

Secondary cuts *beef up menus*

Creative chefs have long known the value of secondary cuts of beef but interest in these flavoursome parts of the animal are set to increase in popularity as knowledge about how to use them grows. **By Rosemary Ryan.**

Ever heard of a flat iron steak? It's one of a number of cuts of beef that, while well known in markets like the US, is less understood by many Australian chefs.

But it's one that is predicted to become a whole lot more popular with chefs here and more common on menus as a result of a new foodservice campaign from the beef industry that's aiming to build a higher profile for a range of hero secondary cuts.

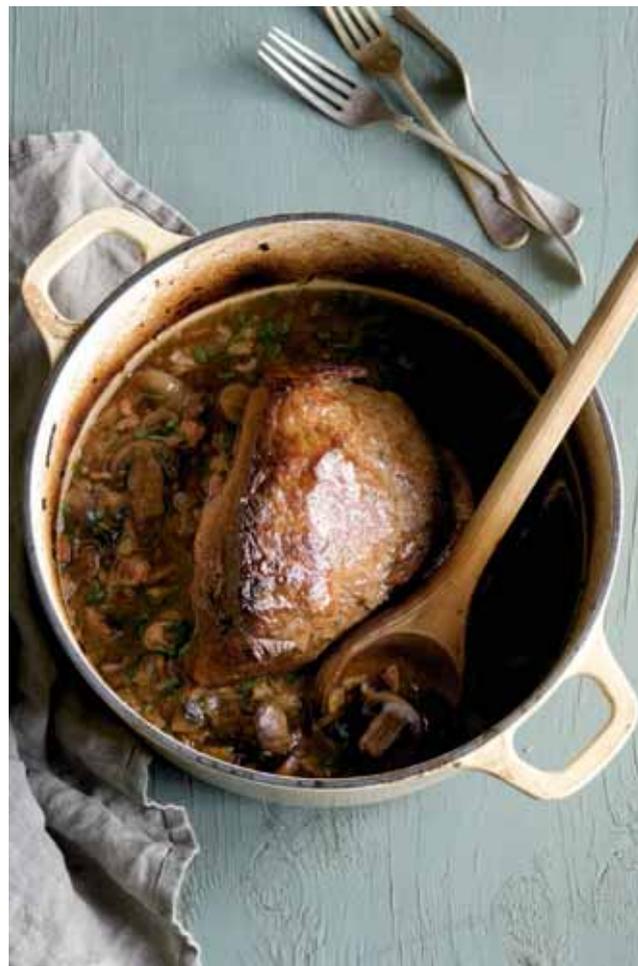
The Masterpieces campaign from Meat and Livestock Australia (MLA) is targeting chefs in an effort to get them interested in and give them the knowledge to be able to do more creative things with secondary cuts. The four hero cuts that are the focus are the flat iron steak (which is a cut from the oyster blade), the point end brisket, the bolar and the flank.

Claire Tindale, product marketing manager with MLA, says the campaign is aimed at raising awareness about the opportunities these secondary cuts or "masterpieces" offer chefs, from their flavour to their cost effectiveness on the plate. MLA hopes the campaign will also change the wide perception about beef that secondary cuts only come into their own in winter as part of braises and slow cooked dishes. "We don't want them to think about the seasons because now when we say secondary cuts they say, 'Yes, we use them in winter'.

"But we want them to think yes you could use flank in summer in a salad, and the same with brisket, you can use that in thai style salads or as a jerky for a bar snack."

David Clarke, executive chef at Sydney's The Chophouse is a big fan of secondary cuts and has been particularly impressed recently by the flat iron steak cut he's been experimenting with. "I've had some here and I've been just blow away by it," says Clarke. "I'm describing it as as tender as fillet but as much flavour as strip loin."

Clarke says he has cooked the flat iron steak – which is a cut that comes from the bottom of the oyster blade – on both a charcoal grill and also on a broiler. "In both applica-



Bolar brilliance: Beer braised pot roast with mushrooms using the bolar cut.

tions it comes up amazingly. It's a little bit firmer on the tooth but it packs so much more taste."

"One of the ways we are doing it is we are trimming it and rolling it and tying it so that it actually looks like a petit fillet—a 200 gram petit fillet. It's low in fat so you have to be careful. That's why we're using a Black Angus which is marble score 2."

Another chef who has used the flat iron steak, Duncan Robertson the owner/chef at Melbourne's River Kwai restaurant, says the cut is very short and dense short grain. "It's almost like cutting butter," says Robertson, who is also about to open a second restau-

rant in Melbourne. "It is really smooth short grain but it is very dense, like butter, so when you eat it you can really feel the texture of the meat on your teeth. We are doing it as a larb, a Thai beef salad.

"We're simply grilling the flat iron steak, letting it rest and then we are slicing it and putting it over the salad. It's best cooked rare, medium rare, it's very low in fat so you don't want to do it well done. It's really sweet and has a light gelatinous mouth-feel, a chewy feel, but without any toughness. It has great flavour. Compared to this in my mind eating tenderloin is like water, there is no flavour, whatsoever."

Brisket is one cut that's also being widely used by chefs in applications from salads to wintery braised dishes. The Chophouse's Clarke agrees says diners appreciate the skill and effort that goes into a dish like a braise.

"I've always done a lot of braises with secondary cuts because I believe a lot of finesse and effort goes into it and what you create is far more superior when it comes to flavour and comfort style food," he says. "And when customers have it they say, 'How did you get it like that, and what 's in.'"

Clarke says he's been using brisket on his menu with "raving success". "Brisket is something that a lot of people are a bit scared of," he says. "It's a tricky piece of meat and it can go quite dry if the right application isn't used.

"There is a lot of trial and error that goes into finding a way you can recreate it in a fast paced restaurant environment."

Clarke says the secret to a good braise is not just braising once. "I braise the brisket in red wine, simple aromatics, veal stock and chicken stock for eight hours then I take the meat out of the braising liquid. Then I take the brisket out and press it until it's cool between metal trays so I can get a consistent and even shape and thickness. Then once it's set you actually cut into whatever portions you want."

"Then reduce the sauce you braised it in down by half. Then you re-braise the meat in this for another two hours after you've



Flank Bourguignon with root vegetables

Eight hour braised Black Angus brisket

Recipe from David Clarke, executive chef, The Chophouse

1 x whole point end brisket (Angus or Wagyu)
100ml olive oil
1kg chopped onion
500g chopped carrot
2L red wine
5L veal stock

Set oven to 125°C. Trim the excess fat off the brisket, seal both sides to nice golden roasted colour and place in a deep gastronome. Sauté the onion and carrot then deglaze with the wine and reduce by half, add stock and bring to the boil. Pour over the brisket and cover with foil (has to be submerged with a wire rack on top). Braise for six hours until tender, remove from oven let cool to room temp. Press brisket between two non stick trays in the fridge with some plates on top to achieve an even flat surface. Rest for four hours.

Strain braising stock and reduce by half, skim all the fat off. Take the brisket out of the press and portion as desired (if you cut 160g it will be approx 220g when finished.). Place the cut brisket in a gastronome and cover with the reduced stock, cover with foil and cook for two hours at 125°C (the braised brisket will suck all the consternated juices up). Cool at room temperature cryovac portions if needed with stock in the bag.

To serve, place portions in a pan, cover with braising juices and cook in oven until hot and nice crust on top.(for cryovac portions place in boiling water for 10 min, finish in a pan in a hot oven).



portioned it because it sucks all the flavour up again and that is when you get the flavour of pure beef.

“You can then have a piece of meat that has some longevity because it has been braised so long it has set in a concentrated stock so you have a shelf life of five days. Then you just basically need to reheat it for service. You can use it in lots of different ways. We serve as a 180g portion with some really smooth potato puree, some glazed onions and sautéed cabbage. Or you can flake it and do it in a pulled beef style. I’ve done a salad with the braised brisket where I’ve shredded it and you get these long needle sized pieces of beef strips that are really tasty and then put that with some shaved celeriac, hazelnuts, fresh herbs and bought it together with mayonnaise in a fresh coleslaw sort of flavour.”

One restaurant truly demonstrating the potential of brisket and other secondary cuts is Neil Perry’s Spice Temple which has a kind of symbiotic relationship with the upmarket Rockpool Bar and Grill operating above it.

The twin operation each week receives its delivery of a side of Wagyu which is then butchered on site and divvied up—the premium cuts going to the steak house and the secondary cuts to the regional Chinese operation below. “We have a program where we get the whole beast in here and we are

‘I’m describing flat iron steak as being as tender as fillet and with as much flavour as strip loin.’

very lucky with what we are allowed to use down here,” says Evans.

“Upstairs is the steakhouse so they take all the primals and we use the secondary cuts. Chinese really suits these cuts and this style of cooking. If we were to use steak and all of those [primal] cuts down here it wouldn’t work because it really doesn’t have the same sort of flavour as the secondary cuts that we use—it would lack a bit of body. It suits our business really well because we can use it all up and you don’t have to pay a ridiculous price.”

Evans says the tender secondary cuts like the eye of the round and the flat iron steak from the oyster blade are used for dishes like the popular hotpots where the meat is cooked quickly while the rest gets braised for numerous other dishes. “The cut from the oyster blade is ridiculously tender,” says Evans. “For the hotpot it’s really fast cooking so it needs to be even better than fillet.”

Evans says all the other secondary cuts are braised. “That’s everything from the shin to the brisket, to the silverside to the outside of the round. It has the most amazing flavour. You have to braise it at just the right temperature – it has to be not too hot or it will be horrible, all dry and tough, but not too slow that it doesn’t break down any of the tough fibres that are in there. We cook our Wagyu for about eight hours at between

90C and 93C overnight.”

One of the most popular dishes on the Spice Temple menu is a stir fried Wagyu dish with eggplant that uses slow cooked brisket. “We stir fry the Japanese eggplant pieces until they are golden brown and then pull them out. Then we stir fry some freshly chopped ginger and garlic and a little red and green chilli. Then in goes the braised and shredded brisket which is cold from the night before and we toss that through until it is warmed through. Then we add a little bit of light soy and chicken stock and toss it together. Add a little bit of chilli oil and then the fried eggplant and serve it straight away with a little bit of shallot on the top. It is very, very cheap.”

At Libertine restaurant in Melbourne, chef Andre De Laine says he’s very conscious of making use of cost effective secondary cuts not just to keep plate costs down but to allow him to put more on the plate in other ways. Proving popular on his Autumn menu at the moment is a dish that combines slow cooked stick beef spare ribs with a piece of grass fed beef fillet.

“I’m a massive fan of braised sticky good things,” says De Laine. “And I’m a really big fan of beef rib. There is just something really intrinsically appealing about it visually on the plate, a nice bit of sticky braised stuff around a bone.”

Secondary cuts shine for taste and value

Flat iron steak

A flat iron steak is produced from a whole oyster blade by removing all of the connective tissue and silver skin. It can be easily portioned into two or three ready to use steaks. Flat iron steaks are suited to grilling or pan frying. These steaks are often seen in restaurants and steakhouses in the US where they are popular because they are lean and tender. If the oyster blade has some marbling, the steak will be even juicier and more flavoursome.

Point end brisket

Brisket is full flavour cut that lends itself to many international cuisine styles from Japanese to United States barbecue. This cut performs best with some fat left on, so don't trim the product completely. For best results remove the thin red muscle known as 'red bark' if it's present on the external surface. The recommended cooking method is slow cooking or sliced thinly in no more than 2cm slices.

Bolar blade

The bolar blade is prepared from the blade, otherwise known as the clod. It is made up of several muscles which have layers of fat and connective tissue within them. If roasting this cut, leave some fat cover to maximise juiciness and flavour. If thin slicing it for pan frying you need to separate the muscles and remove all connective tissue. To produce paper thin slices, partially freeze and slice thinly on a slicing wheel. This flavoursome cut is suited to various cooking methods including grilling, roasting, slow cooking, and schnitzels. It's great for classic pot-roasted dishes like the French beef bourgignon.

Flank steak

A flank steak is a single muscle cut from the flank primal which is beneath the loin and in front of the back legs. It is further prepared by stripping away the membrane and connective tissue to leave a flat, coarse grained muscle with fibres that run lengthwise. It's a very versatile cut of meat with a coarse grain that makes it perfect for marinating because the meat fibre is very porous, yet firm enough to ensure the meat won't collapse while marinating and subsequent cooking.

Information courtesy of Meat and Livestock Australia

"And look it really is cheap. It means if I can get a really under championed cut like that on the plate it means that I can deliver something extra elsewhere as well. For example, with this dish, I have on the plate the really nice grass fed fillet with a juniper jus, plus the braised ribs.

"For me the plate would be one dimensional had I just put the fillet on there. This way the customer gets the best of both worlds—it makes it more substantial. A great rare piece of fillet and the braise."

De Laine says secondary cuts deliver great value to chefs who take the time to master them and incorporate them into their menus. "I do love flank and brisket for the same reasons I like the ribs—there is a big reward when cooking with secondary cuts," he says. "They take time, and they take a lot of patience, but they're cheap and deliver great flavour.

"The beef rib for example has such a full and robust flavour, and when you eat this rib you taste big time beef. And it's not so much that I can get these cuts cheaper and it all goes in the pocket.

"For me it means I can spread the love like with the beef plate—I have the smaller piece of fillet, not a honking 220 gram piece of fillet, but a really good 150-160 gram fillet and then a piece of rib on there. It is better for me economically and better for the punter."

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