

Barbecue heaven Slick's Que Co. in Sisters slow-cooks its meats, pit-style

By John Gottberg Anderson / For The Bulletin

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Want to know all about barbecue?

Ask Roy Slicker. He's the high-energy owner of Slick's Que Co. in Sisters and one of the top authorities on barbecue this side of Kansas City.

Slicker, who serves on the board of directors of the National Barbecue Association, opened his barbecue joint last year on May 20, after five years of running a small catering business called The Left Handed Chef. He achieved professional success so rapidly that after just nine months, in mid-February of this year, he was delivering one of the opening speeches to the association's national convention in Memphis.

A year earlier, when Slicker visited the 2009 convention in Austin, Texas, "I did not want to open a restaurant," he said. "I was happy with my catering company. I had no plans for a restaurant, no name, no location, no suppliers, only a lot of resistance to the whole damn idea."

But encouraged by barbecue-business veterans, whom he calls "the masters," he returned from Texas to his Sisters home ready to launch a new business.

"I attended a lot of seminars and heard some amazing stories," he said. "I got lots of advice from everyone I met."

Slicker signed a lease on his Sisters restaurant — a former convenience store next to a gas station on the town's main street — on April 17. He converted it to a barbecue joint in a single month and opened the doors before Memorial Day weekend in 2009.

Pit essentials

Slick's Que Co. is unlike other barbecue restaurants in Central Oregon, according to Slicker, because everything is prepared on a pit barbecue.

"In a pit-style restaurant," he said, "food that comes out of the smoker today is served today. When you run out, you close. If we have leftovers, we donate it to local charities."



Ryan Brennecke / The Bulletin

Roy Slicker, owner of Slick's Que Co. in Sisters, checks the meat in the barbecue pit in front of his restaurant.

Slick's Que Co.

Location: 240 E. Cascade Ave. (U.S. Highway 20), Sisters

Hours: 11 a.m. "until we're out" Wednesday to Sunday (usually about 6 p.m. Wednesday, around 7:30 p.m. other days). To open Mondays beginning May 31.

Price range: \$7.50 to \$21

Credit cards: MasterCard, Visa

Kids' menu: Yes

Vegetarian menu: Cole slaw, potato salad

Alcoholic beverages: Wine and beer

Outdoor seating: Yes

Reservations: No

Contact: 541-719-0580 or www.slicksque.com

Scorecard

OVERALL: A-

Food: A-. Tender, delicious barbecue meats are slow-cooked in a pit smoker.

Service: A-. Although diners order at the counter, owner Roy Slicker's enthusiasm is infectious.

Atmosphere: B+. Casual and friendly, with photos on the walls and a mannequin in the corner.

Value: B+. Sandwich prices begin at \$7.50; meats are

There are three essential elements to good barbecue, Slicker said.

First is the quality of meat. "We buy only choice pork butts, Angus beef brisket and turkey breast," Slicker insisted. "And our sausage is the best in the country, Meyer's Elgin Sausage from Texas."

Next is the style of cooking: very slowly at a low temperature. "I cook between 200 and 210 degrees," Slicker said. "I'll leave it in the pit for 16 to 18 hours."

Finally, there's the choice of fuel, producing heat and flavor. "I'm using apple wood that I hand-select in Yakima," Slicker said. "I look for moisture in the wood and sweetness in the bark." He combines the apple with buttery pecan wood shipped from Louisiana.

Tender ribs

Slick's ribs are served after 4 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays only. There are two cuts offered: baby back ribs, which come from the top of a hog's rib cage, or St. Louis-style spare ribs, taken from the belly side of the rib cage. The difference is important to Slicker.

"If I have a cloud cover and I'm going to be making a lot of ribs, I'll do baby backs ... because the humidity is higher and I don't have to worry about them drying out. But if it's cold and dry, I'll pick the St. Louis ribs." Spare ribs, he explained, are fattier and retain moisture.

I timed one of my visits to Slick's for a weekend ribs feast and was treated to the St. Louis-style dish. The ribs were tender and delicious. But the meat was not smothered in sauce, nor did it fall off the bone. Slicker wouldn't have wanted it to do so.

"In the barbecue connoisseur world, meat is not supposed to fall off the bone," he said. "In competitions, you are disqualified if it does so. That means its been reheated or overcooked."

Sauces, marinades and dry rubs, said Slicker, are matters of personal preference. While he makes his own barbecue sauce — he is marketing it independently with the slogan, "It's like a rodeo in your mouth" — he believes in leaving it to the individual diner to add as much or as little as he or she wants.

Sampler plates

The rest of the menu is available whenever Slick's is open for business. My family and I tried a bit of everything on two sampler plates, each of which offers a combination of four meats and three side dishes.

All of us loved the pulled pork, the beef brisket and the spicy sausage. We were split on the smoked turkey; two people found it overly dry, but I thought it was very good. I wasn't as fond of the burnt ends, and we agreed they lacked the tenderness of the other meats; the ends were cut from smoked brisket and bathed in barbecue sauce.

Among the side dishes, the baked beans were simply mouth-watering with their sweet touch of molasses. The smoky potato salad was better than the cole slaw, which was little more than peppery cabbage with vinegar and sugar. The potatoes gratin were, frankly, forgettable.

But the bread pudding was superb, heated and served with pecan praline ice cream.

Family friendly

Slick's is a casual, family-friendly restaurant. Patrons order in a cafeteria-style line and have meals delivered on paper plates to their seats at shellacked picnic tables. They can order fountain drinks, beer or wine from a separate bar.

While they wait for their food, they can study dozens of photographs that line the walls, many of them of Roy Slicker himself talking

moderately priced.

Next week: Cork

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with the “masters” of barbecue-style cooking.

And then there's Charlie. He's a mannequin that Slicker found on Craigslist and bought for \$50. “He was naked when I picked him up,” Slicker said. “He had a mustache. That was it.”

That was less than a year ago. Since that time, Charlie has traveled more than 26,000 miles around North America with his foster father, visiting barbecue joints, competitions and meetings. He now sits more-or-less permanently in a corner of the restaurant. Patrons like to have their photos taken with Charlie, Slicker said.

And just a year ago, they didn't know who he was.

SMALL BITES

Spice Box , a small Indian cafe, has announced that it will open Saturday in the former location of Hurricane's dessert deli in Century Village on Bend's west side. Mrinal Patel, whose parents came from the west Indian state of Gujarat, will serve dishes based on her mother's family recipes, including the lentil stew known as dhal. The menu will feature vegetarian, vegan and meat dishes. Open 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. with prices in the \$6 to \$8 range. 133 S.W. Century Drive, Suite 204; 541-419-2542.

El Super Burrito opened its third Central Oregon restaurant earlier this month on Bend's east side. Located in the former A&W Drive-In, the budget eatery serves its popular burrito specialties, as well as tacos and other traditional Mexican food. It also has a drive-through window and is licensed to serve margaritas and other adult beverages. Other stores are in downtown Bend and in Redmond. Open 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. 2100 East U.S. Highway 20, Bend; 541-388-5667.

RECENT REVIEWS

Lola's (B): Excellent soups, salads and sandwiches highlight the lunch hours at this casual cafe on the breezeway between Brooks and Wall streets in downtown Bend. A recently added breakfast menu needs work. Breakfast at 8 a.m. Saturday and Sunday, lunch at 11 a.m. every day; open until mid-afternoon Sunday to Wednesday, until twilight Thursday to Saturday. 852 N.W. Brooks St., Bend; 541-508-4533.

5 Fusion & Sushi Bar (B): Inconsistency marks the dining experience at this Asian restaurant, which couples a fusion menu with a sushi bar in downtown Bend. Order the wonderful oolong tea-glazed sea bass but avoid the numerous fried dishes. Open 4 p.m. to close every day. Lunch will be served beginning in May. 821 N.W. Wall St., Bend; 541-323-2328, www.bend5spice.com.

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