

**Aurelio Torres**  
Mi Madre's—Austin, Texas

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Southern Foodways Alliance  
&  
American Studies Department  
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Group Members:  
Marvin Bendele

**[BEGIN INTERVIEW]**

**00:00:00**

**Marvin Bendele:** Hi, this is Marvin Bendele, and I'm at Mi Madre's Restaurant in Austin, Texas. It's November 8, 2007, and I'm here with Mr. Aurelio Torres, the owner of Mi Madre's. And Mr. Torres, could you please just say your name and your birth date and I'll test the levels on our—on our equipment here.

**Aurelio Torres:** OK, My name is Aurelio Torres and, um, my birthday is May twelfth, forty-nine.

**MB:** OK, thank you very much. We should be set. So, Mr. Torres, just to get us started, can you talk about kind of a little bit of your family history, where you guys are from, how you got here, if you've always been here, anything like that? And then we'll get into the business a little bit.

**AT:** We're basically—we're from Saltillo, Coahuila. We left, and my wife and I—we're both from there and we have all our relatives living, and all our families living there. And, that's where we were raised. Not born—well, I was born in Texas, but since I was a very little boy, baby actually, they took me down to Mexico, because my mom was from Mexico and she wanted to live there in Saltillo, all of my life.

**MB:** So, do you still have a lot of family there?

**AT:** Oh, everybody's there, all my brothers, all of my sisters, my—my in-laws, all living in Saltillo.

**MB:** And that is on the northern side of Mexico, right?

**AT:** Yes, yes, it is on the northern side of Mexico about—it is close to Monterrey, about fifty, sixty miles from Monterrey, so it's really close.

**MB:** Where were you born?

**AT:** I was born in, uh, actually in the valley, the Rio Grande valley—Raymondville—Raymondville, Texas.

**MB:** Oh, OK, and how long have you and your wife been in Austin, or in Texas?

**AT:** Sure, we came here in 1988 from Saltillo. Ah, we decided that we wanted to—to move over here because I learned English, you know, when I was a teenager. So, I was going, “I feel like coming back to the States because I was born in the United States, well, from here.” So we decided to move here basically because of all the nice, beautiful trees, laid back city, we loved it. We loved—this is our city.

**MB:** Yeah, it's a different kind of landscape than you find in even south Texas and into northern Mexico, right? I mean, there's not as many trees down there? Most of them are mesquites, right?

**AT:** Most of the mesquite, yeah, it's a more desolated country—actually bare, and so we love all these trees. Yes, go ahead.

**MB:** So did you guys—I know your daughters, I talked to them, they worked—or at least one of your daughters I've talked to worked here, but how long have you guys owned the place? Did you move straight to Austin, I guess, and did you open the place as soon as you got here? Give me a little bit of history on that?

**AT:** Yeah, well, no I came—basically somebody offered me a job. It was a big company called Chuy's Mexican Restaurant. They were starting to—the business being open for about three or four years, and they started to have some problems. So I say, "Well, I'll help you." I had been in management for some time in Mexico, so I know. I know, you know, about basic *[indiscernible]* problems. And I come in, and I stayed there with them a couple of years, and then I decided to open my own business. So I came here, and I found out about—I wanted to live close to the University of Texas. And, so I found this place, I was lucky enough, nobody wanted it, so I say, "I'll take it." Little did I know that it was going to be such a huge success.

**MB:** And what was the reasoning in being close to the University of Texas?

**AT:** I wanted to—I wanted to be around, surrounded by students, people who are more—actually more knowledgeable. I come from Saltillo and it's—we have a large university base also. And you see a lot of students, a lot of people that are very smart. So I wanted to be surrounded by that. That was one of my main reasons—I wanted to learn from the best, actually, and being

surrounded by the best, you know, the students of the University of Texas, I decided that this was the place.

**MB:** Kind of a little slice of home, I guess, being surrounded by the university, so. So I guess, you started out with Chuy's managing the restaurant?

**AT:** Correct. I was a kitchen manager there for a couple of years. And I decided they no longer needed my help. So, I decided I'd, you know, move. I wanted to move on, and really open my own place. I felt that—one of the reasons at that time was that most of the restaurants that were selling tacos were, I mean, they're really weren't very good at all. So I decided I can do better than that. You know, cause I came from a place in Mexico where it's—we're the king of tacos, and I said I can do better tacos than that, you know. So I decided I'll open my own place selling tacos. And that was the reason that I came here.

**00:05:04**

**MB:** And, Chuy's is a chain. Was it back then as well? And, I guess I wonder if that has anything to do with the style of taco that they produce?

**AT:** Actually, they don't sell tacos, they—all they have is some kind of tacos, but nothing like what I have. And, they have a good system in the—in everything else that they have. At that time they wasn't a chain, they only have a couple of, well, they have a couple of restaurants. They opened the second one when I decided to—when they decided to hire me because they need—they need—they were short handed. So that's—that's the reason that I came to help them. And, they offered me the job. I'm very happy—I'm very happy that I started with them.

**MB:** So did you start doing that as soon as you got here in 1988? Is that when—

**AT:** Correct, yes, that was my first job—freshly coming from Saltillo. And I just came in, get off from the bus, and the second day I was working for Chuy's.

**MB:** So when did you open Mi Madre's then?

**AT:** Mi Madre's was opened in 1990—1990—July 1990. Yes.

**MB:** And, was this—just to, kind, of get an idea of the building. I noticed that there's a—is this a home attached back here? And, was this all here, or did you build on to it?

**AT:** It was here. It wasn't in the condition that it is right now, and, of course, I rebuilt and remodeled it, and, you know, make it larger. And what that—it didn't have a patio. I built out the back room. I built out—it was only the front, the front that you're seeing right now. So I started going that way, and—make it better, you know, for, the condition for the customers. And, as I went along, I wanted the building just to resemble something that I was living in in Mexico.

**MB:** Well I guess, let's go ahead and, do you have anything else to talk about on that, because I think what I want to do is get to the focus and hear, what we're going to talk about today, the barbacoa. And I guess, let's just start off real quick, can you tell me—how you've grown up

preparing barbacoa? Just kind of run me through the process of what you consider barbacoa to be.

**AT:** Yes, indeed, barbacoa is like your yearly celebration of Thanksgiving here. We do that pretty much every day—every day. For us, it is a Thanksgiving everyday. We—that was a family gathering also, celebrations. We don't do turkeys, but we do barbacoa. We don't do roast beef; we do barbacoa. Basically because that's the easiest way for us to—to cook our meat, in a way. It's got it's own system to do it, but mainly it was celebration. You have a celebration, a family celebration, a gathering, and they expect you to serve barbacoa. And if you do, they'll be coming back to you. And that's what you wanted; you wanted that relationship with the family, the gatherings. And they love you, and of course, we were very happy. We're very—we need the family together, and we wanted to talk on the weekends, and that was—that was our main deal, to make barbacoa. Barbacoa is—at that time we made it in—we put it on the dirt soil. We built a, a hole, actually, but it's got it's own measurements. You cannot just build any hole. You've got to be—that's different techniques for building it. You got to know those techniques. One of those techniques, you have got to make sure there's not a sewer close by—to begin with. Also, or any pipes, or any caves surround it, because the heat tends to go away if you're not careful where you make your hole, where you're going to cook the barbacoa, it will not come out as good. It will be wrong. So, once you do that, it's got different measurements, and, basically, it's like one meter by one—about ninety centimeters square. Or around—a diameter—and by about a meter, which is about three feet down—down. And, usually, you are very careful where you, make the—say—make the hole. And then, what you do, you surround it with—on the bottom, you put on the bottom the blue rock. The blue rock is a round rock that are in the rivers. I don't know if you are

familiar with that kind of rock. It's the ones that usually you find on the rivers from the bottom. And—it's the one that goes, you know, with the water, that moves with—

**MB:** Sure, yeah, I think I know—

**AT:** I don't know what you call it. We call it the blue rock.

**MB:** Right, OK—

**AT:** But it's kind of roundish, and you pick up medium size pieces. I would say somewhere like maybe six—that's about six inches—six inches, somewhere around there. So they're big round rocks. You put them on the bottom, and then, and you build it up a little bit to the top of the sides. That's how you build your—that's going to be your base.

**00:10:22**

**MB:** With the rock on the sides?

**AT:** With the rock on the sides too. As much as you can, kind of, going around like that. Build it maybe a foot higher. And that's where you're going to lay your meat. Now, you don't lay your meat just by itself. What you do is—hmmm, you first you build up your fire. You put a lot of firewood. We prefer, sometimes, with the mesquite to heat up the rocks. And you heat up as much to see them red. So, that they'll—so that's going to be your fire base, or your heat base.

**MB:** The rocks themselves are red?

**AT:** The rocks themselves. Yes, when you hear them, they start cracking, the rocks, because all the heat—they're almost ready.

**MB:** OK.

**AT:** And, usually, basically you do that when it's getting dark, because you're going to usually wait and do it at night, in the evening. Like somewhere around six, seven p.m. you start building your fire and you start getting—getting it hot, real hot. And I'm talking about inside the hole. Once you do that, you take all the – extract all the—whatever didn't get burned. All your firewood, you don't leave any because you don't want to smoke the meat.

**MB:** Oh, OK.

**AT:** OK, so you do not leave anything—anything that will make smoke. What you want is the hot rocks. So you have got to have, like, your tools—proper tools to make sure you reach in because you don't want to do it with your hands. It's too hot.

**MB:** How do you get all the—it's ash by then, right?

**AT:** Ash by then, yes. Actually, it's all right. You don't have to pick up everything. All you do is—something that will smoke.

**MB:** Oh, OK.

**AT:** That it, will be smoldering, in other words.

**MB:** So, the ash is fine to leave. It's just—do you just—

**AT:** The ash is fine, the ash is fine. Now, there are different meats you can use. In the North, we only use beef: a beef head, the tongue, the cheeks, the lips, the ox lips. And, so it depends. You go in the South, they will use: lamb, ram, or I don't know what—

**MB:** Is that cabrito?

**AT:** Cabrito, yeah, but the big kid goat. The big goat. They use that. That's in the South. We don't, we don't like it. In the North, we don't like it.

**MB:** What's the reasoning? Why do you—does it just taste different?

**AT:** It is the taste, the taste. The taste is more like, is more like, wild taste to us. So the beef for us is the, you know—you put the whole head in it, and in Mexico, I think, some of them have still the brains in it. Here in the United States, they take the brains off, but in Mexico they keep the brains. So they—we cook the whole head with brains and everything. It is a delicacy. But, let's go back. You build your fire—your heat—heat all the rocks and then—by then, you start

preparing because you're going to leave it for a little while to get all—this is a process, probably takes about a couple of hours by the time you're done. And your hole is ready with enough heat. Then what you do in the meantime, you're washing your—the head, or the cheeks, or any part of the beef, actually. You can do any part of the beef. But we do the cheapest cuts, which are the toughest ones and that's one of the—one of the reasons the meat tastes so good. I just gave you some barbacoa to taste. And that is ox lips that we use here.

**MB:** What part of the—cattle is that?

**AT:** That's the head.

**MB:** Oh, it is part of the—

**AT:** It is the—it is the lips of the head.

**MB:** OK, it is the lips.

**AT:** Of the cow—of the ox. And that is—it is a delicacy, when you're doing it right. It's really not complicated at all. You wash it; make sure it's real clean.

**MB:** So, somebody's washing it while you're making the hole, getting it hot—is it a certain person in your family that would do it? Or is it a kind of a family—

**AT:** No, no, you can do it. It's actually a one-person situation. Yes, it's a one person, mostly because we don't want to share this with a lot of people [*Laughter*]. Actually, I'm giving away the secrets of the pozo—barbacoa de pozo. But, I mean anyway, it is, you know, it is kind of like a religious situation right there where you know, you are like, man, you get some barbacoa and you are going to feel so proud because you are going to be so happy that people are enjoying that. And, it is something that you do with pride. So, once you have someone—or you can do it yourself—wash, washing the head. The head they sell it by itself; it is clean already. And you can buy extra tongues, in case you have a lot of people, you can do the extra tongues. A lot of people like the tongue separate when it's cooked. So I say, "Give me one of a tongue, and another one from cheeks—cheeks meat. I want lips." And so, you know, different people like different parts. Oh, and the eyes, don't forget the eyes. The eyes are very fatty. They are delicious. It's a delicacy also. Very few people have tasted them. They don't know what they're missing. They're *real* good. You take out the pupil. The pupil is not eaten—you cannot eat that. But you take it off and, and everything else—the ball of the eye is real tender—it falls apart. But it is very fatty, but it is so good.

**00:16:01**

**MB:** So, is—so say you're doing this for your family or just some close friends and stuff, and you have one head and extra tongues, who gets to eat the eyeballs?

**AT:** You're very picky who—because they—actually, people reserve those.

**MB:** Ah, OK.

**AT:** Yeah, and so the one that has the highest authority will say, “You save me—one eye for me.”

**MB:** *[Laughs]*

**AT:** And he—and the other eye is for the one who cooks it, if he wants it because it—like I say, it is a delicacy. There’s only two eyes for your head, so there’s not too many of them *[Laughs]*. So anyway, but going back to the procedure of cooking the meat. You wash the meat and then you can use two things. We—usually, we use a burlap sack, a clean burlap sack where we put all the meat, and, we also put it on foil, to cover the burlap sack. And then you go ahead and—I’m going to go ahead with the way we cook it in the North. Then I can—well, I will go back and tell you how they cook it in the South because there’s two ways to do it.

**MB:** OK.

**AT:** The one way, we—we put, like, on top of the rocks, we’re going to put our burlap sack with foil on the bottom and we cover the whole meat. And when, before you cover it, you’re going to put some of that, I don’t know what they call it because it’s a—it’s a plant. It’s called maguey, I believe it’s maguey. I don’t know what they call it here. But it’s a big leaf from—it’s a cacti.

**MB:** Yes.

**AT:** Huge, I don’t know if you’re familiar with it.

**MB:** I am. I'm not sure what the English version of it would be but—

**AT:** Yeah, I'm sorry, I don't know.

**MB:** That's fine. I can look it up later. But it's m-a-g-u-e-y, or something?

**AT:** Yes, correct, the maguey. And what you do is, first, you, of course, you cut them, the big leaves, and then you roast those before you put them on. You roast them, burn them actually, so that way you can—they'll be able to—they'll be pliable because they're real hard. But when you roast them, you kind of burn them and then they're real pliable. At the same time, you kill everything that might be on the leaf that you don't want on your meat. Because they're going to be from the bottom, like, making like an X on the bottom, or covered over the whole thing, the rocks. And they're going to be covering all the burlap sack. And the uses of that plant are going to go—are part of the ingredients that give it flavor to the meat. Of course, all you use is salt. You don't put garlic or anything, just salt and those leaves. That's it. You cover it real good. And then, what you're going to be doing, you're going to be covering—and of course you put foil—cover it real good, because you're going to throw dirt on top of that. Cover the hole again. And then you put like—you can build a little fire on top to keep predators away from your meat. You're going to, you know, you are in the outskirts. So of course, dogs might come later on, and you know, in the morning before you get up. And you won't find any meat. But we build a fire on top just to keep predators away.

**MB:** OK.

**AT:** But not a lot of people do it—but, you know, I used to do that. And that way, I can get up late, and, you know, it will be safe *[Laughs]*.

**MB:** Well, OK—I'm trying to—so, how do you say the leaves again? It's—

**AT:** Leaves? Maguey.

**MB:** Maguey. OK. So, they are basically surrounding the whole burlap sack that has the meat inside of it.

**AT:** Yes. You surround it, make like a cradle with all those leaves that are going to protect your meat. And then on top of that, of course, like I say, you're going to put the foil because that way it will protect it from the—from the dirt that you're going to put on top of that.

**MB:** OK, OK. So—

**00:19:57**

**AT:** That way it protects—it keeps the heat in there, inside the hole, and it will cook it over night. It takes—it's a process that takes about eight to ten hours. Like, you do it somewhere—basically, you do it somewhere around eight, nine, so by the next morning, around seven or eight in the morning, and the barbacoa is ready to go.

**MB:** Is it, is it something that you do, obviously you do it overnight—but do you—do you have friends come over and you guys hang out and—or—

**AT:** Yes, well they'll be ready in the morning, like around nine in the morning and everybody's going to be there because they know. Especially the ones, the ones that want to eat the eye—he'll be the first one to get there.

**MB:** *[Laughs]*.

**AT:** And, by then, of course, they're going to be sharing, bringing some tortillas, and some of them are going to make the hot sauce, which is another part of the barbacoa process also—pico de gallo and anything else that they want to bring in. But basically all you need is the barbacoa and the tortillas because it really makes a lot of meat. It really makes a lot of meat.

**MB:** So—what, aside from—obviously the cook gets the—where you said the cook gets one of the eyes, and you said the one with the most authority gets the other eye. How do you determine who has the most authority? Is it by age? Or—

**AT:** It's probably my wife *[Laughs]*. Yeah, that's probably, or, or your mother, if she likes it. Or my mother—at that time, my mother loved eyes. That's the only part that she liked. Or your father, or your grandparents. You know, so you decide which one. And not everybody likes them, but the ones who like them, they tell you that's the best thing of the barbacoa.

**MB:** So, if you had a special guest coming over that—and they—no?

**AT:** No, no way, no, no, no he won't get the eyes *[Laughs]*.

**MB:** All right, all right. Well—so how did you learn the process?

**AT:** It's a family tradition. Pretty much everybody in Mexico—well no, I wouldn't say everybody, but a lot of people love—know how to make barbacoa. Every morning, at every corner in Saltillo, you'll find barbacoa sellers. And you find different styles, but basically all pretty much cooked the same, but some of them make it a lot better. You know, I define my barbacoa. I like it fresh, most of the time, I like it fresh. I like it not greasy, not very greasy. And usually when you go—and I dare you, next time that you go find barbacoa somewhere, they're going to give you a dark piece of meat, you know, pieces of meat that is kind of very, very greasy. And they call it barbacoa. That's not barbacoa. That's frozen barbacoa that has been there probably for the past six months. But that's—you know, I mean, not everybody can afford or knows how to do it here in the States. So—so, they do the best they can.

**MB:** Well, so just to clarify the cuts of meat—obviously, you were talking about the head is one way. And, but you said other—it's not really—barbacoa is more of a process instead of a particular dish, right? I mean, so, do you do the brisket or the skirt steak?

**AT:** You can do just about any cut. I—my preference—and this is what you need—you need to make sure, it's got to have grease. Because the grease is going to act as—to protect the meat so it

won't dry out. Otherwise you're going to end up with a dry piece of meat that it won't be very good. So, like, for instance, I pull an example: you try to make just cheeks of the beef. They're going to come out real dark because they don't have any fat at all. So you put the pieces that have the—the greasy spots on top, They'll be basting—or, or, what do you call that? Basting the whole meat, like—

**MB:** So it kind of drips down?

**AT:** Drips down, correct. And everything's going to stay on the—on the—you know, on the bottom.

**MB:** And now you said that there are—are there different styles in Saltillo?

**AT:** In Saltillo, basically, pretty much everybody does it the same. But the process of cooking the meat will be different. Some people will have it more greasy; some more like me. I like it kind of lean. But I like it moist. It's got to be moist. It's got to be tender, the flavor good. I don't like dark barbacoa. I like it kind of brownish, kind of like you just tasted. That's—that's the barbacoa.

**MB:** What turns it—how does it turn black?

**AT:** It turns black because it's been overcooked, one. And then, it's staying in the freezer too long. It's—they're feeding you last month's barbacoa.

**MB:** So that's what you were talking about a minute ago, with the frozen?

**AT:** Yes, yes. They're killing it, microwaving it. You know, you've got to reheat it, on maybe like in a bag in boiling water. You put those bags in the boiling water and heat it up that way. So, it's a process.

**00:25:10**

**MB:** You mentioned you were going to talk about the—what they do in the south—

**AT:** Yes.

**MB:** And you don't have to go through the whole process, but what is different about it?

**AT:** Oh, they use different cuts of meat, like, say, they use goat and lamb. We don't like it. But there's a process for that. And it's much—it's a little bit different. The cuts will be pretty much the same, but see, the goats, they have little heads. So they do the heads, but they do the whole goat.

**MB:** Ah—

**AT:** The whole goat, as opposed to just the head of beef, pieces of meat. And what they do is pretty much the same way you—you know, the process of making the hole and wrapping the meat. The only thing that they do different—they say, anything that drips down, they put like a

little pan on the bottom and then they put a rack. On top of the rack, they put the leaves, the maguey leaves. And then they put the meat inside, like, I say, put it in the middle of all the leaves, wrap them around. And on top of that they put the stomach of the beef—on top of that. They call it—let me see, I wrote it down. They have a—[sounds of Mr. Torres looking through papers]—they—the whole stomach is like a bag. And they put all the—all the inside pieces of the intestines and the liver of the goat. And they chop them up and fill that—the bag of the stomach of the beef. They fill them up completely and they put oregano, salt, peppers, and—hmmm, let me see, some other spices. I know the spices—I'll come back and tell you. They tie the bag, and they put it on top of all the meat. They wrap it with the leaves of the maguey and foil, and they do the same thing. Cover it, cover everything with the soil. And they leave it cooking overnight. See, now you end up with three products. One, you end up with the barbacoa. Everything that drips down is—they—it's a special soup that they love, which is very greasy, of course.

**MB:** And they catch it in the tray?

**AT:** They catch it in the tray, there on the tray, yeah, in the pan that they have in the bottom of the rocks. So everything is caught right there. They fight for those. They eat—so delicious. So delicious—for people who like lamb and goat. There's some restaurants that serve that here. I particularly don't like it, because it's very greasy. But they like—they love it. They call it birria.

**MB:** Birria.

**AT:** Birria.

**MB:** Yes, I think I've actually had that. But it was kind of a soup with the meat in it.

**AT:** Yes, yes, it's a style that they do it. All the stomach that I was telling you? They chop everything that they put in that—on that soup. So by the time you get up the next morning, the bag will be cooked, and everything that is inside will be like—I mean, it's like melting already because it is so hot. You know the hole keeps the heat cooking all that meat for, you know, for ten hours. So in the morning, that thing is very delicious.

**MB:** Well—

**AT:** That's a different way of cooking it.

**MB:** Well, so in Texas, or in south Texas, or up into Austin, wherever, what—is there a lot of people that are doing this? As, you know, kind of in their backyard? Families? Things like that? I guess both styles, because I'm sure there's people from all over or have ancestors from all over Mexico, so—

**AT:** Yes, you've got to remember one thing, the soil has got to be more like clay type. If it's sandy, it's not going to work. It's not going to work because the hole's not going to hold in the heat. So, it's got to be special soil that will keep the heat so it will not diffuse and go out. So, you know—in south Texas, there might be some spots that have clay, but it's mostly sand. Not a lot

of places. So, it wouldn't work. And another thing, it's just for family, yes, because it's not allowed, you know, by the health department, I guess.

**MB:** OK, well that kind of gets me to one of my other questions. You can't cook the barbacoa in the ground and sell it here, right?

**00:30:00**

**AT:** Yes, no, I can't. I can't. Unless—there might be a way. If I build a hole that I covered with bricks, you know, fire bricks and things like that. That will probably work pretty much the same way. It would be a modern way to do it. Like one of those fire—you know, Italian places where they have the—where they cook the pizzas.

**MB:** Oh, you mean like the big brick oven.

**AT:** Yeah, something like that. It would work. Remember barbacoa is just steamed meat. That's what it is. The way you do it, yeah, it will play an—it will influence the flavor in the way that you do it. If you do it in a hole, it's going to come out different, because of the different ways that it reacts with the soil and the amount of heat that it gives. So, all of that will play an important part.

**MB:** So do you know the reasoning behind why they—the health department doesn't let you use—to cook it in the holes? Is it just because it is in contact with soil?

**AT:** Yes, I imagine that they want to make sure that the—you know, I may be very careful, but a lot of people might not be careful of protecting the meat, and they might, you know, get soil and—but I don't see no reason why—but we got to comply with that. We got to find different ways—like my way that I cook it here in the restaurant. I have a special pressure cooker, a big pressure cooker that I cook my meat in. It takes me about four hours to do it, as opposed to twelve hours.

**MB:** Is there a taste difference in doing it in the pressure cooker, aside from doing it like you would do for your family? Or—

**AT:** If you do it right, there's not too much, not too much—there's different tricks to do it. So, true, of course, there is a very minor difference. But if you never taste it before, you will not—you will not know.

**MB:** Well, without giving away any secrets, is the—do you still do the leaves in the pressure cooker and things like that? And wrapping it—wrapping it in burlap and what not?

**AT:** Yes, I skip the burlap because I can't find burlaps here as easy as in Mexico. But I use the foil, and I use the leaves. I can use the leaves. I mean I use the leaves. But I don't need that many—just one leaf. I can put it on top, because obviously, I don't need to protect it, just to give the flavor to the meat.

**MB:** Well, earlier, before we started the recording of the interview, we were talking about—and when you brought the barbacoa out, you were talking about that you are just starting to do it again this week. And I was wondering why not serve it before? What was the reasoning? And did you serve it before and stop and then start again?

**AT:** Yes, I did. I served it—I made it before and I didn't have many calls. I'm talking about, probably about seven to ten years before, ago. I've been in business seventeen years here. But I didn't get many calls. And I made it, and I had to eat it at home *[Laughs]*, with my family, which is no problem *[Laughs]*. But, you know, you cannot eat so much of that because it's very heavy, also the same time.

**MB:** Does that have anything to do with—I mean now that—now you're starting to do it again, and you're getting more of a demand, you were talking about earlier. Does it have anything to do with kind of the changing demographic—more people that, I guess, Latinos moving in or moving to the area? Does it have to do with that? Or is it just—people are just starting to realize that barbacoa's good *[Laughs]*?

**AT:** I think it's all of the above. I think people are more aware of what barbacoa is. Before—you know—even—Anglos didn't know what barbacoa is. I was surprised about—but you're from the South, you know.

**MB:** *[Laughs]*.

**AT:** So, you know, they still ask me, you know, “What’s barbacoa?” “You should try it, you’re going to like it.” And I gave some samples to them, and they said, “This is good.” And it is good. It is good. So, they say, “Well, are you going to have it from now on?” “Yes. I’m going to have it from now on.” And I started making it—it’s a very simple process, when you know, when you know. Because you can ruin it, like I say, overcook it. Or, also, you’re not doing it right, you know, it will not come out this good.

**MB:** Well, do you—we kind of talked about—touched on how you learned the process, but is it something that as far back as you can remember your family has been doing?

**AT:** Yes, yes, it’s as far as I can remember. We, you know, learned it from the parents, grandparents, uncles—everybody, you know, they’re doing it, and you are right there, you know, seeing what they’re doing. So you get to learn how to make the barbacoa.

**MB:** Are there stories about how it originated? Where the process came from?

**AT:** I imagine. No, I’m not really sure, but I think it’s the—like I say, the easy way for just about anybody to do it, because they didn’t need any—any, you know, instruments, or any, actually nothing, no tools at all. They made the hole, they put the meat and whatever they can find, you know leaves or whatever. Cover it up and the next morning, they—

**00:35:12**

**MB:** I guess all you’d need is the meat and a way to start a fire.

**AT:** That's it, that's it. That's basically it. A lot of people, their barbacoa has this and that. Yeah, you know, you can make it a difficult, but you can make it as easy as possible. Anybody can do barbacoa.

**MB:** Well, so, how is it going so far with serving it again this week? What's the verdict so far?

**AT:** So far, they—the different people that I fix the barbacoa today were very excited. And it makes me excited too, because, I say, wow, now, you know, now everybody wants it *[Laughs]*. I'm like, I should have done it for the past three years, I guess, but I got frustrated—you know the first time, the first two years when I started introducing my barbacoa and they didn't want it. Because it's head, or it's lips, or, you know, they don't know. But when you try that meat that's lips—you can taste it—it's real good. It's not fatty, it's very lean, it's very moist. And that's how barbacoa should be.

**MB:** Well, how much are you doing right now?

**AT:** I started making sixty pounds. And I get a yield of about fifty per cent, which should be about thirty, thirty-two pounds yield.

**MB:** Per day?

**AT:** No, I imagine that will last me three days.

**MB:** Three days. For the beginning?

**AT:** At the beginning.

**MB:** How do you, is there a certain way you need to store it, to kind of keep it as fresh as possible for the three day period?

**AT:** Three day period? You can keep it in the refrigerator—and it will be gone, it'll be gone. I mean, what I'll do is I'll cook a batch—I call it a batch. And I try to do it every two days. So, what I'll probably end up doing because it's so simple with the equipment that I have, I'll start making half of that. That way I'll keep it as fresh as possible. Pretty much everything that I do is made on the small batches that finish either the same day or the next day.

**MB:** Well, that's really great. I really appreciate your talking about that. While we're on the subject of fresh things, I've also been doing interviews—I mean this is obvi—this is definitely a barbecue thing, so I've interviewed a lot of, you know, German meat markets making sausage and stuff like that. And I know you guys have chorizo, and I was wondering, do you make it yourself? Or do you know how?

**AT:** Yes, yes, we know how the chorizo. The chorizo is really our secret recipe too. We don't currently make—we used to make it, but we find here, only here in Austin or in this part of the state, that we find very good chorizo. And we decided to just buy the chorizo. We buy a very lean kind of chorizo and we—it's kind of expensive, but I don't cut costs.

**MB:** So, you're saying that this is the only place that you've found that you can buy it from a supplier that it's good?

**AT:** Yes, yes indeed. I cannot find that chorizo in—in any other part. And here I was surprised because I—anything that I serve in my restaurant has got to meet a different criteria. The first one, high quality, and that means that I go to long lengths to find out the best product that I can cook because I eat it here myself. And I'm the most demanding customer that this restaurant has. If I like it, I know everybody's going to like it because I'm very demanding. I've been in this business for so long that I've gotten to develop the taste for people, you know, for what people really are going to like. And we're pretty much—you like that because the process of finding the best meat. Now, when you find the meat to cook the barbacoa, which is something that I forgot, you've got to have high quality—you cannot buy just any meat to make barbacoa, any beef head. It's got to be a certain age of beef. You do the young—the young beef, it's not going to work. I mean, it doesn't—it will not have the flavor developed in the meat so when—that will be the difference with somebody who doesn't know how to cook the meat or what kind of meat. Because they're all—I want to make barbacoa and they'll just buy any head, anywhere, and you got to be very careful, otherwise it will not develop the flavor that you want.

**MB:** How old should the beef be?

**AT:** It's got to be—mature beef.

**MB:** So, slaughtered at two years or a year?

**AT:** Probably, most likely, yeah.

**MB:** So, I had a question—oh, so where can you get—get beef heads around here, for stuff like that?

**00:40:00**

**AT:** Some markets have it here. I do have one here. Longhorn Meat has good, excellent quality meat for—to make barbacoa—beef heads. They sell them frozen, but that's OK. The barbacoa with the heads, it's OK, buying them frozen.

**MB:** As long as it's not—you don't freeze the meat after it's—after you've cooked it?

**AT:** No, no, no. As long as you don't refreeze it again—you're going to lose flavor.

**MB:** Well, um, so you were talking about you yield about—did you say fifty pounds?

**AT:** Fifty per cent.

**MB:** Fifty per cent, I'm sorry. So, it was about thirty-five pounds.

**AT:** Yeah, about thirty-five, thirty-two to thirty-five pounds.

**MB:** So, how many—is it all beef head, or are you using other cuts?

**AT:** I'm—no it's beef head and lips. Yeah, I don't use the eyes. The eyes are gone. We eat the eyes. You don't worry about the eyes. You're not going to get any eyes *[Laughs]*. Sorry.

**MB:** Well, so how many heads does that take to—per batch?

**AT:** One, one, one head, and—yeah, just one—just one head. And you're going to get the tongue—but the tongue also, we separate the tongue. The tongue will be higher in price than anything else. The eyes? Forget about it. It's going to be very expensive for you *[Laughter]*.

**AT:** Anyway. You separate them, the head to tongue, you get the cheeks, you got the lips of the beef, and that's basically where you find most of your meat from the head because there's not going to be no brains. There's not going to be any—undesirable kind of meat—just the outside that you're going to have.

**MB:** So, you only have to use one for one batch?

**AT:** Yes, that way, you, you—what you do is you combine the flavors and the grease that will come out from the head and will baste the other meat. So that's part of the secret.

**MB:** Sure, sure, well—I think that's—unless you have anything to add? I'm not sure I have any other questions about barbacoa itself. Can you think of any other? I'm not sure—I don't think

I've missed anything. Let me just kind of look here. I—just to clarify, I did want to ask—make sure—just want to ask when you do it at home, though, do you do it in a pressure cooker now? Or, do you still occasionally do it in the ground?

**AT:** Here in Austin, no, we don't do it on the ground. I haven't found any—you know, at my house, I have sand, so I'm not able to do it, unless I prepare a pozo for that. And I'm not going to do it, just for Austin.

**MB:** But when you go back home, or, to where your family are living now?

**AT:** We have our own pozo where we, you know, it's cured and everything and it's ready to go.

**MB:** And how—could you say—how do you say that?

**AT:** Pozo.

**MB:** Pozo? P-o-z-o?

**AT:** Yes.

**MB:** OK. All right, well I think that's about all I've got today. I really, really appreciate your time.

**AT:** Sure.

**MB:** I may get back to you with some questions when I—after I go through this, but thank you very much.

**AT:** Yes, you come back and try our barbacoa. I invite you to try from different places, and you can see what I'm talking about.

**MB:** And, you know what? I have and I'm very happy that you guys are doing it now because I eat here all the time *[Laughs]*.

**AT:** Good, good.

**MB:** I prefer this place just because it's kind of the style that I grew up on. So, but I will, I will. And thank you very much. I really appreciate your time.

**[END]**

**00:43:33**