



*Evans cooking shrimp and tasso filé gumbo (see recipe on p.156) at Hang Fire Southern Kitchen, the barbecue restaurant she and Guinn own in South Wales.*

and charged a small fortune. But the enthusiasm that drove Evans and Guinn to leave successful jobs in London was as blind to riches as it was to their being female. This same enthusiasm sent them on a quest across America learning about fire pits, then propelled them back to a pub in Cardiff, armed with a smoker and some locally sourced, 28-day-aged pork, and ultimately resulted in their winning the *Observer Food Monthly* Best Restaurant Award.

‘We knew meat was male dominated, we knew barbecue was male dominated – we knew the restaurant industry was male dominated,’ laughs Guinn. ‘It didn’t matter to us.’ In part, that came ‘off the back of our positions before – Sam in a high-level advertising industry, me in the world of policy and academia.’ It didn’t matter to them – and yet there’s no denying the reason Guinn and Evans were so successful in gleaning advice from southern barbecue chefs was because they were women; because ‘never in a million years did those chefs think these two ladies would go back to Wales and set up a barbecue restaurant. They took us out the back, encouraged us to take photos – and were happy to spill the beans because they never thought we were serious,’ Guinn laughingly acknowledges; and when the pair established the pub-based pop-up that became Hang Fire Southern Kitchen, they drew as many female customers as male.

‘Women love this style of food – they just don’t want the bullshit of tattooed, lumberjack-shirted, top-knot masculinity that comes with it,’ Evans observes. In Hayward’s review, he went one step further, attributing the flavour of the food itself to the pair’s femaleness: ‘He claimed our food had a lightness of touch he had never tasted in barbecue before, and put it down to a sort of feminine sensibility,’ Guinn recalls proudly. Their spicing is delicate; their touch is ‘deft,’ says Evans – whether because they are female or not, she couldn’t say, ‘but we don’t cut corners. Our kitchen is not a place for anyone with an arrogant “that’ll do” approach.’ Yet while Hang Fire has thrived, with nearly every single evening booked out for five years, the barbecue bias towards men continues to linger.

‘I think it’s a hangover from dads barbecuing,’ sighs Guinn – for while the gender politics of other foods are moving on, barbecue remains determinedly in the back garden, burning burgers. ‘We had three BBC series, an *OFM* award and a BBC Food and Farming award. Yet I honestly don’t think Sam is considered in the same light as the male barbecue chefs today.’ At Meatopia, London’s annual barbecue festival, they see a chance to deliciously redress this: ‘I take an all-female team – and every year we go bigger and better,’ Evans grins. ‘It’s my annual opportunity to put two fingers up at the male barbecue establishment.’

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