

# Looking for St. Louis Tradition



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Although not as steeped in mystery as the infamous Bermuda Triangle, the Barbecue Triangle has its own mysteries to solve. This includes the geographical three corners known for some of the best barbecue in America; Kansas City to the West, Memphis to the South, in the crown position, the apex of the triangle, St. Louis, and all navigational points in between.

One of the mysteries, and one that is great fun trying to solve, is searching, finding, then enjoying traditional St. Louis style barbecue. For those not familiar with the historical significance of St. Louis Barbecue please visit [www.gatewaycitybbq.com](http://www.gatewaycitybbq.com) and read the account of the area's contribution to the world of this culinary delight.

St. Louis is much older than the two other major points in the triangle. Due to its age and ethnic makeup St. Louis developed its own style of barbecue long before Memphis and Kansas City were a twinkle in their founding father's eye. And unlike their two city counterparts, St. Louis traditions were developed out of backyard grilling and smoking.

Historically, if you were from Memphis or Kansas City, and you wanted to enjoy barbecue, you thought about going to The Rendezvous, Cozy Corners, The Bar-B-Q SHOP or Interstate BBQ. If you were from Kansas City you thought about Arthur Bryant's or Gates. But if you grew up in St. Louis, your thoughts didn't have to wonder beyond your own back yard.

St. Louis never developed those gastronomic institutions as Memphis or Kansas City. Whereas those two cities developed their own style of BBQ from commercial establishments, the ethnic communities in the City of St. Louis dictated which style of barbecue a local eater might favor.

The St. Louis area is famous for one question, "Where did you go to high school?" Why? Because St. Louisans consider their communities an important part of their soul and an important link in their heritage.

St. Louis style barbecue is no different. Depending upon where you grew up in the Gateway City, BBQ recipes have varied, but shared a common method on which it was cooked. For years this included cooking over direct heat on an open pit, then placing the meat in a pot of simmering BBQ sauce while, at the same time, one simmers in 110 degree St. Louis humidity.

Fast forwarding a few decades, St. Louisans now enjoy the new modern barbecue method of low and slow with secret rubs, zesty sauces on the side, and modern gas and electric smokers which take the guess work out of regulating temperature and smoke.

Locally, St. Louis is experiencing and enjoying a renaissance in barbecue culture. No more open pit and no more simmering. Low and slow is the name of the game now. The area has experienced an explosion of top quality barbecue restaurants. This writer has tried most of them, as well as many others in the Triangle, and to be perfectly honest, they are mostly, FANTASTIC.

But, having said this, for all those new southern style BBQ enthusiasts, you know, the low and slow style of smoking-usually dry with a secret spice rub-a reporter can search for a barbecue joint that still offers the open pit, traditional St. Louis style of barbecue.



Well, we found it - Phil's Barbecue on Gravois Road in St. Louis. **Hold it!** Before you go up in flames, let me tell you one thing. Say what you might about Phil's, but the establishment has stood the test of time. If you want to experience old time, traditional St. Louis style barbecue, Phil's has to be on your bucket list.



Phil's is quintessential St. Louis Style Barbecue. Folks, it's a landmark. Still housed in its 1950's circa brick building on Gravois Rd., with its built in brick fired barbecue pit, linoleum tiled floors, red checkerboard table cloths, and walls filled with celebrity patrons, Phil's is a St. Louis landmark. It still provides great, traditional St. Louis style open pit barbecue to those who remember and still enjoy their traditional past.

Comments on Phil's website signify the love for this style of barbecue. "The place was something out of a

time warp." "Yes sir, old style traditional BBQ, they serve the sauce warm and slathered over the meat."

"Why do they smother their ribs with sauce and not served on the side like everyone else?" "Seriously, the pulled pork sandwich was GREAT! The restaurant looks like something out of the 50's. But, who cares, it is great St. Louis style barbecue!"



***"Yes sir, old style traditional BBQ, they serve the sauce warm and slathered over the meat."***

Phil's is probably the last commercially established barbecue restaurant that offers traditional St. Louis style barbecue. When inside Phil's I would challenge you to describe the difference between Phil's and Arthur Bryant's in Kansas City, or The BBQ shop or Cozy Corners, or Interstate BBQ in Memphis. All these establishments are time tested, in original buildings, checkered table cloths, and offer traditional style barbecue.

While many young St. Louis barbecue lovers have probably never experienced traditional local style barbecue, and thanks to the Food Network (with their shows highlighting exotic rubs and sauces-and thousand dollar plus thermostatically controlled smokers), would probably never seek it out. The great local taste is right here. Right in our own back yard.

Sometimes some of the best barbecue is simple and to-the-point. Please consider heritage and tradition an important ingredient of good hometown barbecue. If you are from St. Louis, great barbecue begins with an open pit and a location close to home.