



Right on 'Que

Barbecue goes upscale at Chicago Q—and that's a good thing. | By Michael Negrant | Photography by Anthony Tablier |

Lee Ann Whippen is a bleach bottle blonde, a mom with an "aw-shucks" Southern accent. People often disregard her as a pretty little non-threatening curiosity of sorts.

Those people are dead wrong. For more than 14 years, the owner of the Gold Coast's recently opened Chicago Q has established herself as one of the finest competition barbecue pitmasters in America.

Though she's a tough chick, I wasn't initially convinced she could conquer Chicago's barbecue scene. Bolstered by the unlikely success of North Side spot Smoque BBQ, a slew of would-be 'cue princes with similar credentials to Whippen's have popped up to challenge Smoque's reign. So far, they've all come up short. Until now.

It helps that this isn't Whippen's first go-round. She also owns Wood Chicks BBQ in Chesapeake, Va. Wood Chick's is what barbecue shacks are supposed to be: a roadside attraction covered in aluminum siding with a profusion of crusty squeeze bottles.

Chicago Q, on the other hand, is in the Gold Coast; and since opening a barbecue shack here is like putting a dive bar in the lobby of the Paris Ritz, this restaurant was

created with the neighborhood in mind. With flickering gas light fixtures, gold beaded leather banquettes and shiny wood floors, it could double as a country club. But no matter the décor, it's still serious barbecue.

When the free house pickles and freshly fried dry-rubbed potato chips are delivered, the brain shuts down, the fingers take over and both bowls are gone. The cloud-light cheddar bacon hush puppies move just as quickly.

Whippen's brisket, served with a crisp black bark, renders its juices across your tongue like an August peach. It's as good as Smoque's. Pork and chicken are kissed with the right whisper of smoke, and St. Louis-cut pork ribs are lacquered with a touch of clove-perfumed sauce and break from the bone easily.

But all is not perfect. Cole slaw is forgettable, and the polenta underneath plump, briny lemon shrimp is overcooked and gelatinous. The beans have nice hunks of brisket burnt ends, but they're a little treacy. Correct these things and, well, Smoque better watch out.

You might not put a dive bar in the Ritz, but Whippen might just do all right with a barbecue counter. ■

Chicago Q

1160 N. Dearborn St.,
312.642.1160,
chicagoqrestaurant.com

HOURS Sun.-Thu. 11AM-10:30PM,
Fri.-Sat. 11AM-2AM

THE DEAL MAKERS

House bacon cheddar
hush puppies, \$6.75

Kobe sliced brisket, \$19.75

Key lime seasonal pie, \$6.25

UP IN SMOKE Clockwise from top left: The restaurant's signage; chef Lee Ann Whippen; hominy, smoked corn and black bean salad; pulled pork sandwich; the restaurant's chic interior; and a trio of sides. Below: Chicago Q's Sazerac

