

# Cowboy Cuisine

If Texas to you is a John Wayne matinee and smoke barbecue sauce, a visit to Perini Ranch Steakhouse in Buffalo Gap is overdue. Let's face it, Perini's is as Texas as it gets.

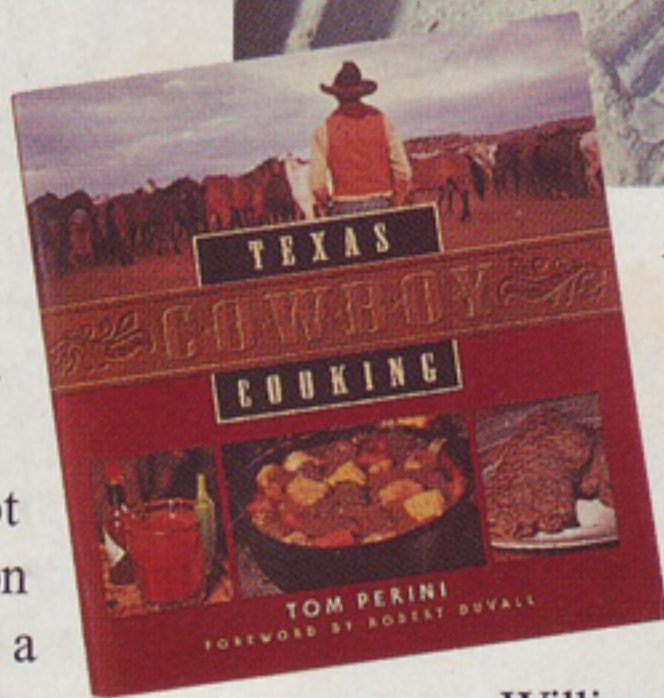
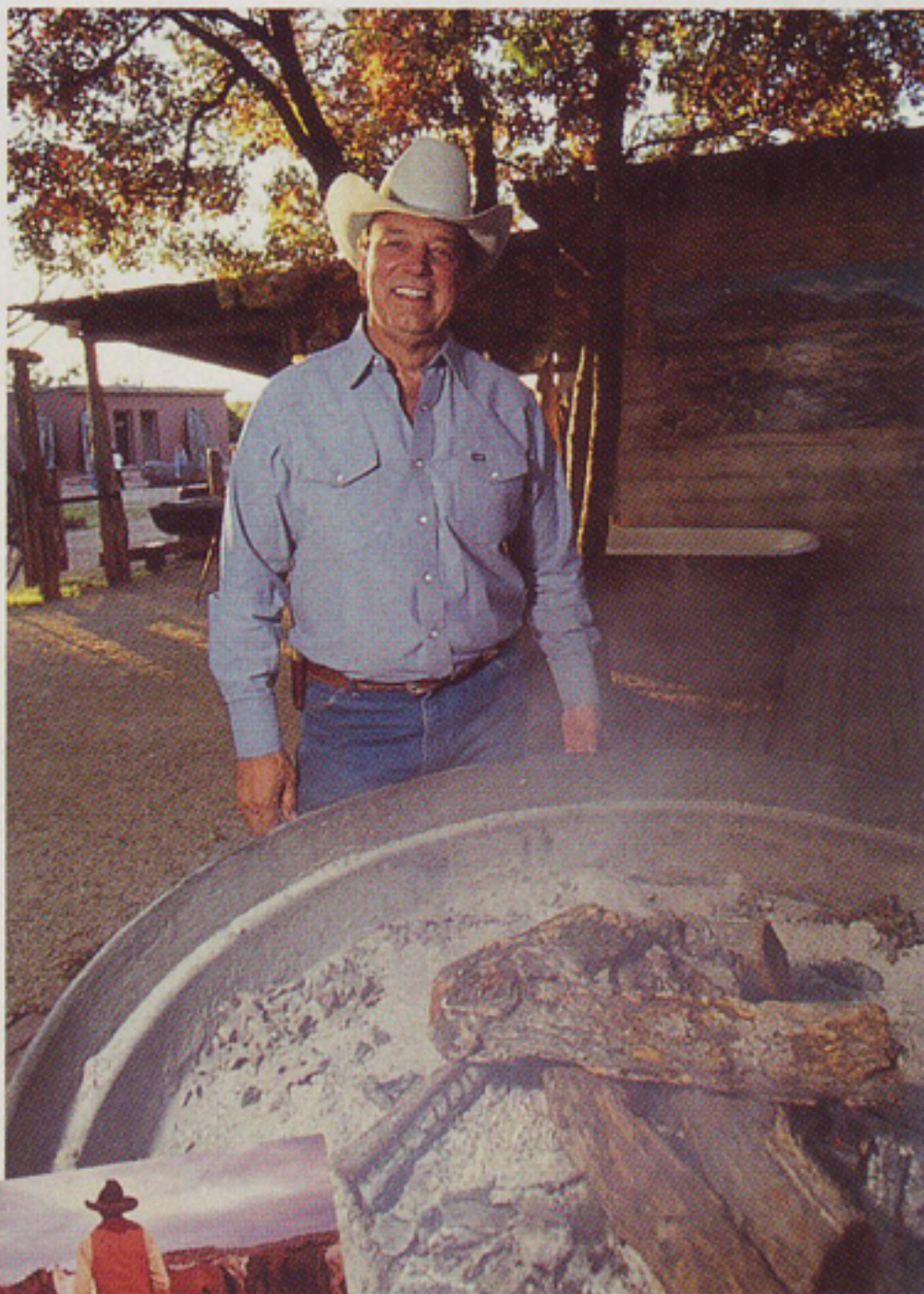
Perini Ranch sits on a dirt road in the shadow of the Callahan Divide. The restaurant, a converted haybarn, encircles a rustic stone fireplace and is shaded by weepy mesquite trees. Diners rest on worn, wooden benches and mismatched chairs. People adore the atmosphere, but they really come for the grub. The beef is prime, the biscuits fluffy, and the vegetables straight from the garden. And when it's all served, the plates are full, as is your stomach when you leave.

An authentic spot to catch live music on weekends, it boasts a pure-country setting.

But there's more. Owner Tom Perini, a native of Buffalo Gap, received his not-so-traditional chef training by cooking for the cowhands on the ranch where he grew up. "When people ask me where I got my education, I tell them I got it from the cowboys saying, 'You need more salt in the beans,'" says Tom in his Southern drawl that's as thick as a hearty porterhouse.

Tom began ranching on the property in 1965 and started a catering business eight years later. He opened his steakhouse on the family ranch in 1983. "This is a small, mom-and-pop operation. I think that's the appeal. I didn't do anything to make this place more Texas. I just opened the doors."

And thus is the introduction of a country cuisine legend. Since then, Tom has been a magnet for success. In 1995, his mesquite-smoked peppered beef tenderloin was named by *The New York Times* as the year's best mail-order food gift. Today you can find it in



A former rancher and now renowned chef, Tom Perini gives away his cooking secrets in his new cookbook.

the Neiman Marcus and Williams-Sonoma, Inc. catalogs and aboard Northwest airlines.

Lucky for us, Tom isn't stingy when it comes to his tricks of the trade. He kicked off the year 2000 with the release of *Texas Cowboy Cooking*, a cookbook that shares Tom's favorite dishes and drinks. "I season the old-time way: garlic, salt, pepper, butter. All you need are the things you already have in your pantry," he says. Actor Robert Duvall wrote the foreword in the cookbook, blessing it with his stamp of approval. He first ate at Perini with Clint Eastwood after filming a movie nearby. Like many other diners, he enjoys everything from the steaks to the bread pudding.

Now you can try to make your own. But the originals are hard to beat.

**Perini Ranch Steakhouse:** State Park Road/Farm Road 89, Buffalo Gap, TX; (915) 572-3339 or 1-800-367-1721. *Texas Cowboy Cooking* is available from Time Life for \$24.95. ◇

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**SEE PAGE 58**

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