

Bryan Schaaf: Back here on the Meat Speak podcast powered by the certified Angus Jeep Ram body shop. Meet scientist Diana Clark, via Zoom. How are you, Diana?

Diana Clark: Doing pretty good. Can't complain.

Bryan Schaaf: Very nice.

Diana Clark: Sun's out.

Bryan Schaaf: Sun's out, guns out, right?

Diana Clark: Yeah. I've got to hide these though. They might intimidate some people.

Bryan Schaaf: Just saying, I've had my [castle doctorate 00:00:27] in protection here my whole life.

Diana Clark: Okay, I will have to throw this in. So someone asked me where the coolest place that our logo has ever been put.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah.

Diana Clark: And my first thought was Bryan's arm. I was, without a doubt, best-looking logo I've ever seen.

Bryan Schaaf: I appreciate that. I'll tell you what, and I'm completely biased, right? Because I feel like... I'm a male. I'm 42, right? I think slightly older than, probably quite a bit older than Zack. Right? Zack, how are you, man?

Zack Wolf: 32.

Bryan Schaaf: See? Okay, so I've got a good decade on Zack. I feel like most males my age, when you were in the '90s, there was this movie that we were obsessed with, because it was all about a trained killer, Leon, the professional, right? And in this movie, there is 12-year-old Natalie Portman. It's where she got her start. And there's a scene towards the very end. I actually just had to go back and rewatch it so I could figure out exactly where it's at when I was on my flight to Phoenix a couple weeks ago.

And there's a scene at the very end, and she's carrying a brown paper bag. Right? And our logo is on the bag in the movie, in this movie. It's almost like Shawshank Redemption has such a cult following. It's kind of the same deal, but for guys my age, right? So I feel like, I appreciate the arm mention, but 12-year-old Natalie Portman carrying our logo I think is pretty spectacular.

Diana Clark: That is [crosstalk 00:02:03].

Bryan Schaaf: There's actually, there's also a picture, I think it's been taken down, but it used to be up on Wikipedia on Ric Flair, you know the wrestler?

Diana Clark: Yeah.

Zack Wolf: Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: Right? He's wearing a hat with the old certified Angus beef logo in its [crosstalk 00:02:17].

Diana Clark: No way.

Bryan Schaaf: So cool.

Diana Clark: Okay. That's pretty cool.

Bryan Schaaf: Right? So I think I'll at least slide down into third place in those rankings. That said, super-excited to bring the content, which we have prepared to everybody today because we have joining us all the way from, I'll tell you know. Diana, when you think of Louisville, Kentucky, what's the first thing you think of?

Diana Clark: Oh, goodness. It's a really rough question. Actually, so this is my livestock judging. There's a show there, the Louisville that you do, it's like the ultimate livestock judging show, ends the season there. Big, big contest. So that's the first thing that comes to my head, and I get really nervous, because I was terrified walking into that.

Zack Wolf: That's surprising, because most people, you hear Louisville, they automatically think Derby, right? Anywhere in the world, you say Louisville, Kentucky, they'll like, "Oh, yeah, it's where the Derby's at."

Diana Clark: Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: And see, I think bourbon, right? I mean...

Zack Wolf: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Derby or bourbon, which one?

Bryan Schaaf: It's the motherland, right?

Zack Wolf: [crosstalk 00:03:22] go hand-in-hand.

Bryan Schaaf: Yes. Yes. That said, you've heard a mystery third voice in the first couple minutes here. So let's go ahead and get down to it. Our guest today is the executive chef for one of the hottest restaurant groups in the Derby city. That's Louisville, by the way. I actually looked it up too. What is Louisville's nickname? It's got a few, right? It's Muhammad Ali's birthplace. Anyways, he is the man

overseeing an ever-growing number of kitchens operated by the OLÉ Hospitality Group in Louisville, Kentucky.

And that's where he is had to flex his creative palette to develop authentic menus that not only appeal to his native tongue, but also to an ever-growing number of Cuban and Latin-centric menus that represent his restaurant's leadership. What's more, his resume also boasts more than a decade spent as a firefighter in southern Indiana. So you know his firehouse chili game is on point.

Please welcome to the podcast the man who eats, sleeps, and breathes restaurant openings, and who showed me how enjoyable it is just to say the name, [foreign language 00:04:25]. Please welcome to the podcast, Chef Zack Wolf. How you doing, man?

Zack Wolf: I am living the dream. I'm excited to be here with you guys.

Bryan Schaaf: Oh, you're in Louisville, Kentucky, right? So you've got-

Zack Wolf: Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: You've got Derby time. Which Derby time is, I've never seen anything like it.

Zack Wolf: [crosstalk 00:04:43].

Bryan Schaaf: Our buddy Josh Moore over at Volare, it's an Italian restaurant, but he rolls with these prime, certified Angus beef tomahawks at Derby time. I mean, I don't even want to talk about how many cattle he goes through, but there is a lot of meat going down around Derby time in Louisville. Of course, it's bourbon-centric. Of course, you've got Louisville Slugger there. It's the epicenter, man. It's the motherland.

Zack Wolf: Yes. Yeah, it's a beautiful city. Beautiful city. Derby time really kicks it off. I mean, Derby here, it's a month-long festival. It starts in May, goes all the way through the first week of May. It's incredible.

Bryan Schaaf: That's awesome. And you, you're from there, right? Or you're from the general area?

Zack Wolf: Yeah, so I grew up right across the river in Greenville, Indiana, which it's 20 minutes from Louisville. So, we say Kentuckiana. I grew up in Kentuckiana.

Bryan Schaaf: Excellent. Have you swam across the Ohio River at any point in your life?

Zack Wolf: Absolutely not. I've dove. I've dove. I did some diving in the Ohio River. Never want to do that again.

Bryan Schaaf: It's funny-

Zack Wolf: That's a one-and-done. One-and-done.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah, it's funny. Local seafood is such a hot thing, but we've got friends in Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Louisville. I don't know of anybody who's using fish pulled out of the Ohio River.

Diana Clark: I wonder why.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. Would not do that, ever.

Bryan Schaaf: That said, before we get into talking about OLÉ, let's talk about your history. Right?

Zack Wolf: Sure.

Bryan Schaaf: So, well, what you're going to find as the episode goes on is the OLÉ Hospitality Group is, it's incredible in that they operate everything from Cuban, Mexican restaurants. They've got, I mean the flagship is called Steak & Bourbon, which might be the most Louisville-named restaurant ever. But in order to do all this, you've got a pretty diverse culinary background, right? I mean, you've done fine dining. You've done Italian. Can you talk to us about your journey?

Zack Wolf: Yeah. So, I started in restaurants when I was 13. I worked at a little Greek coffee shop in the summertime when I was in school, doing gyros, making tzatziki, making coffee, stuff like that. Had no idea that this was what I was going to get into. In high school, I did a vocational program for culinary arts, and I fell in love with the technical aspect of food, right? Like the Maillard reaction and how flavors actually come about. And that kind of just progressed on, and I went to college for culinary arts, worked at a country club, really got to cut my teeth on large-scale events at the country club, and then kind of got thrust into opening my own restaurant when I was 23.

Diana Clark: Oh my gosh.

Bryan Schaaf: Wow.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. And that was a huge eye-opener. Being fresh out of culinary school with my bachelor's in hotel restaurant management, it really put a lot of the stuff that I learned to practice very quickly. And there was a lot of things that I didn't learn that I had to figure out. It was a school of hard-knocks. Not saying that everything went great, went perfect, because when does it ever? But even my failures allowed me to learn so much.

So after that, I worked for some bigger name chefs here in Louisville. I worked at the Brown Hotel, at the English Grill. I was the one of their sauciers. So I got to learn a lot of the foundational aspects at a very young age. Then I teamed up with Fernando. And when I teamed up with Fernando, that opened up a whole

new world to me, because he is so passionate about what he does and how he comes about creating menus, it blows my mind. I've never met anybody like him, because when he comes up with a concept or comes up with menu ideas, we go and we travel, and we find the best of the best, and bring that back and make it even better. We spend months perfecting.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. I mean-

Diana Clark: I'll have to add, Zack, when you guys came to the Culinary Center, I was so blown away by the story behind the restaurants developing and everything like that. I mean, and just seeing, you say Fernando's passion, your passion while you were there. You could tell your whole team was on fire. And it was just something like, "Okay, here's this, OLÉ group is coming." I'm like, "All right, let me look up in their concepts."

And you start to look. You're like, "Okay, these are not even overlapping concepts. These are things that are just completely different, but they're nailing it." Every single one is just this elite, high-end. I wanted to drive to Louisville after you guys visited just to go to the restaurants, and I'm upset with myself that I haven't yet, but I'm going to, because it's not far away.

But honestly, I could spend multiple days just visiting your restaurants. It's just amazing to me. You guys are such a neat team, and you could tell you all care about each other a lot.

Zack Wolf: Oh, yeah. We're like a big family, and I think that's something that helps us even more is that we as a group are so passionate individually that when you bring us all together, we could talk about food and about restaurant operations for hours. And that's what gives us an edge is because we can sit and brainstorm and come up with the best possible ways to do things and then go out and execute.

Diana Clark: That's awesome.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. I guess, can you talk about that? We've mentioned Fernando. Fernando Martinez and of course his cousin Yani Martinez.

Zack Wolf: Yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: Both Cubans, who-

Zack Wolf: Yeah, both from Cuba.

Bryan Schaaf: ... found their way. Yeah, and so I guess, can you talk a little bit about, they've got a really kind of a unique story in terms of how they even got there, but then also there is a restaurant, and I know we've mentioned Steak & Bourbon as kind of the mothership. Well, I mean the mothership as far as meatheads are

concerned, who like bourbon and meat, but there's a restaurant in a gigantic, yellow house called La Bodeguita de Mima, which literally translates into Mima's little bar. And I guess, can you talk about that? Because that is their homage to their Cuban roots, right?

Zack Wolf:

It is. So, Fernando, his story is incredible. I mean, he came over here on a raft he built himself, \$20 in his pocket, landed in Guantanamo Bay. Was in Guantanamo for a year, got transferred to the US. And that's where he started to work in restaurants and hotels, and really hone his craft. Ended up moving to Louisville. And when he moved to Louisville, he opened a couple restaurants that are still here in the city that we are no longer part of. That was Havana Rumba and Mojitos, both Cuban-centric restaurant. And he wanted to bring his home flavors to an area that didn't have that yet. So Havana Rumba and Mojitos were some of the first Cuban-centric restaurants here in the city that he opened and operated.

He sold those, and then he ended up travel to Paris, France. Studied at Le Cordon Bleu. So he took his knowledge from working in it, school hard-knocks, and elevated that to where his knowledge has greatly increased, learning from some of the best French chefs. Came back to Louisville, and then that's when he really started to open multiple restaurants. And there's a couple other restaurants that we no longer have that we can talk about.

But Mima's was a combination of his Cuban roots, Cuban food that he grew up eating, elevated to that higher level that we like to elevate foods. Plus, not only the food, but also the atmosphere. You've seen it yourself. When you walk into that building, it's like you're walking into the Hemingway building in Cuba. We spent years trying to find a perfect building that would look exactly like we wanted it to.

So when this building came up, we knew that was it. That's Mima's. And Bodeguita de Mima is actually named after his mom. We call her Mima. And there's a big [inaudible 00:13:29] painting as soon as you walk in the dining room of this lady dancing in one of the bars in Cuba. That's actually a picture of Fernando's mom. So that-

Diana Clark:

Oh, no way.

Zack Wolf:

Yeah. So that restaurant, it pays homage to his mom, the area that he grew up in, the style of food that he grew up eating. It's just a beautiful location.

Bryan Schaaf:

It's incredible. Well, and okay, I'm going to go ahead and jump to the part that gets me the giddy, right? Because the food is fantastic. Obviously, Diana knows me well enough to know that food makes me happy, right? But I'm sitting there, right? And there's a little kid at the table next to me. And his meal shows up, and it's served in a '57 Chevy, a little model '57 Chevy, which you'd still see

driving around the streets of Cuba today. I love it. It's so awesome. It's so awesome.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. And there's something we've kind of been working on that we've kind of hinted at for a little bit, but it hasn't come to fruition yet. We're still working on the project, but we actually bought a '57 Chevy Bel Air, candy-apple-red. It's being restored. And we're actually going to use that to rent out. So we'll have one of our managers drive, pick you up in the Chevy, bring you to Mima's for dinner, right?

Diana Clark: Oh my gosh.

Zack Wolf: To give you that whole experience.

Bryan Schaaf: That's amazing.

Diana Clark: That is awesome.

Zack Wolf: I mean, how cool would it be to impress your date on date night, "Hey, we're getting picked up in this old-school, beautiful car," take it to this amazing Cuban restaurant, right? Treated to the nines with Cuban food and mojitos, and yeah.

Bryan Schaaf: Fantastic.

Diana Clark: That is so cool. I love that. I mean, I would just want to ride in the car too, and then plus the great food after that?

Bryan Schaaf: Right. I feel like that thing, it initially reminds me of in Amarillo, Texas, there's the Big Tex. They'll send the Cadillac with the horns to pick you up if you're going to do the 72-oz steak challenge. But at the end of the day, the food and the cocktails are far superior at Mima's.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. Let's be honest. It's the food that really matters.

Bryan Schaaf: Right. True story. So, speaking of the food and we're going to change concepts a little bit as we go, to just go through, but one of the things that I always find is I'm always fascinated with food that forces me to use Google, right? Google-able food, right? And I mean, typically it happens when I'm in restaurants of different cultures. You guys, Cuban food is something everybody's heard the term, but what does it actually mean? Because when I look down the menu at Mima's, you've got things like Vaca Frita, Ropa Vieja, Bistec a la Palomilla, right? Things that, you know what? I'm as big of a meathead as anybody. I still have to look these things up. I guess talk about that.

Diana Clark: Let's just say really quick how romantic it all sounds too. Can we just throw that out there? It's like, man, you're put in the mood just reading the menu. It's great. I love it.

- Bryan Schaaf: Right? You get driven to the restaurant in a '57 Chevy, and then you get Ropa Vieja.
- Zack Wolf: Yeah, so Cuban food, when you think of Cuban food, those are the namesakes that people really think of, right? Ropa Vieja, plantains, right? A lot of plantains being used, but the cooking styles that go into Cuban food stem from poverty, right? Long, slow-cooked, stuff that lasts for a long time, because in Cuba they don't have the supply chains like we do here in the US. They don't have the revenue, the money to go to the grocery store every day. They might go to the grocery store once a month, and they have to make all of that food last.
- So those long slow braises, like the Ropa Vieja, or the quick, fried stuff, like the Vaca Fritas, all of that stems because of how the cooking styles had to change in Cuba based on the living circumstance. So we wanted to show that, bring that traditional style food here, elevate it, and give people that real, full experience. Our Ropa Vieja is served in a can. We actually make the Ropa Vieja, can it, and serve it at the table in a can, like you would in Cuba.
- Diana Clark: Okay, that is so cool.
- Zack Wolf: Yeah, and the server literally comes over with a can opener, opens the can up and pours it on the plate. And it's beautiful. Don't get me wrong. But it gives you that sense of style like you're actually in Cuba.
- Bryan Schaaf: Yeah.
- Zack Wolf: We wanted to pay homage to that as much as possible, because I mean, Fernando, that's his heritage. That's where he grew up, and to open a Cuban restaurant, being Cuban, you want to be able to really showcase that food.
- Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. That's fantastic. So talk to us about, I guess kind of your perspective on that. Obviously, Fernando, being Cuban, brings that perspective. As a kid from Louisville, right? There's so much talk about, I guess if go back over the last 10 years, sometimes chefs get accused of cultural appropriation and things like Rick Bayless, who spent years in Mexico, never mind the fact that he gets accused. What is it like for a kid from Louisville, Kentucky, in terms of the learning curve to not just learn this cuisine, but to have yourself at the point where you are now able to execute that as authentic as is humanly possible?
- Zack Wolf: I am a kid who loves learning. I am constantly trying to elevate myself, learning new techniques. And one of the things that helped me as a younger chef was I spent most of my time learning cooking methods. I wasn't worried about learning recipes or memorizing recipes, but I wanted to know what a braise does to a meat. What simmering a sauce for a reduction does to a flavor of a sauce, right? I spent most of my time working on the foundations of cooking.

When I teamed up with Fernando, and I started learning about all these concepts, right? And all these different types of food and styles of food, all of the foundation cooking concepts were still the same. Now you're just throwing in different ingredients, right? And that helped me, but it also propelled me to learn even more. There was ingredients that I had never used before. Malanga root. Had no idea what malanga root was. Didn't know how to use it, but learning that you've got to wash it, right? It's so starchy. You've got to wash that starch out if you want to fry it, to get it crispy. Learning those little things over time has allowed me to understand food even better. [crosstalk 00:20:33]

Diana Clark: So what is malanga root? I've got to ask.

Zack Wolf: It's taro root. So if you think of a really starchy, root veg, similar to a potato?

Diana Clark: Okay.

Zack Wolf: Very hard exterior, but you can shave it real thin to make chips out of it. You can julienne it and make fries with it.

Diana Clark: Oh, cool.

Zack Wolf: Yeah, it's got a great crunch. It caramelizes very well, but it is packed full of starch. So, you can't just cut it and fry it and expect it to get crispy, because the starch in it will not allow it to get crispy. You have to, it's like washing sushi rice, to get sushi rice, to be sticky. It's the same thing with washing malanga root. You have to keep constantly washing that starch out of it. It's little things like that I've learned from working with them that's shown me a whole new flavor profile, a whole new world of cooking cuisine. And that's not only with Cuban food. That's with Italian, Mediterranean, Mexican, Venezuelan. We've done all kinds of stuff, and we still have more stuff planned.

Diana Clark: So can I ask, when you guys go and come up with some ideas, how far have you traveled to try to get some of that inspiration to come back to the restaurant? Because I think that's really neat to see, no, if we're going to do this, we're going to do it how it's supposed to be done, not what we think it is. So what are some of those experiences that you guys have had there?

Zack Wolf: So with Guaca Mole, which is our Mexican restaurant, our Modern Mexican restaurant, Fernando and Yani, they traveled to Mexico for a month and a half, literally spent a month and a half traveling around to Tulum, Puebla, Maya Riviera, learning from cooks in that region, literally getting their hands on the products in that country, learning the history behind those dishes, how they're classically made there, bringing all of that knowledge back here and putting that into practice with the ingredients that we have here.

Diana Clark: That is so cool.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. And it's not only did we bring back that knowledge, but we also brought back artwork. All of the decorations for the restaurant, the lighting fixtures, our baskets made into loom, the alebrijes, which are the little hand-painted, hand-carved wooden sculptures of mythical creatures. We brought, I think, 90 of those back to decorate the walls.

Diana Clark: That is so cool.

Zack Wolf: So we not only brought back the knowledge of the food, but we also brought back pieces of the culture.

Diana Clark: So it's almost like you're stepping into that culture when you come into the restaurant. That is phenomenal. I love it.

Zack Wolf: Exactly. Exactly. And that's what we want to create. We want to take people out of Louisville and transport them to Mexico in Guaca Mole, the restaurant, or we want to transport them to Cuba in Bodeguita de Mima.

Diana Clark: I love it.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Well, and the thing that jumps out at me with Mima's is it is, it's every, and you're sitting in the new Guaca Mole right now.

Zack Wolf: Yes.

Bryan Schaaf: Which you talked about every room has kind of a different feel to it, a different theme, but it's a very authentic theme that you guys have taken. Mima's very much like, I mean, there's the Cuban big-band music playing. I mean, it's very festive, and it's the work that you guys put into making sure things are as [inaudible 00:24:15] as possible is mind-blowing.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. Yeah. As a restaurateur and as a chef, our goal is to not only provide awesome, fantastic food, but also an experience. Right? If you're going to come to a Mexican restaurant, I don't want it to be the same boring Mexican restaurant that's on every corner. I want you to come in and literally feel like you are in Mexico. I want you to feel transported to that region, immersed in that culture, immersed in that food and walk away mind-blown. And that's what's going to keep you coming back, right? As a chef, that's what we want. We want you to keep coming back. So if we create an experience where it propels you to come back, then we're already halfway there. Now we put the food on top of it, now we got you by the hook.

Bryan Schaaf: Excellent.

Diana Clark: Zack, you might be one of the most excited chefs at I've ever talked to about, this is awesome. Just talking to you. I love it. I love it.

Zack Wolf: Well, I love what I do.

Diana Clark: It's very clear. Yes.

Bryan Schaaf: Well, and Diana, I'll tell you, this will warm your meat scientist heart, right? Obviously we are a beef-centric podcast, right. We don't make any, obviously, and obviously we're obviously biased towards certified Angus beef, because that's where we work. But that said, when you look at the cuts that are on various menus, and you have to understand the OLÉ group has obviously fine-dining, white tablecloth, steakhouse. So of course all your favorite, classic middle meats that you have to have. Right?

But if you look across everything else, you've got everything from brisket to sirloin flap, or that's also called the bavette. If you're unfamiliar. Outside skirt, chuck roll, chuck flap. I mean, beef bacon. You guys are the only ones, it took me a minute, because we track every pound of everything going everywhere on the world here. And I saw bacon on your menu. I thought, I've never seen that before at a restaurant. I mean, talk about that. I mean, the mix of things, obviously with taco shops, you think a lot of thin meats, but you guys aren't just married to skirt steak, right? You guys, your knowledge of the beef carcass is obviously reflected in what you guys are bringing in.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. Yeah. And that's something, when we come up with menus, and we start thinking about that. We try to think of what are people not using, right? What's something that people don't know, but we want to introduce them to? Or what can yield us the best results?

So right now, the sirloin butt, you braise sirloin butt, you get an amazing texture out of that. It's unlike anything else. It pulls apart. It's nice and stringy. It gives you an immense beef flavor. So we use that for some of our slow braises. The outside skirt, that's a classical carne asada, because it's perfect. It grills perfectly. It gets [inaudible 00:27:13]. The beef bacon though was something that we saw when we came up to the [inaudible 00:27:20]. Chef Tony had made that, and I was blown away by it.

And we use bacon on a lot of things on the menu at Steak & Bourbon. And in my head I was thinking, okay, we've got to switch some of that out. We've got to get away from the pork bacon. If we're a steakhouse, let's use beef bacon. There should be no question about that.

Diana Clark: I love that.

Zack Wolf: So literally the week we got back, I called our supplier, ordered a sample of it, started playing with it, and that's when we candy it now. So we glaze it in brown sugar and maple syrup, and it goes on our burgers as a burger topping.

Diana Clark: Nice.

- Zack Wolf: It goes on our wedge salad. So everybody has, every steakhouse that I know of, has a classical wedge salad. And we always ask that question, well, how can we elevate this? How can we make it better? Get rid of the bacon and put beef bacon on it.
- Diana Clark: Yes.
- Zack Wolf: That's the perfect way to do it.
- Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, as a chef with your palette, talk about that a little bit. Obviously we are biased. We're on the inside. Obviously we eat the beef bacon all the time. Actually a gentleman from Chicago was actually the one who kind of created that for more of your large-scale production, which is why it's widely available now. But beef bacon versus pork bacon, I guess, what are the differences? I mean, because obviously taste-wise there, there are some differences. It's not an exact swap-out, but what do you notice about it?
- Zack Wolf: So with beef bacon, the flavor profile, it's a lot more, I would say... I wouldn't say duller, but it's more consistent of that beef flavor that not so hits you in the mouth, where pork bacon, it's either smoked or cured, and immediately you get that intense smokiness or that cured flavor.
- With beef bacon, it's kind of a slow build up into that really good beef flavor. The texture's also different. And that was something that we kind of had to play with too. The texture of beef bacon, it's a lot more firmer than classical pork bacon, so that's why we candy it. We give that little bit of crunch to it, and it just elevates everything that we put it on with more of that beef-centric flavor, right? As a steakhouse, that's what we want to do. We want to, beef is the center of the plate, always. So we needed to add that beef bacon to those dishes to give you more of that kind of robust beef flavor and not so much of that smokey pork flavor that you get with regular bacon. I'm not saying that pork bacon is bad. I love bacon.
- Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. I'll never throw pork bacon under the bus.
- Zack Wolf: No, but if you switch out those products with beef bacon, you're adding a totally different flavor profile that gives you that just underlying tone of, I don't even know how to describe it. For me, describing flavors is totally different, but it just gives you that hint of beefiness without so much overpowering smoke. [crosstalk 00:30:32] usually say it.
- Diana Clark: Just knowing from working with, because a lot of the sausages and stuff that we create here were originally pork sausages that we converted into beef, and you have to be delicate with how you, you can't just swap ingredients and say, okay, it's good. The beef speaks way more. The beef is way more powerful. So it's being sure that you're complementing it correctly, and you're not just throwing things in, because I think pork, whatever you put on it is what it's going to taste

like. I've had really good pork too, but it's still, it doesn't carry the robustness that beef does. So, I love that you say that, because it's totally true. You can't just throw on smoke and say, okay, it's going to be good. It's like, no, you need to really accentuate the beef and then kind of just have that subtle, smokey, cured flavor in the background because that's the goal behind it.

Zack Wolf: Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. And that's something we're really good at as chefs for this group, is that we don't match flavors. We don't hide flavors. We try to build those flavors up and bring them out. So when we create dishes, we don't throw a whole bunch of things in to make it taste like something else. We create our dishes based on one flavor and we build everything around that to accentuate that flavor up. That's how we operate.

Bryan Schaaf: Excellent. All right. Let's, you know what? Since we've already mentioned it a couple times, let's talk about Steak & Bourbon, right? This is a steakhouse, and it strikes me as funny that you guys go to so many great lengths to introduce these concepts to Louisville with such authenticity, because truth be told, a lot of people in Louisville have never been to Cuba or certain places of Mexico. So you're bringing something new to them. Right? So that is, you guys really are their guide to that culture, that cuisine, things like that.

With the steakhouse, I mean, Louisville, Kentucky is in the heart of meat and potatoes country. I guess one of the difficulties, or I guess, can you juxtapose that with the fact that in one aspect you're introducing something that is brand new, and teaching, but in the other, you're bringing something in that people already kind of know and understand. I mean, that's got to be almost be equally if not more challenging. We have this discussion about burgers, right? Making a perfect burger is next to impossible because everybody already has their own preconception about what is that perfect burger. I would imagine the steakhouse has got to be kind of similar, right?

Zack Wolf: It's exactly similar. And that's something that we talked about for a long time when we were kind of developing Steak & Bourbon's menu was you can't mess with people's memories, right? So, if you put a steak on a menu, you want to be able for everyone who has an idea of a steak, you've got to meet that expectation. Right? You go to a steakhouse, you order a ribeye, you already have an expectation of what that ribeye is going to taste like. We wanted to meet that and then exceed that. So that's why we created a spice rub for our steak that don't mask the flavor of the steak. It elevates it. It gives you that saltiness, that pepperiness that you want, but it also adds a little bit of garlic and a little bit of onion and even a little bit of cayenne to bring out the heat in that.

And that's something on our menus, a lot of our dishes, they're not necessarily spicy, right? Because some people don't like spice [inaudible 00:34:17], but adding a little bit of cayenne or a little bit of jalapeno here and there, it opens up your taste buds, right? It gets your mouth watering. It elevates that taste to a whole nother level. So we added a little bit of that heat to our steak seasoning.

Then we took it even farther, and we're like, "Okay, well, how can you make a good steak a great steak? Why not fry it on cast iron and beef fat to sear it?" So now you're taking that flavor of a really good, fatty ribeye, and now you're caramelizing it in beef fat. So you're locking in all of that really good flavor in beef fat.

And then we elevate it even farther by adding a little slab of butter on top of that steak, that's got a really good, fresh herb mixture, a little bit of acidity. So as you bite into that steak, that acidity opens up your pallet. You get that heat from the steak seasoning. It's cooled off by that butter. You get that really good, crisp crunch. So what we do, we don't mess with those memories of those steaks or of that dish. We just take it to a whole nother level you can't get anywhere else. That's what we're all about.

Bryan Schaaf: And speaking from experience, it's fantastic.

Diana Clark: Can we just stop talking right now and just drive to Louisville? I mean, we can still make it there for dinner tonight.

Bryan Schaaf: Five and a half hours, Diana, five and a half. Right? It's [inaudible 00:35:50].

Diana Clark: Yeah.

Zack Wolf: It's not bad.

Diana Clark: Gosh.

Zack Wolf: I mean, you guys leave now, I can have you guys reservations for dinner. Just saying.

Bryan Schaaf: All right, I'm in. You know what? Let's let you just talked about the steak. Let's talk about the other side of that equation. You've got to name a restaurant Steak & Bourbon and put it in Louisville, Kentucky, right? The bourbon game has got to be on-point, right?

Diana Clark: Yeah. Was the same sampling done, I'm assuming on your guys' end to make sure that you had the finest ingredients in there from the bourbon side?

Zack Wolf: Absolutely. Absolutely. So, the last I looked, I think we had 96, 98 [inaudible 00:36:32] bourbons on the menu currently. All from all over Kentucky, right? Different regions, different barrel picks, different ages, different proofs, a lot of the harder-to-find stuff. We kind of tuck away, use it sparingly, bring it out as demand grows. Our old-fashioned, of course you know, if you're in Louisville, you're a bourbon restaurant, you want to have a fantastic old-fashioned. So everything in our old-fashioned is a traditional old-fashioned. Even down to the cherries that we put in it. Most places use the maraschino cherries. Those don't have that flavor profile that you really want in an old-fashioned, so we use

Amarena cherries. Those Amarena cherries, a darker flavor, not so sweet, more on that bitter side. So, that helps bring out the flavor of the bourbon. So yeah, we take a lot of care, not only in just the food side, but also the bar side.

Diana Clark: Love that.

Bryan Schaaf: Excellent. All right. Couple last questions before we have to turn you loose here. While we're on the subject, now we're getting into the selfish portion, right? Let's talk a little bit more about bourbon, right? And not just from the restaurant standpoint. You're a Kentucky boy, right? Josh Moore, if you don't know Josh, he's a great friend of ours as well. He's got Volare in Louisville. Every time I'm with Josh, I end up picking his brain about some bourbon, right? But if you could, as somebody from, I mean, you're from the motherland, you're from the epicenter of bourbon, right? What are your go-tos that you're either picking up at the restaurant, that you're buying at the store? What's your drink and what's your sipper?

Zack Wolf: Okay, so I'm a huge Basil Hayden fan. Basil Hayden, I feel like, is one of those bourbons that is good for a beginner. It's not super-strong, has a really good flavor profile to it, but it's also for a connoisseur bourbon, for those exact same reasons. Right? It's not going to hit you in the mouth. It's not going to burn too bad, but it's going to give you that nice, subtle flavor. They just released their toasted version, which I am absolutely in love with right now.

Diana Clark: Oh, that sounds really good.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. So I actually had people on the hunt to try to find me some more bottles of it, because it seems like every time it hits the shelf, it's gone. But I'm also kind of biased. We actually just did two of our own barrel picks. So we have one coming from Old Forester. It's actually available right now at the restaurant to buy. We spent a week doing that barrel pick with Old Forester, so that's a Steak & Bourbon branded, Old Forester barrel pick.

Diana Clark: That's so cool.

Zack Wolf: And we have another one coming out. I think we're trying to get it by Derby time, but I don't think it's going to hit, so it might be in that July, August mark, but we have another barrel pick coming out too. And that one's going to be even better. That's an Eagle Rare barrel [inaudible 00:39:28], which I don't believe anybody has done yet.

Diana Clark: Dang.

Bryan Schaaf: And if it's after Derby, it means there's plenty left for us, right?

Diana Clark: Yes.

Zack Wolf: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And I'm also, if I'm not going for bourbon, I'm going for mezcal.

Diana Clark: Nice.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. Huge mezcal drinker too. Mezcal margarita, that's my go-to every day. Every day.

Bryan Schaaf: That's fantastic. All right. One last question, because by birthright, you are the authority. Tennessee whiskey, Kentucky bourbon? Are they the same? Is bourbon a whiskey? Is Tennessee whiskey a bourbon?

Zack Wolf: No.

Bryan Schaaf: No. Okay. You heard it here first.

Zack Wolf: No, Kentucky bourbon has its own flavor profile, its own set of rules and restrictions. But the favor of real Kentucky bourbon cannot be beat.

Bryan Schaaf: That said, do you buy any Tennessee whiskeys or is that a-

Zack Wolf: No.

Bryan Schaaf: That's a no-no. Okay.

Zack Wolf: No. Not in my house anyways. Absolutely not

Bryan Schaaf: Outstanding. Right before we let you go. Can you give us some plugs? Where can people find you and shame on me? We didn't go down through the fullest OLÉ hospitality group. Obviously we've talked about Mimas. We've talked about steak. And we've talked about guacamole. You guys have a couple other concepts in there, right?

Zack Wolf: Sure. Yeah. We have four Luchador restaurants, which are quick-service taco restaurants spread throughout the city. We have one near Airport Park in Colonial Gardens. We have one in St. Matthews. There's a couple of throughout the city. We have Senora Arepa, which is our Venezuelan arepa concept. Of course, Bodeguita de Mima, our Cuban restaurant, Guaca Mole Modern Mexican, which is in downtown Louisville. That's our Mexican restaurant. Steak & Bourbon out on the east end. And then we have some more concepts coming. [crosstalk 00:41:20]

Bryan Schaaf: Is there ever going to be a time when you're not going to be planning for another restaurant? Because you guys seem to thrive on this.

Zack Wolf: Yeah, no. It's not going to happen. We are constantly, like I said, every... It seems like every four to six months, we're working on another one.

Bryan Schaaf: That's fantastic.

Diana Clark: I love it. Love it.

Bryan Schaaf: That's fantastic. All right. If you can, before we turn this, give us some plugs. Where can people find you? Yourself? The restaurants? Via social media, anything like that?

Zack Wolf: So all of our restaurants can be found at ole-restaurants.com, has a list of all of our. That links to all of our other sites. On Instagram, @olehospitalitygroup. You can find us there as well. And then my personal Instagram is @chefzwolf, and I'm always plugging the restaurant, showing what's coming, stuff we're working on, events that we're doing, showcasing some of the awesome food that we're getting in. Because we import some of our food too. It's not just stuff that you can find in Kentucky. We actually import some of our chilis, some of the ingredients that we use, it's hard to find.

Bryan Schaaf: That's fantastic. That's fantastic. I'll tell you from personal experience, having been there and only being five and a half hours away, I highly recommend anyone who is making a pilgrimage, whether it be it for a Derby, be it for Muhammad Ali, be it for the Louisville Slugger Museum, man, go check these guys out. Make sure that you ask for your dinner at Mima's to be served in a '57 Chevy, because normally they reserve that for the children, apparently.

Zack Wolf: We can make it happen, though.

Bryan Schaaf: Next time I'm there. Man, I wouldn't mind on wheels. That said, Chef Zack Wolf, OLÉ Hospitality Group. By the way, OLÉ is O-L-E, which stands for oh, let's eat. I didn't realize that. I was like, "Oh, that's easy to [crosstalk 00:43:05]."

Diana Clark: I didn't know that either.

Bryan Schaaf: Right? I was like, "Oh, how about that?" We appreciate you for joining us here on the Meat Speak podcast, powered by this certified Angus beef brand. If this is your first time tuning in, please know that you can find us across all of your major podcasting platforms, Google Play, Apple, Spotify, and a billion other ones that I get this little report on, that I had no idea even existed. So it's amazing. If you can, actually, if you have the iPhone, which most of the kids do these days, it seems, hit the little purple icon. Leaves a star ranking. Leave us a review. It's not about our egos. Well, it's about my ego. It's not about Diana's ego, but it's just to help us with the overall visibility of the podcast so we can continue doing this.

So until next time, on behalf of Diana Clark, meat scientist, Chef Tony Banks, who's actually on a gigantic boat right now on the Caribbean, cooking food with Norwegian Cruise Lines. So yeah, Diana, we're stuck here in northeast Ohio. Chef Tony's down-

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Diana Clark: Right. Oh, poor, poor Tony.

Bryan Schaaf: Right?

Diana Clark: Poor Tony.

Zack Wolf: Yeah. Tough life. Right? Tough life.

Bryan Schaaf: Yeah. Don't worry, Tony. I'll be shoveling snow tomorrow. You have fun, man.

On behalf of certified Angus beef and the Meat Speak podcast, I'm Bryan Schaaf.
Thank you all for listening.