



Jane and Michael Stern's ROADFOOD

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Bobby Q's menu describes the pork as "famous" and the beef as "not quite famous yet."

We are not betting on the beef – it doesn't have the succulence of Bobby Q's pulled pork shoulder. It is sliced thin and it is a little lean to glisten the way flaps of four-star barbecued beef usually do, although an application of peppery hot sauce fixes it up mighty nice. The pork benefits from sauce, too, but not because it needs it. It is opulent meat, worked into big tender shreds and lots of crusty outside pieces that fairly glow with flavor. With a bit of sauce, it is just about perfect.

Sweet barbecued beans and coleslaw accompany meat if you order a Barbequed Plate, but it is worth paying extra and replacing the standard "New Slaw" with "Poolroom Slaw," a mighty hot concoction with its own kind of sauce that is made from a recipe an old Pittman in Nashville. Catfish can be ordered boneless and filleted, which is easy to eat and very unfishy, or as a couple of whole (but headless) fiddlers on the bone. Catfish meat is easy to pick off the skeleton, and the meat from the whole ones (two to an order) is heavy with juice and high flavored. It is sheathed in a thin, crisp crust and accompanied by a couple of spherical hushpuppies. Bobby Q's is a dramatic exception to the rule that barbeque restaurants serve drab desserts. Every day there is something different – a multi-tiered cake, and icebox pie, or if you are very, very lucky, banana pudding. Striations of whipped crème and threads of buttery brown sugar are veined through silken yellow custard and heaped together with crumbled vanilla wafers and bananas. The gentleness of this bakery dish is an inspired conclusion to a meal of torrid barbeque. In our book, it is one of the great desserts in all the South.