

NEW YEAR

Yasmin Prabhudas rejects the January diet fads and goes in search



Clockwise from above: CAU's interior is inspired by the bold urbanity of Buenos Aires; the menu features an impressive range of Argentinian beef; head chef James Garland favours a rib-eye cut of steak



If your idea of a cure for the winter blues is more about getting your teeth into a juicy piece of meat than curbing the calories, look no further; head chefs from three top local restaurants have stepped out of their steamy kitchens to offer you the lowdown on what makes a great steak.

James Garland is head chef of CAU, the newest of Blackheath's gastronomic pit stops, which opened in November (10-12 Royal Parade, Blackheath SE3 0TL; 020 8318 4200). Offering an array of uncomplicated Buenos Aires-inspired dishes, including steak, CAU also gives Italian and Spanish comfort food such as pasta, fish and salads an Argentinean twist. James is in no doubt about his favourite cut of meat: 'It has to be the rib-eye with extensive marbling. As it cooks, the fat breaks down, which gives it plenty of rich flavour.'

When he makes it for himself, James oils the meat and places it in a very hot griddle pan, seasoning it generously with good rock salt, turning the steak only once during the process.

'A good tip is to replace the oil with rendered beef fat; this just ensures the steak is packed full of flavour,' he says. He likes the steak to be 'the star of the show', so he keeps his accompaniment simple: 'Green chimichurri sauce – a



light salsa of finely chopped peppers, lots of parsley, shallots and garlic, mixed with a dash of sherry vinegar and olive oil. Argentine style!

Among his top tips is to cook with coal, which 'helps to add interesting flavours into the beef. In CAU we have a Jospier (coal oven) and you can't help but taste the difference. So when the weather permits, cook your steaks on the barbecue and buy a good quality charcoal. And look out for wet-aged beef. This means the beef is hung for 24 to 48 hours, then cut and vacuum-packed and left for 21 to 28 days, making

the meat very moist and full of flavour.'

Simon Wadham, head chef at the Rivington (178 Greenwich High Road SE10 8NN; 020 8293 9270), which serve modern British cuisine, agrees with James about the best cut, although he also offers an alternative: 'Rib-eye is a perfect cut of beef because of the balance of fat and flesh content. The cheaper option is bavette, which has a fantastic flavour.'

At home, Simon prefers to cook the meat in a pan: 'I would oil it lightly, season with sea salt and pepper and fry it in a heavy-bottomed cast iron pan.

STEAK OUT

of a good, south-of-the-river steak. After all, it's cold out there...

Then, I'd heat a bit of oil until it's really smoking blue hot and fry the steak for a couple of minutes either side till it sears and caramelises. I'd have it medium rare or medium and serve it with green beans and dauphinoise potatoes and I'd probably have a beer with it.'

His advice is not to be tempted to turn the steak over too quickly: 'Let it cook for two and a half minutes and don't move it around or you'll lose heat out of the pan; you won't get that caramelisation if you turn it over too quickly. Also, don't use a light-weight pan – you'll lose too much heat – you want a heavy duty pan.'

Meanwhile, Nick Constantine, owner of two branches of Cyprianis Mediterranean Bar and Grill in Locksbottom and Petts Wood (17 Station Square, Petts Wood BR5 1LY; 01689 896 899/366 & Crofton Road, Locksbottom

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BR6 8NN; 01689 859 000) is another fan of the rib-eye, although he also sees the merits of a well-aged rump steak: 'If you treat it properly it's good but it must be from a good source and aged for two to three weeks.'

Before he grills it, Nick sprinkles his steak with rock salt, black pepper and olive oil. 'I like my steak medium rare, which takes three to four minutes either side. Then I put it in the oven for one minute just before serving – this creates a juicier steak. A good steak goes well with mushrooms, rocket sprinkled with parmesan cheese, chunky chips and a nice glass of red wine,' he explains.

The secret to a great steak is all in the preparation: 'Before grilling, leave it out of the fridge for an hour so – you want it to be at room temperature. If you cook it straight from the fridge it takes longer.'

He adds: 'It's also important to go the extra mile to source a good piece of meat. You might pay a bit more but it's worth it. Make sure it's a grain-fed cow, which produces a tastier and more tender meat.'



Simon Wadham (far left), head chef at the Rivington (left), agrees that the rib-eye is the perfect cut of steak. Below: Try the Rivington's minute-steak



High steaks THE BEST OF THE REST

❖ Inside Restaurant in Greenwich has a modern European take on its steaks. 19 Greenwich South Street SE10 8NW; 020 8265 5060

❖ Buenos Aires Cafe in Blackheath, the original local Argentinian restaurant, serves

up a mean mixed steak platter. 17 Royal Parade, Blackheath SE3 0TL; 020 8318 5333

❖ Uskudar in Petts Wood serves its prime fillet steaks Turkish style.

61 Queensway, Petts Wood BR5 1DQ; 01689 820 055

❖ Branded in Beckenham is a steak specialist.

51 High Street, Beckenham BR3 1AW; 020 8658 5757

❖ The Station in Hither Green serves steaks from the grill.

14 Staplehurst Road, Hither Green SE13 5NB; 020 8463 0367