



## Restaurant

# Hang Fire Smokehouse

Cardiff's obsession with American BBQ-style food shows no signs of letting up, but you'd be hard-pushed to find anyone doing it better than these guys, says HUGO BALL. Photos by OWEN MATHIAS

**F**or the last year or more, it seems like each time you ask people in Cardiff for their favourite places to eat, there seems to be one type of food on everyone's lips: BBQ. Meaty, proper American-style fare. It feels like there's a BBQ restaurant, diner or pop-up around every corner, promising as much charred meat and ribs as you can cram into your mouth; everyone's at it, from The Smoke House in Pontcanna to new boys The Smoke Haus and Feather & Bone in the city centre. But there seems to be one particular hangout currently packing in punters like no other: Hang Fire Smokehouse, currently in the midst of its latest pop-up residency at The Pilot in Penarth.

They've been on our radar for a while. Driven by a burgeoning reputation built mostly on local word of mouth, the escalating hype around HSF seems have reached almost hysterical levels.

As with all good things, it began with an obsession. HFS founders Sam Evans and Shauna Guinn, hooked on the notion of American BBQ, take their food very seriously indeed. This is no passing fad for the pair – they're so committed to the cause that they even travelled around the US a couple of years ago in the name of research, to find out just what 'authentic American BBQ' really is: for six months, they slavishly attended

**“The HF Holy Trinity – pulled pork, brisket, Texas sausage – is well worth the ensuing meat sweats”**

masterclasses, embraced pearls of wisdom from backyard and competition barbecuers alike and, most importantly, sampled as much BBQ fare as possible – all to help them learn the alchemy of 'slow 'n' low' cooking. Their adventures saw them cook for a rodeo in Houston (50 briskets, 300 chickens and



500 racks of spare rib!) and learn secret spice rub secrets that they have allegedly sworn to 'take to the grave'.

Having experienced all the major State variations, and long since returned to Wales with smoker in tow, HFS has smouldered into life, employing the various techniques and recipes the girls picked up on their road trip. Everything (rubs, sides, sauces etc) is made from scratch, and we're promised locally sourced meat, smoked slowly and gently in their barbecue pit, using a blend of hickory and fruit woods, which apparently imparts the most fantastic depth of flavour.

But that's enough preamble. You're getting hungry, right?

As we approach The Pilot on a Thursday night, the signs are looking good; the place is packed, inside and out. Demand for HFS food is so high, people happily queue, and many of its Thursday night tables are booked

in advance, with space for a few walk-ins. It must be good – the HFS gals even cooked for Dolly Parton and crew at their Cardiff gig this summer; they loved it, so we're told.

The O-man and I are tempted to go the whole hog – literally – and snaffle everything on the menu, but end up sharing a few plates instead; the food arrives, all piping hot and begging to be devoured. Silence descends as we dig in.

Lordy, it's good: the half-rack of St Louis pork spare ribs, all smoky, salty and sweet, with meat that just falls off the bone; the Brunswick stew, a rich, tomatoey Southern BBQ favourite made with applewood smoked rabbit. And the Hang Fire Holy Trinity – pulled pork, beef brisket and a beef/pork/Texas hot link sausage – is worth enduring the 3am meat sweats any night of the week. Throw in a few moreish sides (delicious slaw, BBQ beans, seasoned fries, crunchy pickles) and you're done.

After such a wonderful artery-clogging feast, there's no hope of a pud, but if you are tempted – God help you – then The Pilot's blackboard menu should see you right. We were on the verge of food coma by that point, so specifics are rather blurry. Anyway, when the savouries are as good and filling as this, who the heck needs dessert?

The pop-up at The Pilot finishes on 27 November. Book a table **right now**. **CL**

### Visiting details

#### Opening hours

Thursday nights only, 5.30pm to 9.30pm

Prices BBQ mains from £10, sides from £3 each

BBQ sandwiches £5

Child-friendly? Absolutely!

Vegetarian choice They do a haloumi burger in a bakery bun, with North American pickled relish (Chow-Chow)

Wine list Good choice of The Pilot's beers and wines

Service/atmos Quick, friendly service; great atmos

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