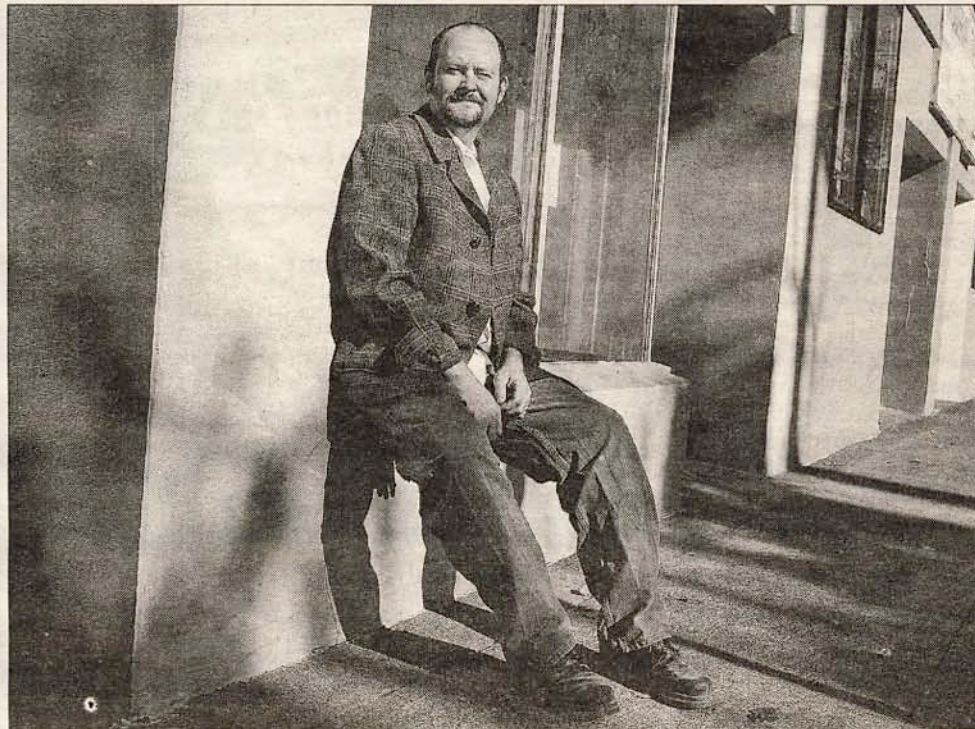


# platter

food finds, restaurant news and dining trends

By CHRISTINA MELANDER



TIM LaBARGE/SPECIAL TO THE OREGONIAN

**Rodney Muirhead brings serious consideration of central Texas 'cue to his new Podnah's Pit Barbecue on Northeast Prescott.**

**SALT, PEPPER AND SMOKE** — The secret to great barbecue is letting meat smoke over subtle heat for a good, long time. For 'cue savant Rodney Muirhead, bringing a new restaurant to readiness was similarly drawn-out. As we reported on OregonLive.com last week, after months spent renovating a 35-seat storefront, he opens his hotly anticipated **Podnah's Pit Barbecue** today on Northeast Prescott Street.

Barbecue junkies, some of the most rabid and opinionated culinarians around, regard Muirhead as a serious pit master. He first surfaced in 2003 with Low BBQ — originally with pal Kyle Connally — after the two were laid off by a robotics firm. Low gained a quick following at the Portland Farmers Market and then on Monday nights at Apizza Scholls on Southeast Hawthorne. The short run ended when other prospects called, and, in 2004, Muirhead sold the Low BBQ name, smoker and know-how to Ken's Place, where it's now featured on Tuesday nights (1852 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., 503-236-9520).

Muirhead's barbecue roots run deep. He grew up in Waxahachie, Texas, where he cultivated a taste for simple Texan 'cue and spent many a day cooking in his grandmother's kitchen. Before moving to Portland, Muirhead took a break from high-tech to attend the French Culinary Institute and put in time as a line cook in New York. When he and Connally started Low, they embarked on a two-week carnivorous rampage in Texas, consuming barbecue twice a day to discern the style and approach they liked best. (Look up "Texas Gluttony" on eGullet to read about it.)

Muirhead adopted his MO from his favorite of the bunch, central Texas' legendary Smitty's.

"The style is a lot simpler than other barbecue, there's not much more to it than salt, pepper and smoke," Muirhead says. And patience — to gauge the proper cooking time. At Podnah's, Muirhead will start his hand-built, oak-fired smoker at 5 a.m. to have beef brisket and pulled pork ready for dinner (lunchtime sandwiches will feature meats smoked the day before). "The texture and tenderness of smoked meat is dependent on time," he says. "You can have two briskets of exactly the same weight and size and one could take eight hours and one could take 12." He pins this perplexity on the animal itself, explaining that cooking speed is tied to what the animal ate and how much it exercised.

Podnah's lineup includes spice-rubbed pork ribs, homemade beef sausage and the occasional prime rib special, plus traditional sides, an iceberg wedge salad, pecan pie and fruit crisp. 'Cue hounds should have plenty to chew over.

1469 N.E. Prescott St., 503-281-3700; open 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Tuesday-Sunday

**MORE TARTS, LESS TAPAS** — **Bar Pastiche**, a boho-grunge tapas bar at 3731 S.E. Hawthorne Blvd., is kaput. The collaboration between **Pix Patisserie** dessert-master Cheryl Wakerhauser and Navarre's John Taboada seemed a likably zany concept at first — throw your napkins on the floor! Order by pointing! But Portlanders just weren't comfortable shoving in at the bar to assemble a meal from the ever-changing lineup of miniature plates. And service was just awful. Wakerhauser is converting the shoebox bar into a sunny yellow Pix location, her third. She reopens this week.

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