

# A HAMBURGER TODAY

BURGERS. WITH KETCHUP, MUSTARD — AND OPINION.

## Grilled: Evan Funke, Chef at Rustic Canyon in Santa Monica

Posted by [Damon Gambuto](#), January 9, 2010 at 3:00 PM

Recently, I noticed that almost all of our [Grilled](#) interviews are with burger eaters. As a Serious Eater, this didn't so much disturb me as leave me undernourished—I found myself hungry for some insight into the mind of the burger creators.

In our latest installment we get to know chef **Evan Funke** of [Rustic Canyon](#) in Santa Monica. He makes one of the [best burgers in Los Angeles](#) and is the kind of guy that I immediately wanted to be my friend. He is intelligent, curious, and way cooler than I could ever hope to be. If you make it out the City of Angels for a visit, you'd be doing yourself a grand favor by trying his food.



*[Photograph: Damon Gambuto]*

**Name:** Evan Funke

**Location:** Los Angeles, CA

**How often do you eat burgers?** As often as I can. I grew up on burgers as a kid, though most of the the time they were of the backyard variety and usually cooked until charred crispy hockey pucks because of my squeamish brothers and sister. It wasn't until I was older that i began to truly appreciate the glory of rare and mid-rare.

**Where did you eat your most recent one?** In my kitchen at [Rustic Canyon](#), at the end of a busy Saturday night service.

**Burgers all around:** dishwashers, cooks, food runners. Professional cooking makes for eager appetites.

**Cheese:** American, cheddar, other? Sharp Cheddar, Gruyere (cave aged). NEVER blue. Ever.

**Ketchup or mustard?** Both. Sparingly. And pickles; gotta have pickles.

**Preferred bun:** Sesame seed, plain white, brioche, or other? I serve brioche, but I prefer potato.

**Grilled, griddled, or broiled?** There is something to be said about a perfectly grilled patty, but that's if you're outdoors. In a restaurant, griddles are the champion.

**And how would you like that done, sir?** Rare to medium rare.

**Would you do us the favor of describing your perfect burger?** 8 ounces of Prime Black Angus: 80/20 mix, medium/large grind, mid-rare, potato bun, pickles, grilled onions, sharp cheddar touch of mustard, touch of ketchup.

**The hamburger is a food item with which most Americans have strong childhood associations. Do you remember your earliest encounter with this delicious dish?** I'm sure in some far recess of my mind there is the very first encounter of a hamburger but i cant remember. Then again I cant remember the first breath I took either.

**What's your favorite fast-food burger?** This is probably burger blasphemy, but... a [McDonald's cheeseburger](#). It rings true in my childhood memory. Yes, I'm guilty.

**What topping or condiment, in your opinion, should never grace a burger?** Kimchi, kiwi, cranberry sauce, seaweed.... the list is long. Shall I go on?

**What's the most unusual burger you've ever eaten? (Or most unusual burger experience you've had?)** I'm a straight shooter, Unusual burgers I don't do.

**What's the most overrated burger you've tried? Most underrated?** That question can make enemies. No comment.

**As a chef who inherited the burger offering on the menu, how did you feel about having to work with it and how did you approach making it your own?** At first I didn't want a burger on the menu. That was short lived. I tried many different approaches: condiments, cooking techniques, etc. It's still evolving. Just recently, I changed the cheese from Gruyere to sharp Cheddar. It's cleaner; more American. Next, we'll start making our own brioche buns. It's a labor of love.

**What are some cooking tips you can offer when preparing a burger?** Buy the best beef possible. Grind it fresh and use it immediately. Don't work the meat to much; just enough to bring the patty together. Use sea salt and fresh cracked black pepper. Cook it hot and quickly. Here's a secret: use butter to baste the burger right before the cheese goes on; a little butter goes a long way. Godspeed. Eat burgers.