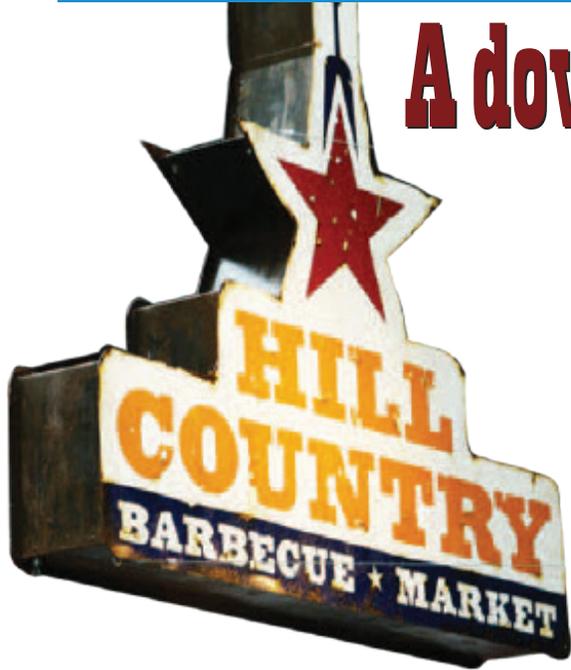


A down-home cuisine goes urbane

Two NY BBQ concept operators discuss growth in Northeast



NEW YORK – Barbecue once found its fans in small country venues in the Midwest, South or Southwest. Not so today.

The 2014 New York Zagat guide lists nearly 30 individual restaurants where barbecue lovers can find their bliss. From Dinosaur to Blue Smoke, Virgil's, Hill Country and Wildwood, barbecue 'joints' are growing in popularity.

BBQ is a destination, consultant Arlene Spiegel declares, predicting continued growth

At Hill Country BBQ and Hill Country, food service consultant Arlene Spiegel, FCSI, of Arlene Spiegel & Associates, whose motto is "Setting The Table For Success," was asked to create a concept for national rollout and came up with barbecue. "We traveled to Texas to study 'cue," she says.

"Hospitality consulting is about creating branded memorable concepts. This concept's owner had roots in Texas and couldn't find good smoked brisket in the Northeast. We created a concept that would be viable in New York. Barbecue is a destination. When you want it, you plan on it. In Texas, it's not in great locations. You have to know about it or hear about it by word of mouth. That became our marketing strategy. When the customer gets there, it's because they want to be there."

She brought in Sam David, "a great pitmaster." Bringing BBQ to New York became an adventure. The team wanted table service but Spiegel argued that "the real experience is standing in line, talking to the pitmaster." Today, she says, "we have 250 to 300 people waiting in line." Hill Country Chicken, a spin-off second concept, also flourished and more recently opened a second outlet in Brooklyn.

The challenges include "getting the particulars right – the wood, the dry rub, dealing with EPA, the smoke issue, complying with codes and dealing with enormous crowds. We didn't expect hundreds and at first, we'd run out of food."

The accolades, she says, were a thrill. "We were voted one of the best by The Wall Street Journal." Hill Country's founder, Marc Glossner, grew up in Lockhart, TX, a small town viewed as the BBQ capital of the state. His entrepreneurial background led to creating what he loved when he realized he had to bring "central Texas BBQ to New York." A second restaurant opened this year in Brooklyn and is doing very well. "As a category, BBQ is expanding," he declares.

