecue staples is the Minetti family's **Susie Q Brand Specialty Foods**, which offers authentic Santa Maria Style seasonings, pinto beans and salsa available at local retailers and on the web at www.susieqbrand.com. Santa Maria Style Barbecue is a fixture at many other local restaurants and is also woven into the fabric of everyday life in the valley, with fine examples offered by streetside grillers along Broadway and elsewhere as part of non-profit fundraising efforts. For additional insights into Santa Maria Style Barbecue, visit www.santamaria.com, click on "Visitor Information", then "Santa Maria Style Barbecue" for a downloadable video and recipes. For more information on Santa Maria Style Barbecue or restaurants, contact Mooncatcher Communications at (805) 239-0020 or mw@mooncatcher.com