Bryan Schaaf: Back here on the Meat Speak podcast, powered by the Certified Angus Beef brand. Bryan Schaaf, coming to you from, I don't know. What's this building called, like the overall building? It's upstairs.

Jeremy Umansky: The Ohio City Firehouse.

Bryan Schaaf: The Ohio City Firehouse that's been for more than a hundred years in Ohio City, which if you're not from Northeast, Ohio, Ohio City Cleveland. It's Cleveland zip code, right?

Jeremy Umansky: That's right.

Bryan Schaaf: Just across the Cuyahoga river. Of course, the Ohio City Firehouse is home to one of the most discussed restaurants. I say restaurant, but really, man, you guys are like a... It's like a project, right? I mean, you guys always have something of note going on here.

To call it a restaurant I feel like is probably selling you guys short in terms of what all is going. It's a mad science lab some days. Some days it's just a lot of different things. That said, I wrote an intro. So I might as well read it.

Our guest today is returning to the podcast for the second time, but fear not, because there's plenty left to discuss, given his discovery of what's become a never-ending rabbit hole using kōji mold in food production.

As an author, he has written one of the most important cookbooks that can be found in many a chefs arsenal today. As a chef and restaurant owner, he bosts multiple James Beard nominations, the best sandwich in Cleveland as voted on by locals, and his restaurant was what's called the best delicatessen in America by the great Daniel Boulud. Please welcome back to the podcast Jeremy Umansky. How are you doing, man?

Jeremy Umansky: I'm so red and blushing right now because I don't necessarily think about those things on a daily basis. And to hear it all at once, I was like, "Oh." I was like, "Who are you talking about? Which chef is he interviewing?"

Bryan Schaaf: I don't know if you knew this, but you guys are kind of a big deal. So Larder Delicatessen and Bakery, you guys have been around since 2018 was when you opened.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. April. We're actually just a few weeks away from our fourth anniversary.

Bryan Schaaf: Four years in, how are things going, man? Obviously your first four years, you had some road bumps that you guys had no control over with the... Well, I think most restaurants that opened don't have to deal with a global pandemic in the middle of their first three years. But how are things going?

Jeremy Umansky: Overall things have been really well for us. We've been super grateful to our community for the support we get from them. We have a ton of regulars. Things have been moving along really nice for us.

Bryan Schaaf: Excellent. And if you go back, if you spend some time and if you're listening to this, we always encourage people to use the power of Google. Because Google is quite handy. I always appreciate the things that I listen to that make me want to go a little deeper down the rabbit hole.

Take some time and Google Jeremy Umansky and Larder, and we'll have links in the bio of this episode. See some of the things that you're doing and you'll start to get a grasp of why this is such a bit of a rabbit hole for what you guys are doing. Before we really get into some of that...

Jeremy Umansky: And can I say?

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah, please.

Jeremy Umansky: On that note too, that's kind of... Typically, around this mark, a lot of chefs and restaurant tours either have a second concept open. They're working on those sort of thing. We haven't done that yet because we have so much going on at any given time internally. That's where we're at.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Well, one of the things that I will tell you, there are a couple recent times that this has happened. When we have chefs for Certified Angus Beef, we like to bring a lot of chefs to our facility, to our meat lab where we break down carcass.

If you are listening and if you're interested in doing that, slide into our DMS and let's have a chat. But we like to give those visiting chefs from outside of Northeast Ohio a taste of what Cleveland is about. And Cleveland has a rich history, especially of Eastern European cuisine. And we always like to bring them here. And this is a Jewish style...

Jeremy Umansky: And thank you for that.

Bryan Schaaf: Oh man, thank you. I can't think of a chef who has come in here that has not walked out with their head spinning or inspired by what you guys are doing. For those who haven't been, tell us about Larder and what you guys are all about and what you're doing now.

Jeremy Umansky: So we are an Eastern European delicatessen with Jewish deli roots. We kind of make this distinction because as we were kind of dissecting and looking at what a Jewish deli is, you kind of think it's one thing. You think it's the pastrami kosher style foods, right? No pork, no shellfish.

In some cases, not even having cheese on a sandwich. So no Reubens, that sort of thing. But when we really started looking at all these Jewish deli's that we

found are... I shouldn't say all, because we're just starting this resurgence of the Jewish deli. It almost went extinct.

But we saw things like bacon turkey clubs and get a tongue sandwich with smoke cheddar on it and this sort of thing. And I was like, so then what is a Jewish deli? Unless you distinctly keep kosher and follow those dietary laws, what Jewish food is, what a Jewish delicatessen is, it's all morphed, it's evolved.

So we really wanted to, with this concept, hearken back to what a delicatessen would've been like, what you would've seen 150 years ago in maybe New York City or definitely large parts of Europe, especially Germany, Poland, even going into parts of Ukraine and that sort of thing.

So we really wanted to take historical inspiration for how those businesses operated and apply that with modern sensibilities to today's menu. So that's what we seek out to do. Also, we didn't want to be a deli. We wanted to be a delicatessen.

We found this historical line in the sand give or take around World War II. Up until that point, deli's were delicatessens. And at the delicatessen, they made the pickles and barrels there. They salted the meats and cured them there.

All these things were done in-house. They were canning preserves and all sorts of things. Each delicatessen was known for like a few items that they were really, really good at. So you'd go to one for maybe your smoked fish, you'd go to another for your pastrami, and then maybe your pickles at another.

So we wanted to hearken back to that, because World War II came around and leading up to that car culture and diners and everything. And most of the delicatessens flipped to a diner model and they became deli's. We wanted to go back to a period in time before that.

Bryan Schaaf: Because when I think of a deli, I think of cold cuts, sliced however thin you want them to on a whole grain mustard sandwich.

Jeremy Umansky: Sure. And that's like your American pop culture deli, right? The concept of delicatessen, I mean, everybody from the Ukrainians, to the Spanish, to the Italians, they all have their own different words for them. Delicatessen is a German word.

But these specialty shops that specialized in fermented foods, cured foods, really hardy whole grain bread production, those sorts of things, that's really what we wanted to focus on.

And we didn't want to be a deli. We didn't want to be diner influenced. Which even going to our concept, finding a space and everything, we found space in a building that was built in 1854.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Which closely aligns to the traditional delicatessen that you're trying to be.

Jeremy Umansky: Exactly.

Bryan Schaaf: Talk about the food that you guys put out. We talk at length. Obviously we're biased being beef people, meat heads. Obviously you have a fan fantastic pastrami.

Jeremy Umansky: Thank you.

Bryan Schaaf: The procedure that it's done is what makes it so special as well. I mean, it tastes fantastic, but it's also very interesting the way it gets from start to finish. Obviously the chicken sandwich gets a lot of press.

You guys have a lot of those traditional, old, timey dishes things like gefilte fish, things like that. I guess, talk about that. I mean, these are things you don't see in most places, especially Cleveland, Ohio, or really anywhere.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. I mean, really, you have to go to a kind of tried and true branded Jewish deli to find a lot of those dishes. Things like gefilte fish, I mean, this is a very, very old preparation. It's essentially pâté made from carp is essentially what it was.

And gefilte itself, that word is a Yiddish word. It literally means stuffed. So traditionally, take a massive carp. A carp can get really big. You would filet and bone it out in a way that you kept the tail, the skin, and the head intact.

Take out the meat, get rid of the bones, grind everything up, mix it with black pepper, with onion. We use co GNRs. And then you'd make this really nice force meat. We'd put there's matzo meal in it. You need some breadcrumbs. We use the matzo meal.

And then traditionally it would be stuffed back into the skin, slow poached, and then chilled and served the next day. Over the past, I don't know, maybe 20 years, gefilte fish has really seen a little bit of a resurgence. It's a weird word, gefilte.

Bryan Schaaf: It's funny to say it.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. If you have no reference of Jewish food or Yiddish or anything, you hear gefilte and you're like, "Gefilte fish, what kind of fish is that?" It sounds weird. But we decided when we would work with different ingredients here at Larder, that we would source as close to the restaurant as possible.

We're three blocks from Lake Erie. You will hardly ever see salmon here. In fact, the only time we've really brought salmon in has been salmon eggs. So we've had literally a friend in Alaska send us to make caviar.

So we use all these lake fish. Carp's a huge one. It's a delicious fish, it's relatively inexpensive, and it goes a long way. So we started making this gefilte fish and then it came about, well, how do we make gefilte fish sensible for today's people?

Me being a Jewish man, growing up I'd help my grandmother make it when I was a kid. And even as an adult for Passover and some holidays. I had exposure to it at a young age when my pallet was developing.

So how do you say, "Hey, I've got ground carp pâté?" A fish that people don't really either know about or think is dirty because it's a fresh water fish and muddy and silty and all that. So how do we take that, put modern flavor profiles on it, get people to enjoy doing it?

So one of the ways that you do that is what they've been doing in Britain for a very long time. They would take that mixture and kind of form it into a burger patty and sear it off. And then you'd have this seared gefilte fish they'd serve with raw onion and horseradish and the traditional amounts.

But we were like, this is an awesome burger. This is an incredible fish burger. Get some cheese on there, some nice sauce, some pickled onions, some good sauce. It's fantastic. Other times we make the full loaves of gefilte fish and then we'll bread them in matzo meal and rye breadcrumbs.

And then we'll fry it up and we'll do it as a fried fish sandwich. We call that the north coast filet of fish. We serve it in different ways. We hear all the time from people of here, we're open four years, "You guys make gefilte fish. This is the only places I can find it on a menu."

And traditionally too, gefilte fish after people stop because of the amount of work and stuffing the skin and doing that whole preparation, people just started making the forcemeat. And then making like a meatball and poaching them off.

So even now to go to a Jewish deli, some places do loaves, other places do balls. But you get a platter of this hunk of fish or slice of fish, some boiled carrots, a little bit of lettuce, and you've got to kind of do something yourself. And we were like, "No, that doesn't work for people who've never experienced it."

If I'm going to give you a slab of this fish that you don't even really know how to pronounce the name of with some raw onion and horseradish, there's not many pallets that are going to gravitate to that and be like, "I want it."

But like I said, when we do that burger with it and we griddle it fresh, the forcemeat, or when we do the fried version, it just we can't make enough.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. It's fantastic. It's old world. But it makes it approachable for people who have no idea what... Which honestly, I would say that is probably a pretty good analogy for a lot of what you guys do in terms of you're taking a lot of these old timey things and breathing new life into the things that could be lost to time if you guys aren't doing it.

Jeremy Umansky: I mean, I think our matzo ball soup is another prime example of that. So most of the time we're either using schmaltz or rendered beef fat in the matzo balls. Every once in a while, we forget to render some stuff and we use the vegetable oil. So we make that from a traditional set.

We get that animal fat in there, which is really what makes it so delicious. And historically speaking, products made with animal fat, Jews would consider vegetarian. If there wasn't hunks of meat or strands of meat flesh in there and a dish is made with the byproduct.

Something like matzo ball or kishke, which kind of think like a matzo ball and a loaf that was made with animal fat and then had like a bunch of diced up vegetables for garnishing it. Some people would have little pieces of meat in their kishke, others wouldn't. But kishke was traditionally a vegetarian dish, even though it was made with schmaltz or beef fat.

Bryan Schaaf: When I always think of, of course, the famous Polish song, Who Stole the Kishke, never knew what it was.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. Frankie.

Bryan Schaaf: I just assumed it was sausage or something. Something I would be sad if it was stolen.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. So looking at the matzo balls and incorporating the animal fat in there, our stock is always a little different. Sometimes there's some beef bones in with the chickens, sometimes there's some pork, some lamb, it just depends. We're just using what we have on hand at a given moment.

But most of the matzo ball soups I have, yes, they're delicious. They're chickeny, the stock's good. It's bold. But they're not balanced. They just feel really one note. So we started working in rye bread into our matzo meal set, which helped bolden the flavor along with the animal fats and the matzo bowl.

And then we garnish our soup with a ton of fresh herbs, dill, scallions, parsley, and we put sour curd in it. I feel like when you have a rich soup, a really good well-made stock, like a good chicken stock or beef stock, it can only must be too rich.

And if there's no contrasting flavors or textures in there, it just can be like one note. You may enjoy it, but you're not going to enjoy it as much as you could enjoy it. So getting that crunchy sour curd in there with the tang.

We make our sour curd from red cabbage. So it turns the broth this beautiful like rose ruby color. It just works out really nice.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. And you're in Cleveland. So sour curd is widely widely accepted in these parts.

Jeremy Umansky: That's right.

Bryan Schaaf: I'd be remiss. I can tell you a couple times of note. We had a group from Red Rooster in Miami in Ohio last week. And Tristan Epps, who's the chef there, it's a Marcus Samuelsson concept. Fantastic place.

Jeremy Umansky: Which I've eaten at the original. One of my buddies opened the original with Marcus.

Bryan Schaaf: In Harlem. Yeah. It's fantastic. But he had mentioned that he has this book called Koji Alchemy on his shelf when we were... Gosh, I think it was my...

Jeremy Umansky: I have one on my shelf too.

Bryan Schaaf: You have one as well, right? So our buddy Jeremy Ford down in Miami was in Ohio and he actually had to leave early. He was so bummed because he didn't realize that we were coming to the place owned by the guy who writes Koji Alchemy, which he also prescribes to so many chefs have Koji Alchemy. This is your book.

Tell us about this. I mean, it's been what? A couple years since it came out. I mean, it has become one of the most revered, I hesitate to call it a cookbook because that's probably understating it. I mean, did you envision that it would take off like it has?

Jeremy Umansky: No. So first, it's a book that I wrote with one of my closest friends and just a brilliant culinarian, Richard Shih. Great guy. He's up in the Boston area. And neither of us expected it to be what it became. Our intent from the beginning with it, too, was to kind of coming back to these modern sensibilities built on archaic tradition.

We really wanted to frame it within the modern world and how it's used. Koji, so for those that don't know what it is, it's a mold native to Asia. It is used you grow it on different foods and it helps break the foods down in very delicious ways.

And you use it traditionally to make meso and sake and soy sauce. You literally can't make those foods without this mold. It's that important. And those three things, rice, alcohol, soybean-based sauce, and a soybean-based paste, you find in every Asian country, from India, to Japan, Mongolia, even parts of Russia, going down to the Philippines, and Malaysia. You find these products all over.

The majority of the world lives there. These are really important foods. And here, us, two boys from Northeast, Ohio, and corn and beef country, you got soy sauce your house. I've got it at my house. I don't know anybody that doesn't. These foods have literally conquered the world.

We didn't want to write, as you kind of said, a cookbook. Because with a cookbook, you're being given somebody's very specific ways of doing things, a dish they created, which is fantastic. And I have so many cookbooks and my wife yells at me all the time about how big my library is.

I love them for many reasons. But they don't give me personal reflection and insight to who I am as a culinarian. They're not giving me the ground basic foundational skills to be able to take whatever ingredients and create however I want to. Because a cookbook is going to say you need one pound of this, a tablespoon of this, this, this, this. Do this in this order. There's the dish.

We wanted to approach cooking from a way that really just puts the ball in your court. So if we have a recipe in there, we say protein. We don't necessarily say a specific bean or a cut of meat or whatever it is. We say protein because the whole idea is protein to you, to me, to a chef in Mexico city, to a home enthusiast in Berlin, to a sake brewer in Japan, it's all going to be different based on the locales we are and what's a staple for us in our individual diets.

So we got people to kind of understand this vagueness and that they could take that into whatever real of creativity they wanted based on the cultural lens that they were viewing the information through and the gastronomic culture that they were coming from. That the sky is the limit. And we haven't really seen a lot of books on food written in that way.

There's definitely a few. Kenji López-Alt, great, great publications. Some of the stuff that comes out of the cooks illustrated group and cook science, they're really fantastic with that. [inaudible 00:21:05] book is great. There are some really good books out there. But we were tackling a subject that none of them were tackling.

We weren't tackling of how to cook and here's all the methods that you can use to cook off a New York strip steak. We are looking at how we can use this very specific mold or groupings of molds to create the most delicious food possible. And that's kind of what we set out to do. So the reception is just continually mind blowing.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. It's incredible. I noticed yesterday, actually, just kind of in preparation for coming up here, there was a time, because I remember the time, where if you typed into Google Koji, your face popped up immediately as at the time one of the few people who were sort of dabbling in this. If you do it now, there are a lot of people who are on board with this. I mean, I can list a whole lot of chefs who are now...

Jeremy Umansky: It's insane.

Bryan Schaaf: Including our buddy who we were just talking about, [Roger 00:22:11]. This movement. I mean, do you take a certain kind of pride in the fact that you've helped spread this gospel?

Jeremy Umansky: I've been asked that a few times and my brain doesn't necessarily work that way. I'm just glad to see people using it. I don't necessarily look at it as like, "Oh, Rich and I did this thing and put it out there and you're all inspired by it."

I just kind of see more people using it, more people embracing it, being in love with it, enjoying its deliciousness. That's the aspect of it that I see. And that to me I think is fantastic. When we can have an ingredient that can be universally applied to any cuisine from any corner of the world and create a more delicious version of any native food that may be produced, what's not to love about that?

Whether you're putting it on a steak here in beef country or you're dressing up your tacos with it for Al Pastor down in Mexico, it just doesn't matter. It works universally across all cuisines. And the wonderful thing, too, is while it is reflective of the cultures that it came from, just because you're using some sort of Koji application in Mexico city doesn't necessarily mean that you're doing hybrid Asian food.

You're just being woke to what they have been woke to for thousands of years. And there's a reason that all these different countries and cultures in Asia have used it. Because they found out that it can be universally applied. Whatever food you're making, you introduce that mold into it, it's going to be more delicious.

Bryan Schaaf: Well, it's incredible. Obviously you guys, it's a major element to your ability to put pastrami from raw to on the plate in what? Less than five days. Four days or something. Somewhere in there. Yeah. Obviously, one of my favorite things that I ever saw was years ago when you guys did a bresaola I have round in two weeks with it. It stuck out to me because we...

Jeremy Umansky: And that was charcuterie.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. We make our own bresaola. Bresaola is classically a six week period. You did it in two weeks, tried them side by side. They were indistinguishable. I mean, the things that you guys are doing with this continue to kind of blow my mind.

And for me, there's a natural leeching over into a discussion about dry aging. You walk into Larder downstairs, obviously you guys have been dry aging stuff in one way shape or another since you opened. But you have the big DRYAGER down there now.

Jeremy Umansky: It's such a cool company. If I could just say thank you to DRYAGER right now. I mean, it says right on there built for beef. Any beef aficionado or any meat lover that loves butchery, whether duck is your thing or certified English beef is your thing, this is such an amazing piece of equipment.

It's one of those things that makes me look at I'm living in the future, man. That whole back to the future too. I'm there. It's happening. And to give... Because let's face it, chef's face hurdles of bureaucracy with opening a restaurant, food service, the health department, all this stuff. There's a lot there.

So to have a piece of equipment that is set it and forget it for something that the bureaucracy is not thrilled that you're doing, I mean, it's game changing, it's life saving, all of the above. And it's a beautiful display piece in the dining room.

I could imagine some people being a little off-putting, seeing big hunks of meat and stuff hanging in a cabinet when they're eating their sandwich, especially like today you walked in, we had just gotten some chuck rolls in there. So they look pretty bright and red. That's a little off-putting for some people.

Bryan Schaaf: Well, I imagine you guys do have some vegetarians who come in here.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. I've got vegan baloney on the menu today. Let's be straight up with that. I mean, I think it's gorgeous to have it in the dining room and people being connected with their food and seeing where it comes from.

And if we put a whole animal in there that has its head on it still, more than ever we need to know where our food comes from and why it comes from where it comes.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. It seems like our mutual friend, our old meat scientist, Dr. Phil Bass used to talk about it. It feels like there is a generation that is now so far removed from the farm that we forget that animals once had bones.

To get a bone in steak, science has said what doesn't actually affect the flavor. But the cool factor, because nobody sees meat with bones on it because nobody is as connected as where their food used to come from and it's still a revolutionary thing.

Jeremy Umansky: I mean, it blows my... And I'm a bone eater. But the Umansky's, there is not a single member of my family or my extended family that does not eat whatever bone, from chicken, to a steak, whatever. Literally, like cracking the bones, sucking the marrow out, eating the cartilage off the end. That's how you eat.

But I don't see many people... My wife doesn't eat that way. My wife's not a bone eater. Literally, like when we eat dinner at home and if we have something that's bone in, she will literally save her bones on her plate. And I have to remember to eat a little less because I still have her bones to clean.

Bryan Schaaf: It's fantastic. So you just eat it just as it is.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: Cracked it. It's like opening a oyster.

Jeremy Umansky: Honestly, too, some things, like certain chicken bones and whatnot I think are edible foods in themselves. We've done dishes with chicken feet, where we developed a way to cook them and serve them and everything, where no suck and spit. You eat the bone in everything.

Bryan Schaaf: And it edible.

Jeremy Umansky: It's all edible. We do it in a way where there's no sharp pieces and that sort of thing. So bones are food also.

Bryan Schaaf: I mean, shoot, we've extracted the goodness from them for so long for different things. When I do it in their entirety... You mentioned, and I'm going to tell you, this is one time I can't believe that I'm asking this question.

But I do think that it's fascinating. And I always like to hearken back to the old adage that when restaurants have vegetarian options on the menu, I always like to remind my coworkers that vegetarians have wallets too.

Jeremy Umansky: Them and vegans.

Bryan Schaaf: Yes, that's right. And so we never, ever, ever want to disparage those folks. But what you guys do is revolutionary. When I think of things like you mentioned your vegan baloney?

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. I'm going to pull up a picture of it right now to show you too. I mean, you look at this and... I don't know, man.

Bryan Schaaf: That looks pretty good.

Jeremy Umansky: That looks like a Lebanon baloney right there.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. You got the color right. You got the fat specs. What's it made of?

Jeremy Umansky: So this is made of vital wheat gluten, which when you mix vital wheat gluten with water into a meat substitute, they call seitan. So this is vital wheat gluten.

Bryan Schaaf: Wait a minute. So meat substitute is called seitan is what I just gathered from that.

Jeremy Umansky: Yes. I guess it depends on your accent, but yes.

Bryan Schaaf: All right. Carry on.

Jeremy Umansky: Seitan, Satan, the lines blur. But yeah. So we use a vital wheat gluten. There's tofu in it, spices, liquid smoke for now, but we're going to be transitioning them to the actual smoker soon. And then most batches, I kind of mess around with the spices.

Do I want it to have more of the classic baloney set with a little nutmeg in there, maybe even a dash of cinnamon and the white pepper and all that? Or like this batch I did today, I was like, "you know what? I'm just putting pastrami spice in here. I want to have like a little black pepper punch." It just differs.

I've been working with different garnishes too in there to kind of give it... And you look at this and you can see grains in here, little what look like hunks of fat and grains of the meat fibers and whatnot. So trying to incorporate more of those things into there. So like the fat specs in here are like a chine style, hard, dense, smoked tofu.

Bryan Schaaf: To give the texture.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. It gives a little difference in the bite when you eat it. And honestly, you put this on a griddle and then you put some cheese spread with it if you're vegetarian, you could use a vegan cheese, you put some salami there, some heavy mustard, and it's like, you know what?

Bryan Schaaf: It's as close as you can get.

Jeremy Umansky: Maybe this is a little different than baloney what I'm thinking in my head. But this tastes like a baloney sandwich and it eats like it too.

Bryan Schaaf: It tastes close.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. And that's the goal, to get everybody to a point where we eat a wider variety of foods than we do. That's the goal. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables, eat meat, eat seafood, but have a balanced diet.

When you just kind of focus in on one thing, that's when we notice the health problems and economic issues associated with it and environmental and all this. And we're not going to get into this stuff much further now.

But we really want to also, when we create vegan food, we're not used using some of the advanced manufacturing technologies that have developed with

impossible, with using heme and different things and extracting it and how they're making it and extruders or muscle fibers and stuff.

We're a restaurant. Compared to all that, we're relatively low tech. So we're really reflective of traditional methods for creating these foods and the precedent that they set. Once again, how can we put modern sensibilities on them?

How can I work this in a way where it's as close as possible to what the meat would've been and just as delicious? And then five days a week, you can have your pastrami sandwich and on Saturday, Sunday, you eat the vegan baloney. You get a little vegetables and a little balance and you're good.

Bryan Schaaf: My life is about balance, right?

Jeremy Umansky: That's it.

Bryan Schaaf: Amen. Well, I would be remiss then if I didn't follow up about a vegan baloney with proper beef. Your pastrami sandwich, right? One of the things that I know, and I know Diana Clark is listening right now as we're talking about this and just proud as can be.

It's no secret that the volatility, especially among proteins, beef being one of them, over the past 18, 24 months has been pretty substantial. Brisket being probably one of the biggest ones called out, which is what that original pastrami sandwich was brisket.

Jeremy Umansky: Straight up.

Bryan Schaaf: You guys ended up changing that though, right?

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: Tell us what you...

Jeremy Umansky: And I think we're using bottom inside now or top. I always forget whether we're using bottom inside or top off the top of my head. But either way we're using round. We're using it cut off the back leg.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Which is one of those cuts that I think people often overlook. But especially from a high quality carcass.

Jeremy Umansky: I mean, that's the great thing about what you guys do, right? So I know even a classically... Can we go a little PG 13?

Bryan Schaaf: Oh, absolutely.

Jeremy Umansky: Even taking a quote unqote, the Applebee's bistro steak, that fast, casual, bang them out, don't really care. It's got wonderful attributes and it's delicious. And it boils down to it's all how you treat the base ingredient.

And I'll tell you what, we switched during the pandemic. Not that we're trying to pull the wool over people's eyes or anything, but never on our menu would it say brisket pastrami. It just always said pastrami.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Because pastrami truly is the cooking method. It's flavor profile.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. We go back to Romania where pastrami comes from. Traditional pastramis where fowl-based.

Bryan Schaaf: They weren't beef at all.

Jeremy Umansky: Goose, duck, turkey. Those were the original ones. And then as people came over to America, it morphed. And originally one of the cuts used in America, Turkey was used a lot early on, but navel, which I love.

And for those of you listening that haven't worked with navel yet, kind of think pork belly. It comes from a slightly different place on the cow and everything. But the cross cut on it, it looks like bacon, but it's beef. For pastrami though, it's got too much fat. Because it's like 50/50, maybe even like 60/40 fat to me.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. At the packing level, when they want to make 50/50 trim, that's what they grind. They grind the navel because it's already there.

Jeremy Umansky: Already there in ratio. So yeah, early on testing out our methodology and our techniques and our recipe, I was exclusively using navel. And then kind of got to the point where I enjoy the anxiousness and the over fattiness and all this. A lot of people don't. It's just too much.

So over time brisket became the cut. So when we switched to a different cut, I don't even feel like I necessarily owe people in explanation or anything because it's like, well, pastrami has always been something different from its arrival in America. And we're still using beef, we're still using certified Angus. It goes through the exact same process and it eats just as good.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Has there been a noticeable difference on it? Because I ate it. I thought it was fantastic.

Jeremy Umansky: People that go to deli's know to ask for their preference of how they like their meat. Do you like lean brisket? Do you like the fatty brisket? And so on and so forth. So with this cut now, the amount of people...

There are some people that don't know to order lean or fatty. So we used to hear not on a regular basis, but enough that people would be like, "Ah, it was

too fatty for me." And that's when we explain, "Well, next time ask for it lean. Because otherwise this is just how it comes out." With this, those complaints I guess have almost gone away.

Bryan Schaaf: It's one big muscle. Yeah.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. So less trim for us and everything. And we square off. We butcher the cut down and we square it off and we have trim for grind and that sort of thing too. But it's pretty much a plug and play cut when it comes to barbecuing and smoking, because that's really what pastrami is.

It's akin to what the Pitmasters are doing. It's just kind of the Jewish version. So if you work with the cut, if you love it, if you treat it right...

Bryan Schaaf: It's going to be there for you.

Jeremy Umansky: It's going to be there.

Bryan Schaaf: It's fantastic.

Jeremy Umansky: It's going to be there. And the price on that cut tends to be more stable. It's a bigger cut essentially than brisket. There's more encompassing that whole round area than just the brisket. So more of it can go out.

People like it because it's economic and it tends to not flex in price too much because of that, because it's a good, consistent seller. Something like a brisket, I mean, we saw prices go up to I think almost $9 a pound in the pandemic at one point. It was very short lived that it was that high. I remember calling you up and being like, "What's going on?" And you're like, "Well, we don't control this aspect of it." I was like, "I know."

Bryan Schaaf: Oh yeah. We have a past episode, I invite everybody to go back and check it out, it's with Daniel Vaughn, the barbecue editor of Texas Monthly.

Jeremy Umansky: Bbqsnob man.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. And he talks about...

Jeremy Umansky: You know we've fed him a few times.

Bryan Schaaf: Did you?

Jeremy Umansky: He's got family that I believe is down by you.

Bryan Schaaf: Well, he's from Wooster. He's a Wooster High School graduate, like a mile from our office.

Jeremy Umansky: So pandemic aside, I believe he comes up like once a year or so and he always pops in.

Bryan Schaaf: It's fantastic. It's so good. But he talked about with brisket prices, not only were you dealing with the pandemic, but you have the Arby's, who has now doubled down on the availability of brisket on their menu. Chipotle. All these national chains are now getting on that barbecue wagon and putting a huge amount of pressure on brisket.

Jeremy Umansky: But it's not just that. It's the home market too. Because brisket has become the beef equivalent of like pork shoulder. What's the standard for pork barbecue? It's shoulder.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. It's where all the fat deposits are.

Jeremy Umansky: Brisket is a kind of similar ratio of fat to meat. The muscle I'm sure dies, you're going to correct me on this. But in my eyes, just thinking where it is on the animal, their move, pork, shoulder, and brisket, I think they're used enough, similar tenderness and whatnot.

That's why both you just cook for forever. And I think we're always looking for something else. Now we have these great pellet grills people can get at home. You can really be an amateur Pitmaster at your house now.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Some pretty good smoked brisket at home now.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. You can with these grills that really aren't that expensive when you think about them. For a couple hundred bucks more, you can get one of those compared to just a regular nice grill. And it's leaps and balance ahead.

Bryan Schaaf: Gravity fed treggers. It's incredible.

Jeremy Umansky: I think that if you're an at-home enthusiast and you're cooking, you're really into grilling and barbecue, that brisket is the one you want to do. So I think there's a lot of that home market is really, really coming in.

I mean, my buddies and my friends, I hear from them all the time, like, "Hey, I'm going to get a brisket. What do you think? Should I do this with it, that? I'm going to put it on a smoker for this amount of time. I'm going to marinate it first." And that's what I get the most questions of from my friends. It's like, what to do with the brisket on the grill.

Bryan Schaaf: Which is funny because it really is probably one of the most challenging cuts to cook, especially you get a whole pack of brisket.

Jeremy Umansky: Muscle runs in different directions.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. I mean, guys, you can make this so much easier on yourself if you maybe use something...

Jeremy Umansky: And from that standpoint, I feel when it comes to charcuterie, there's no greater cut on a cow than brisket for charcuterie. I challenge any culinarian who makes charcuterie listening to this to create a prosciutto, a traditional pork, or something out of another animal that's prosciutto esque and put it up against a cured, dry cured aged brisket. It's mind boggling.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. It's so good. The fat consistency is perfect.

Jeremy Umansky: And so many of us have really never had beef charcuterie. It's used a lot in the Middle East and other parts of the world where they're known. Turkey is really known. There's sausages like Sujuk, which are all beef and whatnot.

They're really well-known for it. But the areas of the world that we think of that are like the charcuterie makers that ring around the Mediterranean, you don't really see much beef. Italy up in South Tyrol. You have spec. You have a couple of things.

But outside of that, you don't see it. So we're like when you eat that for the first time, brisket charcuterie, it's just so mind blowing. And everything about all your past experiences with eating different types of prosciutto and so on and so forth. It's like, wow, this is as good or better, yet it's beef.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. It's fantastic. Tony Biggs makes a fantastic. He used to use the cool lot, but he would treat it like salmon gro-blocks. And then he switched to he used the brisket flat now and it's so good. And it's fairly simple to execute as well.

So big fan of that. All right. Last question, because I know you got to run and I've got to roll fairly soon as well. Cleveland, right? Of course, we're big homers. I'm from Northeast Ohio. You're from Northeast Ohio. The culinary scene in Cleveland, much like the culinary scene in a lot of cities, has changed dranatically.

Jeremy Umansky: I mean, you travel for work. You are literally immersed in the food scenes of every city in the country. I know where you go.

Bryan Schaaf: I try and eat as much as I can. But Cleveland is one. Obviously, we're homers. We're from here. The Cleveland culinary scene, obviously if you go back 10 years, it was sort of like everybody was kind of having this epiphany that like, wow, there's so much going on here. Obviously Hreenhouse Tavern was in its heyday. Lola was doing its thing. You look at Cleveland now, especially coming out of the pandemic and everything. Michael Simon is no longer a Cleveland resident. Jonathan Sawyer is no longer a Cleveland resident. Michael Ruman is no longer a Cleveland resident. But the culinary scene here it seems like is doing just fine, for the most part.

Jeremy Umansky: Doug Trattner is still a Cleveland resident.

Bryan Schaaf: Doug Trattner is still here.

Jeremy Umansky: He's definitely still here. Well, Doug Katz too. Both of them.

Bryan Schaaf: Oh yeah, of course. Yeah.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. I throw Trattner in there.

Bryan Schaaf: I love Doug. Doug Trattner is...

Jeremy Umansky: How many best selling cookbooks has he written?

Bryan Schaaf: Every Simon cookbook plus...

Jeremy Umansky: That's right.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Doug Trattner is a legend. I mean, can you talk about that? It seems like a lot of those guys, obviously there's a lot of lineage back through the Greenhouse Taverns, the Trentino's of the world. Obviously you guys, Adam Valard on the street, the Sawyer boy, other Sawyer boys, Brett Sawyer and that crew had a good company.

Jeremy Umansky: And Simon has had his... Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. I mean, give us an update on what's going on in the Cleveland scene. It seems like pretty much everywhere I've gone, places are busy again. People are coming back.

Jeremy Umansky: Part of that too is the pandemic's winding down, hopefully, and hopefully it's going to be gone. But also that's happening at the same time spring is coming. And you know better than anybody, if it is 45 degrees or above and it's March in Northeast, Ohio, what are people wearing?

Bryan Schaaf: Shorts and the window on the car is rolled down because that's summertime, right?

Jeremy Umansky: We're in this. The dwindling of the pandemic and then this yearly spring resurgence is kind of happening at the same time. So I'm not holding my breath yet that we're through this. I'm just... But Cleveland's the biggest small town in the country.

Midwestern vibe and values when it comes to pleasantries and how people interact. There are out there. But generally speaking, you can't walk down the street here without someone saying hello and you have no clue who they are.

Most place I lived in New York City for a long time. That happens in New York. People are like, "Keep talking, brother. Do you want my wallet? What's going on?" But here it's totally different. So throw everything that we have culturally in here.

So we have these great natural resources. We're right on Lake Erie. Right below us is a beautiful national park. We have all this beautiful farmland, agricultural areas and wild spaces. And it hasn't been as developed as some other major metropolitan areas. So that's one great thing.

Within 30 minutes, you could be in complete heavy forest or farmland from downtown Cleveland. So we have this diversity of landscape. We have the lake as a resource. We have great rivers. On top of that, we have chefs.

Cleveland has been a "underdog" for... When did the river burn? 1972, something like that. I think '72 might have been the big burn. Mistake on the lake, the dirty place, the rust bell. So long there's been so much negative connotation and Clevelanders have known since we got our act together and started cleaning up the river, which is a success story now and everything, 50 years later.

Clevelanders have always known how great it is here. But I think other people are starting to notice. People have been like, "You know what?" We had a reporter a couple years ago from London come in and shadowed around with me for a little bit.

And his big thing was, he's like, "I travel all over the world. I've never been to a city with so much individual city pride." And I was like, "What do you mean?" He's like, "All these people walking around with t-shirts that say Cleveland this and that. It's a peach. It's a plum."

And he is like, "They're not tourists that just bought t-shirts and wearing them home. This is the people here showing the pride in where they're from and what they are." And he said, "I've really never seen that anywhere else in the world." And I was like, "Oh, that's because Cleveland's awesome."

Bryan Schaaf: I don't know anybody who this time of year when it rolls around, and praise the Lord spring training is happening right now. But I think everybody goes back and watches Major League this time of year because it's ours.

Jeremy Umansky: A hundred percent. I couldn't agree more. But then you parlay that into the culinary scene. We had chef Sawyer here, chef Simon, and there's other great... Chef Karen Small, who's been cooking here, Doug Katz, Jill Vedaa, chef Eric Williams.

All of these chefs have been Beard nominees at one point or another in their careers. Some of them have one. We're talking that there are die hard, life

committed, serious culinarians here, who are spreading their craft as far and wide as they can.

And they have chefs that work with them and under them and then go on to do their own things. They have diners that are consistently coming in and they want to see what the chef's doing next. Or they just want to be comforted by what they know is delicious. And they can go to that chef and get what they love.

Bryan Schaaf: Goat cheese guac all day long.

Jeremy Umansky: Yeah. It's really, really fantastic. And as someone who has worked in other markets, major markets and some smaller markets, the conviviality amongst the culinarians here, it's insane. Other markets are so cutthroat that it's like people are sabotaging each other and talking crap behind each other's backs and all this stuff.

And I'm not going to say that doesn't happen here. But generally speaking, all the culinarians get along and have this level of respect for what everybody's doing. And we'll have people come into the restaurant and they'll be like, "Yeah. I'm in town for a couple days," or whatever. And right away we start listing off.

We're like, "Go to Salt, go to Momocho, go see the national park. Here's a couple fun things to do while you're here too." But we're like, "No, you have to eat this chef's food and that chef's food. Oh, definitely go to Zhug." All of these things. So I don't feel that you necessarily get that in a lot of other parts.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. In fact, I know you don't get that in a lot of other cities. Well, things make it very special here. That's it. Jeremy Umansky, before I let you go, can you give us some plugs? Where can people find you? Where can people follow you?

Jeremy Umansky: You can find me Instagram, Twitter, Facebook at TMGastronaut. It's spelled like astronaut, but gastro as in gastronomy. You can find me there. You can find me at The Restaurant. I've been keeping a little bit of a lower profile as of recent we had a baby in September.

This is probably the last one we're going to have. So I'm just soaking up all the snuggles I can right now. I go home, I set the phone on do not disturb, I hold the baby and I just smother her. But yeah, those are places. Or come visit us at Larder.

Bryan Schaaf: Outstanding. Jeremy Umansky, brother, thanks for taking time, man.

Jeremy Umansky: Brian Schaaf, always a good one.

Bryan Schaaf: Excellent. If this is your first time listening to the Meat Speak podcast, you can catch us across all of your major podcasting platforms, Google Play, Spotify,

Apple Podcasts. Actually, if you have the Apple Podcast, which apparently is what the vast majority of people have, hit the little purple icon, that's the podcast icon.

You can go and not just leave it a subscribe, but also a star ranking. Leave a little review there as well. And if it's funny, we'll totally read it. Unfortunately, I did not consult our reviews before walking in here. Otherwise, I would've something to read. That said, until next time, on behalf of meat scientists Diana Clark, chef Tony Biggs for the Certified Angus beef fan, I am Brian Schaaf. Thanks for listening.