



# **Steak: One Man's Search for the World's Tastiest Piece of Beef**

*Mark Schatzker*

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**Steak: One Man's Search for the World's Tastiest Piece of Beef** Mark Schatzker

**The definitive book on steak has never been written-until now**

"Of all the meats, only one merits its own structure. There is no such place as a lamb house or a pork house, but even a small town can have a steak house." So begins Mark Schatzker's ultimate carnivorous quest. Fed up with one too many mediocre steaks, the intrepid journalist set out to track down, define, and eat the perfect specimen. His journey takes him to all the legendary sites of steak excellence-Texas, France, Scotland, Italy, Japan, Argentina, and Idaho's Pahsimeroi Valley-where he discovers the lunatic lengths steak lovers will go to consume the perfect cut. After contemplating the merits of Black Angus, Kobe, Chianina, and the prehistoric aurochs-a breed revived by the Nazis after four hundred years of extinction-Schatzker adopts his own heifer, fattens her on fruit, acorns, and Persian walnuts, and then grapples with ambivalence when this near-pet appears on his plate.

Reminiscent of both Bill Bryson's and Bill Buford's writing, *Steak* is a warm, humorous, and wide-ranging read that introduces a wonderful new travel and food writer to the common table.

## **Steak: One Man's Search for the World's Tastiest Piece of Beef Details**

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Author : Mark Schatzker

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Mark Schatzker**

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### **bethanne says**

Full disclosure: I love traveling books and I love books about food. When I saw this on Goodreads' First Reads, I had to enter and lo and behold, I won. And I was really really excited to read this book. The premise is simple: a man goes on a world journey in search of the perfect steak. His travels take him from Texas to Japan to France and other places in search of that perfect steak.

From what I had read on the back cover of the book, I expected this to be a humorous approach to steak and have a lot of travel-related antecedents in regards to the steak. But I was bummed to find out that the writer - despite having all of the inspiration from visiting everywhere - just presented fact after fact about the kinds of steak he had all over the world, but didn't present the journey in a way that travel buffs like myself would appreciate. It was almost mechanical reading through trips when there could have been a more humanist approach to the information.

Okay, so great idea, execution could have been better. But this is a fascinating read. No doubt that any steak lover will want to read this book and find out all about steak traditions in other countries.

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### **Matthew says**

I won this on Firstreads and rather enjoyed it. It wasn't laid out in a manner that made sense to me, but that just slowed down my reading of it, not my enjoyment.

Schatzker brings us through 8 locations as he eats his way around the world looking for the perfect piece of steak. The story brings us fascinating characters worldwide who all know cows, beef, and what they like. He also brings us through the history of beef in those locations, including a fascinating breeding program by the Nazi's, who tried to recreate the Aurochs, from which cows evolved. This book is of the new style, which tells facts without sourcing it, but does list a Bibliography at the end. In the moment, I'm generally OK with this style, but afterwards, I tend to start doubting certain facts or assumptions.

Either lucky for us or unfortunately, Schatzker's never had that one cut of steak that he'll remember for the rest of his life. In some ways, his search for the perfect steak turns into an Ahabian adventure full of feedlot fillets in both North and South America, concerns about meat overdosing, and distant relations.

Here are my main takeaways. Cows evolved eating mainly grass. Humans evolved eating cows who mainly ate grass. It's healthier to eat cows that mainly eat grass. Cows who eat primarily grass taste better. And finally, happy cows taste better. Cows who hang around all day eating flash boiled corn probably aren't happy, but cows who eat grass, chestnuts, apples and other treats probably are.

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### **christine. says**

Let's get this out of the way: I don't particularly care for steak.

I'm a pretty picky eater. I hate onions. Lettuce. Tomato. As you can imagine, the sandwich can be my worst nightmare. I'm also lactose intolerant, and I have a stomach condition that makes eating hellish sometimes.

But beyond this pickiness, I am sort of a foodie. I've eaten sweetbreads, wild boar, quail, jellyfish, squid ink, and enjoyed it all. I read blogs like Serious Eats and The Girl Who Ate Everything on a daily basis, and collect cookbooks. One of my favorite neighborhoods in the city is the East Village, because I love the food in that area.

And the one food that I love above all is meat. I'm a carnivore. Pork, chicken, seafood. Lamb is meh, but beyond that, I'm game. I could never be a vegetarian. I'd subsist on cupcakes all day.

I signed up for the giveaway of this book actually for my boyfriend, who does enjoy the occasional slab of beefy goodness in his diet. I didn't expect I'd enjoy this one as much as I did.

I can actually remember the best piece of steak I've ever eaten. It was at Megu in Tribeca, a place that I took Jon for our first anniversary. The steak in question was a strip of wagyu beef, perfectly caramelized and with a rikyu glaze - black sesame and soy. That piece of meat was the silkiest piece of beef that I had ever tasted. It literally melted in my mouth. I couldn't get enough of it. The texture was superb. I've never had anything like it since. If steak always tasted that good, then maybe I'd like it more.

Schatzker not only tells of his globe-trotting voyage to acquire good beef, he explains why humans find steak so appealing. The chemicals and chemistry behind it. The trials and tribulations of grass-fed beef. The feedlots and the way they've diluted the taste of true steak. It's an absolutely fascinating story of the lengths that one man will go to find out what makes steak taste so good. The book is divided by region, as Schatzker stalks the globe, eating his way from France to Japan, Argentina to Texas.

This book succeeds because by the last pages, I was craving steak. Great steak, the type that Schatzker describes as an A+ experience. I don't know if I'll ever find that steak, but this book sure makes me want it.

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### **pianogal says**

I don't know if I didn't like this one because I don't like steak in general or because I'm not a fan of the author. It just felt like he was really negative about everything. It sticks with me that he repeatedly described steak as tasting swampy. Yuck. Again - this could be that I don't like steak, much less swampy steak.

Or maybe he just needed some ketchup.

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### **Jessica says**

Full disclosure: I received an ARC of this book through the Goodreads First Reads program.

I absolutely loved this book! Mark Schatzker writes about his quest for the perfect steak, including his trips around the world to Texas, France, Scotland, Italy, Japan, and Argentina and his attempts to raise his own cow for the perfect steak. The book is full of so much interesting information about the history and current state of steak, including a vein that runs throughout the book that covers the grass-fed vs. feedlot argument

about beef. Having tried one too many mediocre steaks, the author sets out to find the perfect steak and what goes into creating it, and takes the reader along on a humorous and fascinating ride. The writing is fantastic and will keep you laughing and interested.

Having moved to the San Francisco bay area a year ago, I found the book to be especially interesting because so much of the local culture here revolves around food and the search for delicious and healthy alternatives to many of the foods that are currently making Americans fatter and fatter. One of the huge things in this area's culinary scene is grass-fed beef, something I had never really seen or heard much about before moving here. I can definitely say that I find it to be much tastier, and a lot of the information in this book helped me to understand why this is the case, and how my new-found love of grass-fed beef may actually be better for me. I definitely think "Steak" is the perfect companion book to any foodie's collection.

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### **George says**

A comprehensive book that attempts to answer what makes a steak good. The Canadian author journeys around the world from the United States, Europe, Japan and South America tasting steaks and talking to experts to figure out the key parameters. He even experiments with raising his own heifer. The not-so-simple answer is you want certain breeds, fed on sweet grass, slowly fattened, and living in a stress free environment. This is beef atypical of what you find on the supermarket shelves.

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### **Amber Sky says**

Best part I've read so far (after the author has written about his experience eating Scottish Highlander cattle, that has not been "tinkered with" in terms of selective breeding to produce faster growtime and higher meat yields):

"Outstanding meat is the enemy of thought. It causes a single-minded focus on the pleasures of the mouth. We tore through the rib eyes, and then through the pope's eyes[odd name for a certain cut, I think it was bottom round here in america], communicating via groans and the odd squeal, pausing only to make exclamations about juiciness, or philistine assertions like "I never want it to end." To someone standing and listening just outside the door, the meal would have sounded rather like an orgy."

I really enjoyed this book, although I have to think that it has singlehandedly and almost regrettably raised my expectations of what a good steak should be. The only regret being that I can no longer enjoy a simple steak because it is a steak. Knowing now exactly what to look for in a great steak will leave me, like the author, constantly wanting the next steak to be the best.

It's a really nice read, very well informed and broadens the subject quite imaginatively. The people interviewed were genuine and gave a lot of insight on the subject and what the author was trying to achieve but ultimately ended up leading him round in circles. Schatzker knows how to write to his audience and it shows.

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## **Shavonya says**

This is a very interesting book. Mark is so involved with his project of the "unltimate carnivores" quest that he takes you along with him. As a culinary student for years I have heard that nothing taste like it used to and this book explains that with a depth that is not preach-y or boring. Mark's word play and descriptive talents are wonderful. He also has a great since of humour. He gives alot of historical information about extinct cattle and scientific fact about cattle different breeds, how they are raised, bread, slaughtered, prepared and the list goes on.

It is a bit upsetting when you realize whats happening to our food for the sake of a quick/more money. Even more so what we put the animals through to get it. Don't get me wrong, I love meat and will probably always eat it, but since we are going to kill these animals we owe them enough respect to house them comfortable and to treat them well. I'm not saying it all has to be beer and massages (according to the book, that's not even done in Japan)but we should be taking a page from Temple Grandin and treat the animals with the respect living creatures deserve food or not.

Towards the end of the book, and when Mark is describing the scientific make up and health benefits of cattle the book does slow down considerably. Having said that you feel his joy of having amazing steak in Scotland, his amazment at have good well-done steak in Argentina. He should right food travel guides because he knows how to take you on a journey.

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## **Karen says**

Boo hiss. So much blah blah blah and no mention of Canadian beef! We have the best in the world!

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## **Mollie \*scoutrmom\* says**

I won an advance copy of this book in a drawing, and read it with the determination of not letting that fact influence me in favor of the book. I needn't have worried, quality speaks for itself. I expected a version of a cookbook, and found instead a well-written memoir. The quest for the perfect mouth-watering experience is not easily or often well-written, except in this case.

What I liked most about this book is that it is a description of the journey as well as of the destination. There are disappointments and "eureka!" moments. We get to meet the people along the way, from the hostess at a restaurant who calls her male customers "honey" to the old woman who cures sausages in a lard bucket to the butcher who is particular about which part of the animal is hanging from a hook. We are given descriptions of the author's world travels that almost enable us to smell the landscape around us.

Oh, and the tastes! The English language does not often evoke flavors and textures in the mind, but this author knows the key. Sometimes he tricked my brain and tounge into reminiscences of my best meals, including aromas.

In addition, there is enough educational material, both on flavors and cooking, and on the science behind flavors and cooking, to fascinate even the most jaded foodie. Those who like that sort of thing will want to keep a highlighter handy. The author's personal preferences are clear, but he shares others' points of view without ridiculing them.

We learn about the business and economics of beef mass production and about the small farmer who breeds for flavor instead of for profit. The influence of the cultural preferences in different countries on what meat is available at the market are explored. All of this is written in evocative prose that is well-edited enough to keep one interested through descriptions of enzymes and the Maillard reaction and snakes in Italy and palmitic acid and the beef-breeding experiments of pre-war Nazi Germany and prehistoric cave paintings in France.

By the end, I was thrilled to find enough information to enable me to acquire and cook fantastic steaks of my own. Yippee!!!

This book fascinated me, and I hope you will find it as enjoyable as I did. I look forward to Schatzker's next book.

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### **Neil says**

This book was awesome. I must have a sympathetic salivary response because I was constantly finding my mouth watering as I read the author's descriptions of the steak he was eating.

One of themes in the book I enjoyed the most was the idea of *terroir*, a french term used to describe wine, conveying the idea that the geography of a food influences its flavor. This is referred to by one of the book's characters as a *pure savor* which she describes as something in which you can taste the land it was raised on. In the chapter on Italy there are hunger inducing descriptions of the herbs and grasses on the mountainside the cattle were grazing flavoring the milk, cheese, and steak that they produced.

Perhaps the best compliment I can give the author is that I didn't notice him very much. *He* ate the steak, *he* experienced the locales, *he* asked the questions and heard the answers but he didn't get in the way. While reading the book, it almost felt as if *I* was doing those things. By the end of the book, I can't really tell you very much about the author because he was merely the pane of glass through which I experienced the steak of the world.

Boy was it delicious.

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### **Hannah says**

S3V2L3

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### **Brian says**

I learned a lot from this book, mostly about how I have probably never had a really good steak in my life. It is almost impossible to get a good steak in America, not even from the really high class restaurants. It is all coming from feed lots, and while there are some cows in the American population that are good tasting, nobody is tracking that. For 40 years or more, all the cows in America have been bred for efficiency and productivity, without regard to taste. The genes are there, but rare. Then even if you do happen to get a good cow, the methods used to raise them destroy the flavor.

The author here went on a search for a really great steak, which led him to many countries. Scotland, Japan, Argentina, they all have better steak than we do. But the productivity bug has hit many of them as well, and the quality is steadily decreasing.

this is true of so many modern products. And it doesn't have to be. There is no reason that cows cannot be bred for both productivity AND flavor. Let's hope that someone decides that it is worth the trouble.

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### **Kim says**

What a fun and fascinating read. Author Mark Schatzker decides after too many mouthfuls of textured saltwater to go looking for the steak of his dreams. It's something he'd been vaguely doing for a long time, but which crystallized into an active quest after he discovered that even something as unappealing as mutton can be made into food for the gods, so long as you eat it in the one place where they know how to do that. So to his mind, there HAS to be a place in the world where the steaks offer endless bursts of deliciousness; it's just a matter of finding it. Which is the general theme, but there's a lot more to this book than just another self-indulgent, food-related travelogue. I learned a lot through it because the author learned a lot himself about things like soil type, different types of fat, different types of cattle, cultural differences in their approach to beef, the science of taste, the effects of grain vs grass, etc - because these are all things that can affect his steak experience and / or his quest. All of which sounds horribly dry and boring but is a lot of fun to read because he presents it all through personal anecdotes as he travels and talks with people. Anecdotes of his own tasting experiences, of his conversations with eccentric characters who just happen to be experts on some aspect of beef, and of the experiences of others that he learns about. Reading it ended up being much the sort of pleasure he described eating steak to be - something that makes you feel good while you experience it, satisfying and delicious, which leaves you wanting to experience something like that again.

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### **Lissa1229 says**

This book made me hungry!

It was interesting tale of one man's hunt for the perfect steak. Being from the midwest, I love steak and I like a good quest, so I was excited to read this.

The author was good at describing things especially a bad steak or a good one. I liked his analogy of how people will nit pick over a glass of wine but pay little attention to the meat!

I could see this book leading to cookbooks, places to visit or you might see on a travel channel or food network.

My one problem with this book, and maybe it's a regional thing, but cows (or the term cow) are for milking, not for eating! We eat steer or cattle.

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