

## BEST

### Cut of Meat

One night when I went to dinner at Jar, the former co-owner Mark Peel was making the rounds in the dining room. Peel is also the chef-owner of Campanile, and is considered by many the city's most talented and knowledgeable grill chef. When he came to our table, I asked him which of the steaks I should order.

"Rib-eye," he said immediately. "Always order a rib-eye. It has the most flavor."

I ordered a rib-eye that night and at every opportunity since.

The rib-eye (also called a Spencer) is not a lean steak. A good specimen is extremely well marbled, with a much looser texture than a fillet. It is also the one steak that I don't order rare or charred rare — I've found through experience that the flavor and juice of the rib-eye come from the heating and melting of the interior marbling (i.e., fat). I order rib-eyes medium rare or charred medium rare.

I've conducted countless taste tests. At Taylor's Steak House in La Cañada, my friends (who've ordered fillets and the house-special culotte steaks) and I always swap bites — and the rib-eye always wins the flavor prize. At Campanile, the prime-rib steak, crusted with a black-olive tapenade, charred medium rare, and served with flageolet beans and bitter greens, easily trumps every other red-meat entrée.

I presently have a freezer full of rib-eye steaks, thanks to an ongoing special at Alexander's Meats in San Gabriel's Howie's Market. If you buy an entire rib-eye (between 10 and 16 pounds), the cost is \$9.99 a pound — and they'll cut and individually wrap the steaks to order. (Pre-cut rib-eyes in the butcher case run around \$17.99 a pound, so it pays to buy in bulk!) Call ahead, and the cheerful butchers will have them cut, wrapped and ready to go when you get there. In the past, I've split the whole rib-eye with three people — it was like buying a racehorse — but the last one, thanks to a friend's generous gift, was all mine.

I generally have the rib-eye cut into individual steaks about 2 inches thick (they come out to about a pound apiece), salt them some hours before cooking, and grill them on a blistering-hot barbecue fire for a bit of char or on a very hot salted cast-iron pan for equally appealing crust. Four minutes per side is *perfect*. Each 1-pound steak serves two — but blissfully, gluttonously serves one. —Michelle Huneven

**Alexander's Meats at Howie's Market** 6580 N. San Gabriel Blvd., San Gabriel, (626) 286-6767 or 287-2772; **Campanile** 624 S. La Brea Ave., Los Angeles, (323) 938-1447; **Jar** 8225 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, (323) 655-6566; **Taylor's Steak House** 901 Foothill Blvd., La Cañada, (818) 790-7668