



Ben Grossman (left)
and Craig Samuel

The Smoke Joint: Bork On A Pun

By Andy Battaglia

Ben Grossman and Craig Samuel run The Smoke Joint in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, the newest node in a small but scrutinized New York barbecue scene. They both came up in fine-dining kitchens around the city—for his part, Samuel still doubles as executive chef at City Hall restaurant in Tribeca—but The Smoke Joint is something different: earthy, small, inexpensive, the kind of place where a faded Auburn hat doesn't look the least bit out of place.

AV Club: How did you guys meet?

Ben Grossman: We met 12 years ago while working at one of the best kitchens in the city at the time, at Picholine on the Upper East Side.

Craig Samuel: I used to call him every morning when people wouldn't show up. I'd worked with a lot of cooks, but what I saw in Ben then was what I saw in myself. When he left there, the last thing I said was "Don't go too far, because I want to do something else with you." Then he went to Indiana!

BG: But that's where I became a barbecue fiend, so it was good.

AV Club: You'd worked in much different kitchens in the past. Why the change?

CS: It's really not that different. Our kitchen manager now, before here he worked at Megu, Gramercy Tavern, Eleven Madison Park. Our decor may be different—we use paper plates and plastic forks—but I'm purchasing the same meats from the same supplier that I use for City Hall. The guy who supplies me with 21-day dry-aged

meats is the same guy who supplies the ribs for us here. Focusing on it pigeonholes us and makes it sound like all we do is eat barbecue, but it's a facet of us.

AVC: What New York barbecue did you like before?

CS: I thought the pulled pork was great at Rub. I liked the ribs at Dinosaur. I thought Pearson's brisket was the best barbecue in the city. But now ours is. A lot of what we do differently comes from the French and classical technique in our backgrounds. When my mother made greens, she would put them on and then go watch *One Life To Live*. We slave it over a little more than that, worry about exactly how to season them and when to take them off. I love my mother's greens, but ours are slightly different.

AVC: What kind of wood do you use to smoke your meats?

CS: It's mostly sugar maple because it lends such a sweet flavor. With beef ribs, we add a little hickory and mesquite because the

See pg2 for continuous story

maple alone is too mild for them.

BG: The sugar maple comes from my dad's property upstate. He bought a plot of land and cleared it to build a house. He has all this wood and was just going to use it in the fireplace.

CS: His father's house is awesome. If I was his son, I'd bump him off.

AVC: What's the longest you smoke for?

BG: 12 hours, for the brisket. But it depends—some needs more, some less. After 10 hours we start checking. It takes time to learn exactly when to take it out.

CS: At this point we can't ever just sit down and eat a plate of barbecue, because we have to nibble it all day long.

AVC: How do you season the fries? They're unusual.

BG: It's from "Joint rub No. 77," the dry rub that goes on anything about to be cooked. It's made up of 12 spices.

CS: We spent close to a year developing a rub that we thought worked well. The one we use for a rub is the 77th iteration; there's a small but major difference for the

one on the fries, which makes it No. 78.

BG: The only person who makes it is me, so Craig can't kill me. He has a few things that only he knows, too.

CS: I always turn my back when making something and hide the last ingredient in my pants.

AVC: Your beer selection draws on 12 obscure brews. What's your favorite?

CS: Every one of the beers is from New York state—except for one. Can a man own a restaurant and not have his favorite beer on the list? It would make no sense.

BG: So that's my favorite: Dale's Pale Ale [from Colorado]. It's hoppy with great flavor.

CS: **I drink the beer that God would drink: Hennepin. I actually believe it was touched by the hand of God. It's ridiculous—I could drink it every day.**

—Andy Battaglia

The Smoke Joint is located at 87 S. Elliott Pl b/w Fulton & Lafayette Sts in Fort Greene, The Smoke Joint Brooklyn.

