

A Plate on the Wild Side—S2E17

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:00:08] Well, we are here today with Jesse Griffith. Jesse is a chef and he specializes in wild game. So I'm really excited to talk to him. And I know that our listeners are going to be interested in what he has to say. And he's the owner, I guess. Owner Operator and chef at Dai Due restaurant. Welcome, Jesse. Thank you for being here.

Jesse Griffith [00:00:27] Thank you. Thank you so much.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:00:30] Tell us about your restaurant and what you do.

Jesse Griffith [00:00:33] Yeah. Well, it opened. Well, we're in Austin. We opened. Dai Due started in 2006 as a what we called then a supper club or. But these days is a pop up. So it was kind of a roving dinner club. We were using all local ingredients like 100%. So we were just sourcing things from Texas and just trying to get as seasonal and reflective of what was available as possible. So that was 2006. We started at the farmers market and 2008 selling sausages and pickles, brined chickens and also started serving hot food. We were one of the first businesses to serve hot prepared foods like Made to order foods at a farmer's market in Texas. And then around the same time we started the New School of Traditional Cookery, which is our hunting school program. So we're in our 13th season of that right now. So we take people out hunting, we show people how to kind of start to finish deal with game. So from the actual sighting in of rifles all the way through preparing and cooking, carrying anything like that, the restaurant opened in 2014. So kind of after all these other things started, we opened the restaurant, it's on the east side here in Austin and it's been going pretty strong since. And we specialize mostly in meats locally, locally sourced meats, some fish, you know, we either do freshwater fish or fish out of the Gulf and then very beautiful vegetables from local farms, all local cheeses, citrus when it's in season, good things like that. So I mean, it's a it's a fun restaurant. I think we always put it in the context we won't have lemons for iced tea most of the year. And until lemons come into season and there's, you know, like last year we didn't have any lemons at all because of the big freeze. The freeze basically killed all the lemon trees, knocked them back pretty good. But if I'm driving through South Texas, I will stop on the roadside and pick up as many lemons as my truck will hold, and then I'll bring them back to the restaurant. And then you could put a lemon in the iced tea. And it's I mean, it's kind of an anecdote, but it's a good way to synopsis the restaurant. But we are very wild game focused also. And like I said, I do guided hunting and culinary trips. And I've also written two books on the subject of cooking Game and fish.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:03:17] Nice. Well, it sounds like you're a jack of all trades with all these great skills and a master of many, I suppose, with all these great skills, huh?

Jesse Griffith [00:03:26] Maybe just a couple. Okay, so I still struggle with the computer sciences. So that's a good example and a few other things. So.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:03:35] Okay. Yeah. How did you get into the Wild Game chef game? Was that just a natural extension of hunting for you, or what?

Jesse Griffith [00:03:48] Absolutely. I started hunting as an adult at first. My whole life I started hunting when I was around probably 30, maybe in my very late twenties. I had been trained as a butcher in a restaurant here in Austin, so I knew that end of it. So I kind of already had that skill developed, but not the obtaining the meat part. And so I was very

interested in that. I think overall that Texas it's a very unique region and that if you were to do an all locally sourced restaurant in California or in Maine, they would all be very different. Texas supports a lot of game. Texas has a very unique and integrated biome here. And so, I mean, there's agriculture, there's wild foods, there's an ocean. So. It's kind of a wonderful confluence of all those things. And I think that game actually figures in heavily and should rightfully figure into a local food system because we have a lot of it, mostly in the form of feral hog, you know, which we could talk about for hours. Yeah. And then also other various invasives or introduced species that are fortunately for us, very good to eat.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:05:10] Mm hmm. Yeah, they're all pretty yummy once you figure out how to do it.

Jesse Griffith [00:05:15] Right. Yeah.

Andrew Lowery [00:05:17] So what's your favorite thing about your work, man? Like, if there's one thing that you could pinpoint, what would you say is your favorite thing?

Jesse Griffith [00:05:23] I get to take new hunters hunting. That's it. I mean, much of my job, especially this time of year, you know, October through February, my job is mostly being a hunting guide and going out and teaching people the ropes of, you know, cleaning animals, butchering, cooking and many of our clients are brand new to it. And so I think that's also very special. So I absolutely love that part of my job, introducing people to the outdoors.

Andrew Lowery [00:05:58] That really is a magical experience to get to take somebody out and really see their eyes open to, you know, this is the process where food comes from. This is something that really connects us and the land and our heritage, where we all came from. And just to see that and to facilitate that really is a magical kind of time.

Jesse Griffith [00:06:19] Yeah, I love it. It's pretty meaningful. And if I'm lucky enough to do that, people ask me like, do you like your job? Like, I love my job. That's very cool. You know, that's good to wake up on a beautiful ranch in South Texas and kind of just have fun for a few days.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:06:36] That's terrific. And so what do those trips look like? Where do the new people come from? And what do you do? Do you walk them all the way through, like even to making a meal.

Jesse Griffith [00:06:50] Not one specific meal. But we kind of we come it as an immersion so they arrive and they can be from all over. I think in years past we would have mostly people coming in from Texas and the majority of them, you know, we do classes of six now. So I'd say, you know, usually it'd be like everybody. But one person would be from Texas and one person might fly in from New York or something like that. Now I would say it's almost like five out of those six people are from out of state coming here to experience it. And I think that we've just gotten a little more notoriety with our program. It's become pretty popular. And so we have a lot of people traveling, a lot of people from California and other states coming here not to just experience the course, but also the hunting in Texas, which is exemplary. It's very good. There's a lot of opportunity and it's easily navigated to it's not a difficult thing to get into here in Texas. I mean, if you can get access to private land. But we start people at the very beginning, you know, sight in a rifle. And then by the end of the weekend, I mean, we're cooking and making sausage and

tamales. And making paté out of the liver and looking how to clean a heart and how to package and so forth, so kind of start to finish. And every single meal throughout is based on whatever we're hunting. So if we have a good cold front and ducks are in season, I will try to convince them to go on a duck hunt as it gets cold. We run trout lines for catfish, too. And so we'll be able to put a catfish class in there, you know, how we clean catfish and then we'll put that on the menu as well. So kind of a contextual immersion. So throughout they're eating it and we're talking about it and they're experiencing it. So we just try to really pilot it as much as we can.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:08:56] That sounds like so much fun. How do people find that class? What's the name of that class again?

Jesse Griffith [00:09:02] The branch of the business is called the New School of Traditional Cookery, and we release our dates in the summer every year. They sell out very quickly. We sold out this year in a matter of minutes. Wow. So yeah. And but a lot of people are on a wait list. It's a great place to be, but we still feel like so many people want it. And so, I mean, it can be a little frustrating at times, too, knowing that you have a lot more people out there that are very, very hungry for this knowledge. And we can't even possibly begin to serve them all at this point. But it's on our website. There's a just a separate page for it with all that information. And, you know, like I said, every year we'll release it around mid-summer and then people can get seats at that point.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:09:54] Okay, that's cool. So when we're talking about preparing Wild game, what's the biggest mistake that people tend to make that you see people making or that you hear about when we're working with Wild Game?

Jesse Griffith [00:10:09] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah. That's something we talk about a lot. Something we think about a lot. I'm going to have to insist on maybe not narrowing it down to one.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:10:18] Okay. Sure.

Jesse Griffith [00:10:20] I might need three. I might need four. But I'll try to keep it concise and first. And we'll do. This is kind of an overarching approach, don't believe what other people tell you if something is inedible. Somebody will tell you a gaff top catfish, you know, saltwater catfish can't eat those. And how many of those have you eaten? They generally say, oh, I've never I've never tried one. So, I mean, most of the time when somebody tells you that it did not come out right. They haven't tried it or something went wrong in the process. Auodad Sheep are another prime example of that consistently, you hear how bad they are, how inedible they are. I've got a pretty old ram that my daughter just put in the freezer and it's fantastic. I'm not understanding what this issue is, I would grant it's a little bit on the tough side, but flavor wise, it's quite good. And the toughness can be surmounted pretty easily by just cooking it, you know, like, long, slow cooking.

Jesse Griffith [00:11:29] Yeah. So number two, slow cooking. So I think that a lot of people approach game cooking in general or maybe just cooking in general. And what that means is putting something on the smoker, applying long, slow, dry heat to something. And while that might work with a fatty rack of pork ribs or a brisket, something that's exceptionally lean like a wild animal, like an aoudad or a wild pig or deer, it may or may not turn out very well. You might just dry that out to leather and also kind of bring out some of the more iron focused game, strong flavors and by doing so. So I think that, you know, learning some new cooking techniques specifically slow and low I'm a huge proponent of

the crockpot. You can't go wrong with those things. You know some liquid and a very dialed in low slow temperature will really be helpful and pretty much break down anything from a turkey leg which people will tell you are inedible. And that's quite untrue to an ordered roast, to feral hog, to venison shanks, things like that. A crock pot can conquer a lot of those things. And I think it's just really important. And what it does is it forces that slow and low approach to cooking and adding some liquid in there because again, there's that you can cook in a dry heat or you can cook in a moist environment and something that's very lean. You're going to want to add some liquid in there to help it along. And I think Crock-Pot are very good at that. I think that's three. I'm going to throw one more in there. And I think that people struggle with and there's certain textures and flavors that can come from game and really trying to communicate to hunters and try to figure out what they're doing differently than us. And one thing that we consistently notice is that the way that they chill game, especially in a hot climate like Texas, would be to put the animal directly on ice, or even worse, put it in ice water. And we're starting to really find that this is pretty detrimental. I think that some people might have success with it, which kind of just leads us down the path even further and to people still doing it. But the way we try to phrase it, our frame it. Is that you would never go to the store and buy meat and then take it out to your cooler and stick it directly on ice. But for some reason, we treat game like that. And I think that it's kind of an emotional response where we're trying to clean what we perceive as to be like a kind of a dirty, wild animal by washing it literally. And yes, and what we're really doing there is introducing more bacteria and we're introducing a lot of liquid into the muscle structure, which makes it kind of difficult to cut, difficult to cook. And I feel like it dries it out and makes it taste gamey or I mean, you can see if you've soaked a certain cut in ice and water, it turns kind of gray and flabby. And we don't handle any of the meats through the classes like that. And, you know, personally I don't I've always wrapped everything really well in in heavy duty contractor bags. And then I sit to keep it away from that direct contact with water and ice. And our results are great. And I think those are starting to really speak for themselves. And I'm I used to be a lot more kind about it, but now I'm kind of like, Hey, everybody, I kind of want to grab them and be like, Listen, don't do this anymore. I mean, if it's working for you, then keep doing it. I guess. I don't know what to say. I don't think that it consistently works for everyone. But like I said, there's no industry, there's no meat industry or culture for that matter in the world that treats meat like that just drops it in ice or ice water. And then you see like this redness come out of the cooler from the drain plug and it's you think it's blood and it's not. It's not how that works. So I would urge people to stop doing that. Just try to keep things as cold and dry as possible. Dry being the operative term.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:15:53] Okay. That's interesting. Well, I mean, even if that's been working for somebody, they might want to try something new that might work better, you know, even than what they've got going on. All right. That's great advice. Do you have a favorite quick recipe that you could just explain, you know, on a on a podcast? Would that work?

Jesse Griffith [00:16:15] Hmm. A recipe. I mean, that is I mean, I've got hundreds for a bunch of different...

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:16:20] Animals, anything.

Andrew Lowery [00:16:24] Maybe Whitetail because that's a lot of our viewers are definitely going to have this time of year.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:16:28] Yeah.

Jesse Griffith [00:16:28] Whitetail again you know I mean if you've got just a simple back strap you know I cooked some the other night and all I did, you know, kept it as cold and dry as possible. I pre season it I put salt and pepper on it probably was about 12 hours before I cooked it. That's kind of euphemistically referred to these days as a dry brine; it used to be called a rub.

But I mean pre seasoning is pretty helpful I think, I think it maintains a lot of moisture and it also gets the seasoning permeating all the way through it before you grill it. My preference is to grill very, very hot and kind of char the outside while the inside stays, you know, nice and medium rare, maybe a little over medium rare, but not too much. But I think people also have really good experiences, I put it on the smoker and smoking it to about medium rare as well, where you're kind of getting a little more smoke flavor on there. I think, you know, it's a very simple technique of just instead of seasoning it right before it goes on. It's just a pre-season and people say it'll draw some moisture out and I don't think that's super harmful. I think that there a little bit of moisture will come out. But what you're getting is that that seasoning to permanent permeate all the way through so that when you have a nice slice of it, the interior is also nicely seasoned as well as the exterior.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:17:54] Okay, I'm glad you cleared up that dry brine term for us because I just recently started hearing that. And I thought when I saw it, I thought, well, that seems like a rub to me. So, we're doing something more PC with that, I guess.

Jesse Griffith [00:18:11] I love it. I mean, it's just like the first few times I heard it, my reaction was the same. I was like a dry brine. Like. Like dry, dry water.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:18:20] Yeah.

Jesse Griffith [00:18:20] Okay. Dry water. Dry salt water. So salt, like. Oh, I'm following you. Yeah, Yeah. I try to brine, but dry or a rub instead. Okay.

Andrew Lowery [00:18:32] That's right. We're not Carolina. Okay? It's. It's a brine down here.

Jesse Griffith [00:18:37] Right, right.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:18:39] That's great.

Andrew Lowery [00:18:40] So speaking of a brine, do you have a go to spice or a special trick that almost always makes something better that you could share with us?

Jesse Griffith [00:18:49] I feel like this is a leading question. I feel like you've done some research, but maybe it's organically we've come to this. So yes, the answer's yes. I have one. One specific spice that I like to put into a brine, like a wet rub or otherwise known as a brine shall be an actual brine. And I put that in both the books. We do use it heavily on feral hogs. It's an excellent brine for the. I mean, just to reinforce for the brine as a saltwater solution, typically it also has some sugar in it just because human brains love the flavor of sugar and sweetness. But I like to put star anise in there so that it kind of stars shaped liquor. It is very common in Chinese food and Vietnamese food. If you don't like licorice, I still kind of recommend it. It should be very subtle and it kind of helps with the flavors of a lot of game. It also is excellent to use as a brine for ducks, wild dogs. So I like to brine ducks as well. And I think that it kind of can smooth out some of those flavors. I

will equate to gamey flavors, you know, for lack of a better term. And game is gamey right there as a rough plywood board and like spices, like star anise would be sandpaper and you would come in and you kind of buff those flavors down a little bit and smooth them out. I think they inhabit the same flavor spectrum as the gamey flavors due to the kind of come in and massage it a little bit and help out. So we refer to that brine as an anise brine. And it's in both the books because it needed to be included in both times. So, yes, absolutely. There is in fact, one unique spice that I think helps conquer gamey flavors. And I would urge people to try it, even if you're anti licorice or you don't like those kinds of flavors, because like I said, it's it will mellow out a little bit.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:21:04] Yeah. You know, I love licorice and I have anise, but I've only used it in baking. I've never tried to use it in cooking. So how would I use it on a back strap? Would you recommend it on a back strap, or what would you usually use it on?

Jesse Griffith [00:21:24] I would probably apply it more to something that I was kind of slow cooked or something that had a lot of add on it. Typically, we're using this on geese, ducks and hogs. Okay, so like a pork or like a feral hog shoulder or feral hog ham would be an excellent use for that where you would put it in a brine through reverse osmosis, all the seasonings would get into the interior of the cut, and then when you cooked it again, it would be seasoned throughout. And I think that specific flavor works well with hogs, which can either be as kind of neutral as grocery store, domestic pork, or they can be as many people have experience pretty strongly flavored and then ducks as well, which are consistently more strongly flavored. I think Wild Duck can be a really difficult thing to cook, and I think that brine helps in that case, a back strap. Personally, I wouldn't get too rowdy with it and maybe an s, I mean, you certainly could put it on there, but I was more salt, pepper, things like garlic. And maybe dried chilies. Although that said, there are tricks with bag strapped with that rich venison flavor that work really well, namely things like coffee or even cocoa powder in small amounts, shockingly will give you kind of an improved crust if you if you do make a little rub with stuff like that and you won't necessarily taste the coffee that much, but it really amplifies that beautiful venison flavor quite a bit. So I think got it. With a venison back strap, I would go with more of a dry brine, a rub with salt starting points of salt and pepper, and then like more savory ingredients like chilies and maybe granulated garlic. But then with a large cut that I was going to slow cook or like a whole duck or something like that, then I would go with a brine with the more assertive spices in there. Like star.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:23:35] Anise? Okay. I have a brining question for you. The traditional brine, the liquid kind. How long are we supposed to bring something? Does it depend?

Jesse Griffith [00:23:48] Highly, depending on how thick that cut is. You know, I think you know something, you know, if it's an inch thick, if it's a dove or quail, you're probably looking at 3 or 4 hours. If you're brining an 8 pound fatty barrel hog ham, you're probably looking at three days.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:24:09] Wow. Okay.

Jesse Griffith [00:24:10] So it there's a lot of time to be had for those larger cuts to actually achieve that full reverse osmosis where all that liquid is transferred into under brine and over brine. One of the advantages of a dry cure or just simply salting something is that once you've applied that and if you've applied that in the right amount, you can't

over season it. Whereas with a wet or liquid brine, there is a possibility of letting it go too far where it could come out a little bit salty.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:24:47] So I'm sorry, now I'm just intrigued about anise and it's brine. So with the anise, the brine has got salt in it, I guess, and maybe a little touch of sugar and anything else?

Jesse Griffith [00:25:00] One gallon of water, one cup of kosher salt, a half a cup of something sweet. That's honey, it's maple syrup, that's brown sugar, sugar. A few star anise pods. I think three or four really. You could put one in there if you want it, and a couple of bay leaves if you've got them. Bay leaves are always good. You can add citrus, things like that also. And then you cool that brine completely and then submerge whatever you want in that brine.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:25:25] All right. That's exciting.

Andrew Lowery [00:25:27] We should call this episode a Plate on the Wild Side.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:25:29] Yes, a plate on the wild side! I love it. Well, I'm. You could ask my husband. I'm notoriously bad at cooking wild game. And part of it is just I get in a hurry because I'm like, Oh, I haven't planned anything. Let me grab some back strap out of the freezer and cook it up in an hour. And that just doesn't work.

Jesse Griffith [00:25:52] I think maybe just, just kind of change your mentality and start thinking about cooking dinner tomorrow.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:25:58] That's a great idea.

Jesse Griffith [00:26:00] Yeah. I mean, so much of it and so much of what we try to impart on everybody is planning and preparation to like how to package things the best way where they fit in your freezer really well. Try to portion things where you're going to use them you know don't portioned sausages you know in 15 link packs if there's only two of you, you know, things like that, put them in two link packs or whatever it is that you're going to eat and try to make your future life better. And I think a lot of times planning dinner for the next day is super helpful. And sometimes I'll make two dinners at once. I'll be cooking dinner for tonight and for tomorrow night I might start assembling stuff for a crock pot, knowing that in the morning it'll be done, or we're just assembling it. So where I turn it on during the day, it'll be done the next evening. And so just so just kind of retraining your mind. And it's like cooking is not just about, you know, the addition of spices and heat. There's definitely a lot of organizational tricks that will make your cooking life a lot better.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:27:07] Okay. I think I need to get one of your books.

Jesse Griffith [00:27:09] Or both.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:27:11] Or both of them, that would work. Well, one of our favorite questions, we ask folks for a biology blunder where something goes wrong in the field and you just end up with a funny story. I was thinking for you that we might have to call it a culinary calamity, but it sounds like you've done a lot of time in the field too. So do you have a biology blender or two you might like to share with us? Just a fun story?

Jesse Griffith [00:27:36] Oh, I mean, I probably have a culinary calamity that I can share. Okay. I mean, I think. Oh, I mean, my brain just automatically goes to this one. Instance, we had this hard time to recount, but we had to cook a wild game dinner for I can't remember if it was two or 300 people. It was a lot. It was a lot of people.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:28:06] That is a lot of people.

Jesse Griffith [00:28:07] And it was off site and we had to travel and kind of everything went wrong. You know, we were spit roasting some feral hogs. We did receive some venison. Everything kind of from start to finish. But this thing was a little bit cursed. Like they brought us the deer to the restaurant that we were going to break down so that we could serve to this. It was a benefit, too. So everything was above board, but they weren't skinned and there was a lot of problems. Like when they arrived, it was like, Oh, this is a restaurant, everybody. And then from there it just was kind of downhill. And then we wanted to serve everybody. Since there are so many people, we wanted to serve them family style. So instead of individually plating two or 300 plates, which is very difficult, we wanted to serve a family style meal where I think it was like every six or eight people would get a platter.

And the organizers were supposed to provide us with our platters, but instead they brought us these giant, flimsy plastic popcorn bowls. So instead of like a flat platter on which we could put everything, we got these very strange, large like, like a chip bowl. Like if you had eight teenagers eating Doritos, you would fill this giant bowl with those. And there's just no way we could put all the food in them and serve that to people. It was, it was laughable. So at the very, very last minute, we had to pivot and try to plate all of these. And it was an utter disaster. It took us forever to get 300 plates out just because it was not what we had planned. And I think we really have always prided ourselves on executing offsite events very effectively and very well. And this was. A calamity is probably putting it very nicely. It was a disaster. But I mean, we got everybody fed in the end. But it was yeah, it was. It's something I don't look back on very fondly. And every time I drive through that town, which is, which is often I, I look over to the scene of the crime and I cringe. I just cringe. Well, there's that.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:30:32] Well, I'm sure it was one of those things where other people didn't, you know, it wasn't as big a deal for other people as it was for you.

Jesse Griffith [00:30:40] Maybe, maybe. We were told in no uncertain terms that it wasn't up to up to par.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:30:47] Oh, well, I mean, you can't be awesome every single time. I guess. That's my story and I'm sticking to it. Well, what else would you like to share with us today? And, and do tell us about your books.

Jesse Griffith [00:31:03] But the one that just came out is The Hog book. I think the subject is apparent.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:31:08] That's the title of it, right? The Hog book, correct?

Jesse Griffith [00:31:11] Correct. Very clever. In these classes over the years, just experience a lot of people asking questions about feral hogs. And I think that, you know, as Texans, we all kind of share this curiosity about what to do about hogs in one way or the other. Maybe we've heard of hogs, maybe we own land and we have a hog problem,

maybe we've eaten it, maybe we've had a good experience, but not experienced this or that. So there is a bit of an elephant in the room as far as hogs go. And so over the years just decided to start to compile questions and ideas about hogs. And then we started to become quite focused on hogs in general as a food source because they are an exceptional food source. And I don't mean like the quality of their meat, which can be exceptional, but I mean in a way that what we've got is a very destructive invasive species in front of us and a pretty clear way to use them. You know, I'm not saying we're going to solve our whole problem by eating them, and I would never insinuate that. I'm just saying that they could taste terrible, which they don't. And so they're quite good. And so I just think it's like a perfect opportunity. It's kind of a perfect food here because every pound of feral hog we that we're consuming is one less pound that we need to get through. Maybe a broken agricultural system, you know, maybe a feedlot system or something like that. And so I feel very strongly that they are a resource that we can use. But throughout what we hear from our constituency is that they're inedible or you can't eat them if they're over this weight or this or that, like a lot of mythology, accompanies them to this day. And so really just to try to take a deep dive on figuring out how to help people, how to empower them to address them in a culinary sense. So the book is about hunting them somewhat. I mean, they're stories about hunting, but it's mostly a cookbook. I think there's 120 recipes and they're sort of like that. It's quite a large book. It's over 400 pages.

It turned out to be quite a, quite an undertaking. And we developed like a four category approach to hogs, which is funny because when you're like what's your favorite game recipe? I'm like, I've broken feral hogs alone into four categories, you know? But we tried to simplify it and make that approach really approachable. Yeah. in that you could look at the hog that you have in front of you and then kind of figure out, Oh, this is a medium hog or this is they're large for, this is a large. So generally these approaches work really well because the problem that we were seeing was that someone would have a 15 pound piglet or a 300 pound boar and they would be treating them the same way, which you can do, but you're probably going to have bad results. And if you kind of start to think about them as separate animals, then it's a little more approachable and your the outcomes will probably be better. And so we try to break them down simply into these four categories where people could rapidly say, Oh, this here is a small pig, this is a big boar, this is a big boar. I'm not gonna even try to cut chops off of it. This is going to be a lot of sausage. This is going to be great for curries, things like that, like strongly flavored dishes, you know, Or if I've got a big fat salad that's been eating acorns all winter, I am going to cut chops. I am going to try to make bacon off of the. Whereas I could not do that with those other two dogs. And so giving people a really good almost a textbook about about feral hogs, and it went over really well. You know, it's been a really fun like the road has been pretty, pretty cool. It took us a long time to write it and it came out at a great time, I think, when Curiosity was really peaking around hogs and the book's been received really well. We won the James Beard Award.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:35:35] Nice! Good for you!

Jesse Griffith [00:35:37] So that was an interesting and notable recognition from the culinary community, too, especially a book about a very Texas-focused book about hunting wild animals. And it got some recognition from the kind of the national culinary community, too, which I thought was very, very cool. And we were very honored to get that award.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:36:03] Before I go on to your other book, I just want to say, right on to everything you just said about the hog as the food source because they're

so destructive, and anyone that we can remove is just a little bit of a, you know, a little partial win for us. And I mean, if I'm eating a pound of Wild Hog, I can feel good about that.

Jesse Griffith [00:36:35] Yeah, that's right. And I'm not even saying that we have to eat all of them, Right? I get it. I mean, people can go out there in the shoot 15 and a night. I'm definitely not going to say, oh you've got to clean them all. Sure. But if you are wanting to pick one and even just pull the back straps off. Mm hmm. I've got a book for you, you know, So.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:36:53] We need these. So what's the other one?

Jesse Griffith [00:36:57] My first book came out in, I think it was 2012, so quite a while ago, ten years ago. And it's called a field. It was more of a general approach to wild game and fish. So this recipes in there, It's very Texas centric. It's got recipes for blue crab and redfish and crappie and catfish and venison, turkey dove ducks, all those, all the things that kind of live around here. And so it's a much more generalized cookbook. And we saw some success with that one, too. It's been pretty well received. That one was nominated for the James Beard Award way back. And it's gone. Well, I mean, it's I think it's aged okay. I think that I've definitely learned a lot since I wrote that, you know, in the last ten years, too. But it's kind of an ongoing deal, you know, where, you know, just education, recipes, content, I think is just something that you can never do it all. And that's the kind of the fun thing about wild foods is like there's always new stuff to discover, new techniques and so forth.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:38:09] Yeah. So what else? Anything else you want to share with us today?

Jesse Griffith [00:38:13] You know, just there's so many branches of this. You know, the restaurant is serving. We serve lots of Nilgai. We serve lots of feral hogs. So you can come to the restaurant in Austin and try those things. We serve nilgai. I think that's, to me, one of the most sustainable proteins, wild proteins out there, you know, pretty invasive. I spent a lot of time in South Texas. I actually just got back from being down there hunting north of Raymondville. And there's a lot of Nilgai there. And they're big animals and they are they appear to be quite sustainable. Like there's always a lot of them. Uh huh. And so we serve a lot of nilgai. We serve a lot of feral hog. And every once in a while we'll get something in like an axis or another exotic. But I think that they do is it is a fun place to kind of try things like that and see Wild Game in just a different context. You know, mostly just simple preparations, grilled. I mean we'll do like a Nilgai tartare, things like that. But you can come and experience out there and, you know, urge people to check out the classes. I know they sell out really quickly. But, you know, we're trying to figure out how to accommodate and get in front of more people in the coming seasons. And we partner with Texas Wildlife Association as stewards of the wild and other really great mentoring programs. And I feel very strongly about that. And I feel like they run exquisite programs for getting new hunters into the field via Texas Parks and Wildlife Foundation and Stewards of the Wild. And so, I mean, I think it's really commendable. What they've accomplished and probably try to work with them even more and trying to get more education available to more people as far as that goes. And then, you know, just kind of distributing the hog book were self-published and self distributed for the hog book. So it's kind of an ongoing job for all of us. And working on another project, TBA to be announced next spring, you know a forthcoming project that that should be pretty exciting.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:40:42] Yeah, well, I'm looking forward to that. So one thing I've been meaning to ask since the very beginning, what does Dai Due mean?

Jesse Griffith [00:40:49] Oh, yeah. Okay. Dai Due it in the preface by saying that it I do is not an Italian restaurant, but it has an Italian name. We serve mostly. I don't know. I would say it's like a German, Mexican Texan restaurant that sometimes has a little Vietnamese food, but very little Italian food. But the name is Italian. Okay. It means literally from the two like the number two. And it's the first two words of a Italian proverb that means "From the two kingdoms of nature choose food with care." And so literally means "from the two."

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:41:31] Oh, I like that. I like that a lot.

Jesse Griffith [00:41:34] I saw it in a book many, many years ago. Yeah, the proverb. And I was like, Oh, I love that.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:41:38] You know, that's great. Jesse, thank you so much for being here with us. I learned a lot today. I always do. But this is really helpful knowledge that my husband might appreciate also! Thank you for sharing with us.

Jesse Griffith [00:41:55] Absolutely. It was a real pleasure.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:41:56] Thank you. All right. Have a great afternoon, Jesse. And remember, everybody, you can eat the wildlife, but don't feed the wildlife.

Jesse Griffith [00:42:05] I love that. All right.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:42:07] Thanks, Jesse.

Jesse Griffith [00:42:08] Thank you.

Dr. Sandra Rideout-Hanzak [00:42:09] A Talk on the Wild Side is a production of the Caesar Kleberg Wildlife Research Institute of Texas A&M University, Kingsville. Funding for this project is provided by the Harvey Weil Sportsman Conservationist Award by the Rotary Club of Corpus Christi. Podcast artwork is created by the talented Gabby Olivas. Trey Kendall contributes with his creative talent as well, and editing is conducted. By Andrew Lowery.