

Introduction

Marion Kane: Little purple berries – I've never seen them before.

Rob Firing: They're sometimes called Saskatoon berries and I'm going to warm them up in a frying pan and we'll have a few on the steak. They're not poisonous.

Marion & Rob: Laugh

Marion Kane: You're not going to feed me poison. That's a relief.

Theme Music

Marion Kane: Steak is a special food but many of us cook it wrong or simply stick to the same old cuts cooked the same old way. Perhaps it's time for a steak revolution. I'm Marion Kane, Food Sleuth®, and welcome to "Sittin' in the Kitchen®." Rob Firing is the author of *Steak Revolution*, a book to get us cooking lesser known cuts of beef in delicious new ways. Rob has worked in publishing for most of his life as a promoter and publicist first at Harper Collins and now at Transatlantic Agency. I met with Rob at his downtown Toronto home.

Theme Music

Interview

Marion Kane: I'm with Rob Firing, promoter, publicist, publishing guru and steak cook. I'm going to talk steak but first you talk about some celebrities in the publishing world.

Rob Firing: Oh, gosh. There have been 100s. I was J. K. Rowling's publicist, the Harry Potter author. That was quite a long time ago, like 20 years ago. Jamie Oliver – one of the many chefs that I got to know over the last decade.

Marion Kane: I've met him. He's adorable in my eyes.

Rob Firing: He's always given me a lot of respect. More than I thought I deserved. He's completely reasonable. He's a really nice guy. Charming, funny, likes to laugh, likes to make people laugh.

Marion Kane: Yeah. You've done two cookbooks?

Rob Firing: Yes, this one, *Steak Revolution* is my second cookbook. The first one is called *The Everyday Squash Cook* and that was really fun but this is really much more my passion. I've been cooking steak for a long time. I used to work in steak restaurants.

Marion Kane: The Keg.

Rob Firing: The Keg indeed, yes.

Marion Kane: We'll talk steak next, one of my favourite foods, but I have to get this out of the way. How do you deal with vegans – militant vegans?

Rob Firing: I don't know very many militant vegans, maybe none, but I would give them the respect they deserve for their position and the way I understand that position in general. I think they've taken it upon themselves to look at it as a moral position and that's admirable but it's a really personal thing. It's hard not to get personal when you're arguing for that position or against that. In my book I talk a lot about sustainable farming.

Marion Kane: How do you buy steak with that in mind?

Rob Firing: I have to make sure I know where it comes from. The steak comes from Sanagan's.

Marion Kane: In Kensington Market?

Rob Firing: Yes, and I know who he deals with. I've been to some of the farms that Peter Sanagan sources his beef from and it's important. It's important for many reasons. Cows are grass-eating specialists. They are exquisitely adapted to do that so if you feed them too much high-energy feed like corn or wheat or some other kind of processed feed too quickly then you're really going to make a cow sick and it's not going to taste too good. So really, grass is the way to go for most of the cow's life.

Marion Kane: Let's get to the subject *du jour* – steak. I had a talk with you about a year-and-a-half ago and you mentioned something to me that's changed my life. The reverse-sear method of cooking steak.

Rob Firing: I heard about this technique about a decade ago I guess to warm it gently at low temperatures to just under the temperature that you want to eat it at and then sear it quickly. As you sear the steak, you develop that crust. It's flawless because the steak is dried out on the surface and a crust forms very quickly and in that time on the hot pan, after the oven-warming. It gives you a lot of control. You don't really have to let it rest that much. So you can pretty much do that and cut it and serve it right away.

Marion Kane: I do it every steak I make. You say to salt it before cooking. How long before?

Rob Firing: Well I'm of a pretty salty school and if I have the opportunity I will salt a day before. I will salt it and put it back in the fridge.

Marion Kane: That's a no-no according to convention.

Rob Firing: I think that there is less consensus on that now and I think history is going to lean towards saltiness. It does draw moisture out of the steak but it's a kind of dry brining so the steak will reabsorb the moisture just like brining something in a salty bath. The reason you do that is for flavour for sure but also it helps the steak hold onto moisture.

Marion Kane: Okay Rob, we're going to go out of the kitchen into the garden.

Rob Firing: Yes. Out of the kitchen and into the fire – fire and smoke.

Marion Kane: (Laughs). Not literally I hope. Oh. There's a huge pot of basil out there. Everything's edible he says in this garden.

Rob Firing: There's the berry area. There's raspberries. There are blackberries. We're going to have some service berries. I'm going to warm them up in a pan and serve them on top of the steak with some scapes which I'll cut off from my garlic which is growing over here...

Marion Kane: Garlic scapes.

Rob Firing: Yes, there's some tarragon, there's some garlic chives, chives, tomatoes, kales. Lettuce is up top. There's mint everywhere. Thyme.

Marion Kane: Mint grows like a weed.

Rob Firing: It does and I use it all the time. Highly underrated.

Marion Kane: Let's look at the fire. It's a charcoal wood barbecue.

Rob Firing: Look how basic this is. It's basically ... this is something my brother was throwing away from his back lot so I took it from him and you know it's set into some rocks from the Canadian Shield that I took from the side of the highway one day when driving back from the cottage.

Marion Kane: It's a Weber taken off its stand.

Rob Firing: That's right. The cover sort of fell apart a long time ago so I stuck corks where the vent used to be. You'll see we're going to use this little tiny piece of pear wood over here and we're going to smoke it so it'll taste like the steak has been cooked over a smoky fire. Notice I've moved the coals to one side so I'm going to put steak on that side.

Marion Kane: The other side from the coals.

Rob Firing: That's right. It will cook up and then I'm going to put the wood on top of the coals on the other side and put the top on and you'll see how smoky it tastes.

Marion Kane: Is this the reverse sear method?

Rob Firing: Sort of. Some of the same stuff applies but really we're kind of roasting the steak. Roasting and grilling at the same time. Cooking it over indirect heat.

Marion Kane: When are we going to put the steak on?

Rob Firing: Right now.

Marion Kane: Oh. Right now. It's red-hot in the bottom of the coals.

Rob Firing: Yeah. You'll see what I'm going to do. I'm going to move to the other side here and we're going to put the wood on one side and the steak on the other side. This is just a stick of wood. It's really just... there's not that much to it. And you'll see how much this is going to flavour the steak and this chamber is going to be filled with the smoke of this pear wood. My neighbour has pear trees so I get his trimmings.

Marion Kane: Rob's snipping something off a plant.

Rob Firing: Yes. This is a scape, which I need to cut off anyway in order for the root of the garlic to grow but it's going to flavour our little pan sauce here that we're going to make.

Marion Kane: Okay. We're going to make a pan sauce. He's put a knob of butter, as Jamie Oliver says, a walnut-shaped amount of butter in a small iron skillet and he's chopping up the garlic scape fairly finely. I've never used garlic scapes.

Rob Firing: They're good. They taste, not surprisingly, like garlic.

Marion Kane: Oh. He's taken the lid off. How long do you think the steak will take?

Rob Firing: Let's take a look at it now and we'll take the temperature. I'm guessing this is about 90F right now. We'll just take a look.

Marion Kane: How often do you barbecue steak?

Rob Firing: A disturbingly frequent amount. Four or five times a week pretty much.

Marion Kane: You look pretty healthy on it.

Rob Firing: Well steak is good for you. If there was a marketer they'd call it a kind of a power because it's got everything in it except fibre even Vitamin C.

Marion Kane: What does it have in it? Protein? Iron?

Rob Firing: It has fats. It has saturated fats and there's new science now telling us that saturated fats are actually quite good. We need them. We can hearken back to that conversation we had a few minutes ago about grass-fed cows. Grass-fed cows have more nutritional content in their fat than non-grass-fed cows.

Marion Kane: Oh. The serviceberries are bubbling and sizzling in the pan. They're ready apparently. They've turned a nice burgundy colour. They were darker before. Oh. The steak. Mmm. This also proves the cooking adage "Practice, practice, practice." If I grilled steak four times a week I would become proficient.

Rob Firing: Well, it's practice for sure. There are things that I know that I won't even think of saying in the interview. That's why I wrote a book because a book you can sit down and contemplate and just remember things and try to get as many pieces of information down as possible. But attention -steak also demands your attention. It's not a food you

put on and leave. It's not like baking, right? It's different. You do have to watch it and give it some respect.

Marion Kane: It's high maintenance.

Rob Firing: It's 116 right now so at 117 I'll take it off in like 10 seconds. When we let it rest inside of the steak will probably go right up to even 135 but the outside of the steak which is hotter now as you can see it's already at 144 when you push that thermometer in the middle of the steak is cooler than the surface which is intuitive but when we take the steak off and let it rest that middle will get hotter than the outside so by conduction the heat diffuses throughout the steak so that's why it's important to let it rest.

Marion Kane: Do you like steak medium rare? I do.

Rob Firing: I like my steak just under medium rare. The French would call it *à point*. I take this off at, this is 119, and it will go up briefly into the 130s before resting just under 120° in the middle.

Marion Kane: It's a scientific operation. Oh, it looks amazing.

Rob Firing: So that's perfect. This is 121 in the thickest part of the middle of the steak.

Marion Kane: "Practice, practice, practice." Ah, it's 131.

Rob Firing: In the middle. This has been sitting on the cutting board away from the fire and remember how that surface was hotter now the surface is still a little bit hotter but you can see the surface is informing the centre of the steak. Just over medium rare but again it's because I'm cutting into it too fast. I should give it another couple of minutes but these slices look pretty good.

Marion Kane: Oh, he's putting serviceberries on top of each slice. That's a delight of sweet and savoury. It's very delicious, juicy and tasty and it...

Rob Firing: The garlic and the berries I think really make it pretty terrific.

Marion Kane: I wolfed that down because the combination of flavours were delicious. I'm going to take another piece. I like my job. And it has a smoky flavour. I can taste the smoke. That's a bonus.

Rob Firing: You use a little bit of wood along with your charcoal and cover up the steak while... let the wood start to burn and then cover the grill up with the hood of the grill or the lid and all it takes is just three or four minutes and you've really added a great extra dimension to your steak.

Marion Kane: I'm going to bite into the corn and I'm going to turn off the mic.

Theme Music

Conclusion

Marion Kane: That was my conversation with Rob Firing, author of *Steak Revolution*. Learn more at missionsteak.com. I'm Marion Kane, Food Sleuth®. You can find more stories like this one at marionkane.com and in Apple Podcasts. Thank you for listening.

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