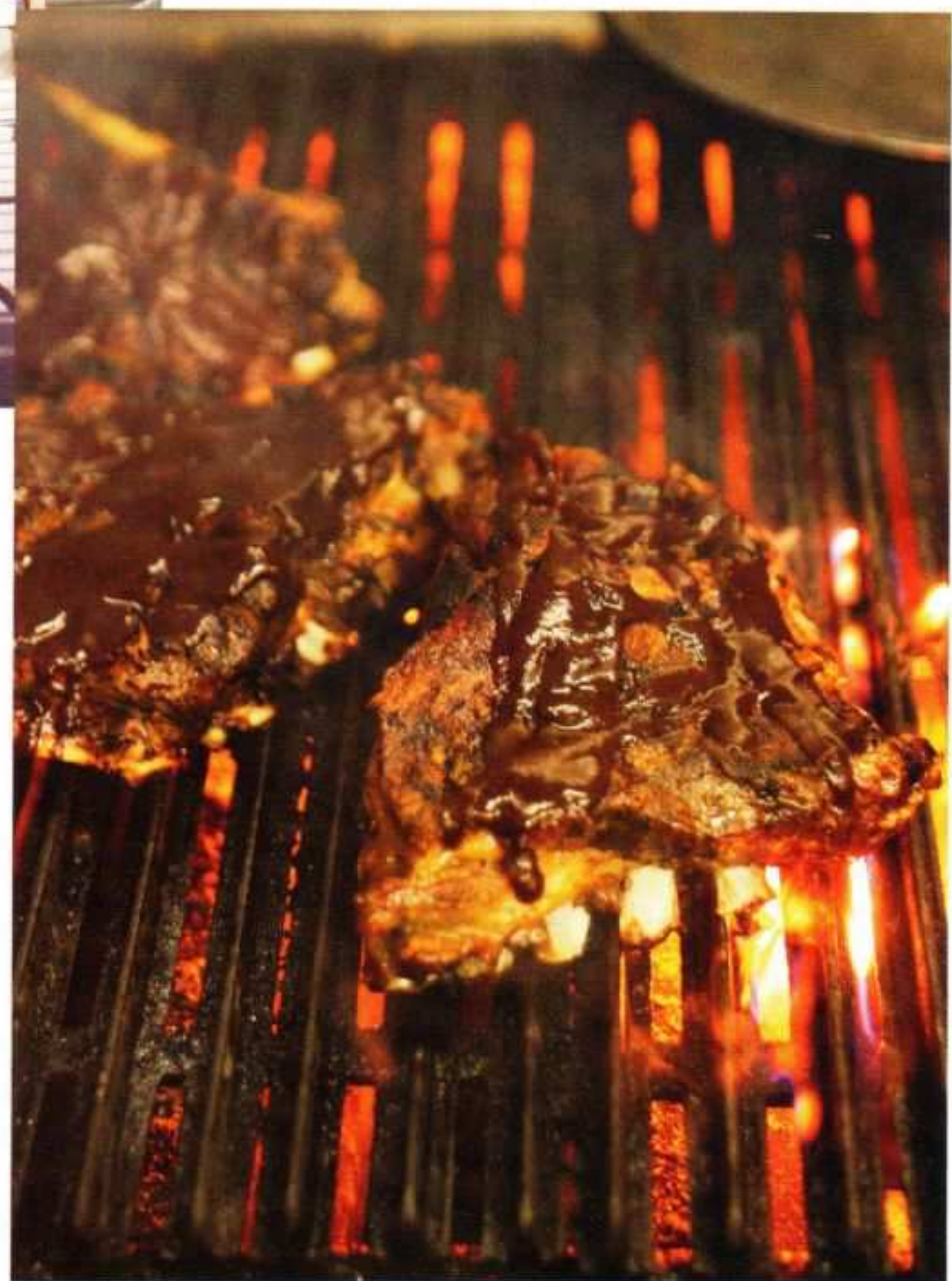


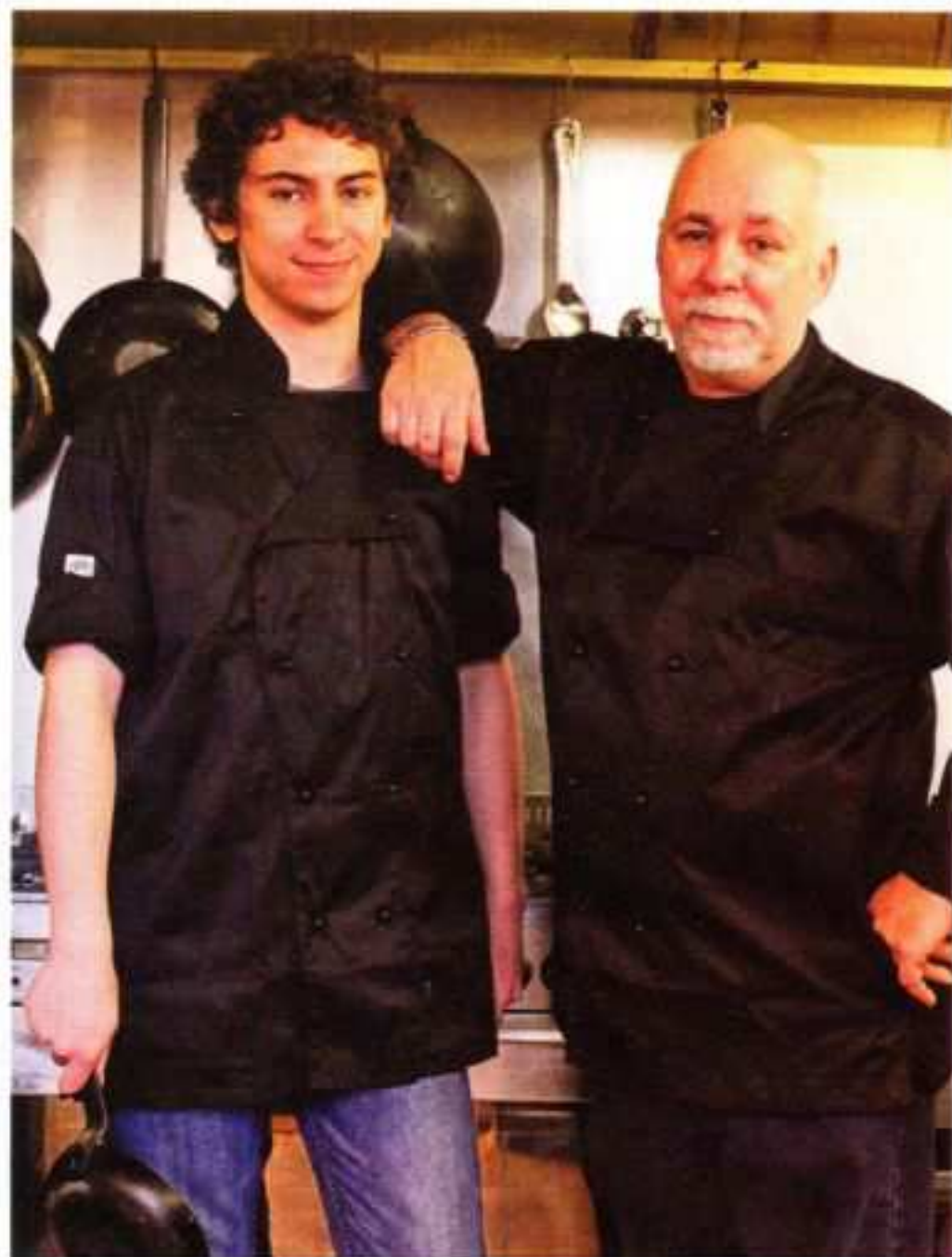


EATING OUT

Smokey Joe's Creole Cafe

Missouri native Jon Peterson has hit a home run serving authentic flavours from America's Deep South in Launceston, Tasmania.





Smokey Joe's is a hit with families. Clockwise from far left: the charming restaurant facade; Jon Peterson with his son and co-cook Hunter; flame-grilled beef brisket.



“W

hen I was a kid, we'd do this outside... Cajun fish is definitely a dish for the industrial fan,” says Jon Peterson as he dodges the smoke billowing from the hissing grill. His son and kitchen partner, Hunter, 22, nods in agreement. “I'd be lying if I said I cooked this one regularly at home,” adds Jon. As the air clears, fillets of perfectly blackened red snapper are revealed. Using Tasmanian fish, the irony is not lost on Jon, a native of south-west Missouri. Here's an American cooking the food of America's Deep South in one of the world's southernmost cities. Peterson's Smokey Joe's Creole Cafe is located in a quirky, memorabilia-filled weatherboard building in Launceston, northern Tasmania.

Having moved with his young family to Melbourne in the early 1990s as an academic to take up a short-term assignment, evolving personal circumstances saw the Petersons become permanent residents. Visiting Tasmania often with his work, Jon soon became transfixed with the island state.

“Life was changing, so we took a huge leap – the kids and I moved to Launceston and I decided to follow my passion and open a restaurant.” Smokey Joe's began trading in 2002 and, more than a decade on, still provides an authentic Creole experience.

“It's funny, but the Tamar Valley in a lot of ways reminds me of home... the rolling hills and river, the wonderful produce and tight community. It's a bit like the Missouri Ozarks,” Jon remarks of the comparison to

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the legendary mountain range famous for country life and a particular style of food.

“People would hunt and prepare their own pig. Growing up, we'd catch catfish and my grandmother collected wild medicinal herbs to cook with,” recalls Jon. “Food was prepared simply and mindfully, and was the essence of what we now call 'slow food.'”

The Ozark influence is evident in Jon's menu at Smokey Joe's and a natural fit with the accompanying Creole and Cajun cuisines. Both styles originated with the French and Spanish settlers of Louisiana, and were influenced by the food of Native Americans, African and Caribbean slaves, and, later, German and Italian immigrants.

“Although Missouri is not strictly Creole country, we are only 500 miles north of New Orleans,” explains Jon. “My mother's family

were Mississippi River people, so jambalaya, gumbo, pulled pork and crawfish were all dishes on our table.” Aside from the crawfish, they also prove popular with the Tassie crowd.

“Getting the right ingredients here is much easier than it was 10 years ago,” says Jon. “With the influx of South East Asian and African migrants to Launceston, there's now a much bigger range of vegetables, such as okra and certain chillies. I still need to import my filé for the gumbo though,” he smiles, referring to the dried ground spice that comes from the North American sassafras tree.

It's not just his heritage that Jon credits for his passion for cooking, however. He also spent several years in the navy before graduate school. “Whenever we'd pull into a port, a few of us would jump into a taxi and ask to be taken to the driver's favourite

The cafe is decorated with American memorabilia. Right: pan-fried okra with Jon's famous Chilli Redemption sauce.



Creole flavours around Australia

suburban eating place, wherever he'd go to dine with his family. Especially around the Caribbean, I found it fascinating to see the connections between the local food and the food I grew up with. More often than not, I'd leave gratefully with recipes."

These dishes from Jon's travels regularly make appearances on Smokey Joe's specials board. "One of our most requested is West Indian curried goat, which is a recipe I picked up outside Kingston, Jamaica in the late 1970s," he adds. Conch fritters and Trinidad choka are also sellouts. Smokey Joe's signature dishes, however, have to be the smoked, dry-rub pork and beef ribs, beef brisket and pork belly. "The pork ribs are smoked for five hours, but the brisket is smoked for 14 hours before hitting the grill. In fact, the brisket takes a good 24 hours of preparation. We use Tasmanian Wessex Saddleback pork and rub it with a base of peppers, thyme, oregano, garlic and onion powder, plus some brown sugar. Today, I'll be serving the belly with tamarind, chilli and roast pumpkin seed mole," says Jon.

The smoked pork also stars in another special. Jon grinds it up to make boudin blanc, a traditional Cajun sausage of pork, rice and seasonings. "I make the mixture up into balls and fry it without sausage skin to

get a crisp crust on the outside and a smoky, creamy softness in the middle," he explains.

Side dishes, including sweet potato salad, pan-fried okra and three-hour braised beans, ensure the continuation of a traditional Southern dining experience. "Some of these dishes can prove a little challenging with first-time customers," says Jon. "The Southern way is to cook vegetables slowly, sometimes until they turn to mush, and I really am about doing authentic food here, not stuff that looks styled for a magazine."

Never questioned though, are the methods behind Jon's home-cooked sauces. He makes 20-litre batches of Ozark BBQ Sauce, and slightly less of his Chilli Redemption, every fortnight. Customers drop in during service to grab a few bottles for home. "Thanks Joe, can't eat without it," shouts Rob Harris of Trevallyn. "I answer to Joe in the radius of the restaurant," Jon explains, then points to a framed black and white picture of a tabby cat. "That's my original Smokey Joe - he was our childhood pet, and it was my sister's suggestion to name the place after him. It's also an Old Blues nickname from St Louis," he muses. *20 Lawrence St, Launceston, Tas, (05) 6531 0530, facebook.com/smokeyjoescreolecafe.*

VIC

GUMBO KITCHEN FOOD TRUCK

On the move around Melbourne's CBD and northern suburbs, some of Gumbo Truck's Creole-style goodies include shrimp po' boys, assorted gumbos and lemon ice-box pie.

Follow them at gumbokitchen.com and on Twitter @gumbokitchen.

NSW

THE BOURBON

Reborn from the ashes of the iconic Bourbon & Beefsteak in Sydney's Kings Cross, head chef James Metcalfe (formerly of Bécasse) offers contemporary Creole dishes and 'Old New Orleans' classic cocktails.

22 Darlinghurst Rd, Potts Point, (02) 9035 8888, thebourbon.com.au.

WET PAINT

RESTAURANT

The menu of this neighbourhood favourite near Sydney's Bronte has long featured Louisiana-style stuffed chicken, pulled pork and Creole chowder. Authentic jambalaya pops up regularly on the specials.

56-60 Macpherson St, Waverley, (02) 9369 4634, wetpaintrestaurant.com.au.

WA

RAGIN' CAJUN CATERING

Bringing 'Louisiana comfort food' to the streets and markets of Perth, the crew cooks up mega-pots of seafood jambalaya, Southern potato salad and funnel cake, just for starters. **0401 653 534, facebook.com/RaginCajunCater.**