

# RURAL RAISED

Perini Ranch Steakhouse was born on the Perini family ranch, but today, the brand encompasses more than just beef.

BY KATE BRADLEY BYARS / PHOTOS COURTESY PERINI RANCH

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*Tom Perini began by catering cowboy events to provide cash flow to his own cattle business.*

**W**hite twinkly lights wrap around the large oak tree at the end of the driveway for Perini Ranch Steakhouse, a subtle beacon for a restaurant that's been featured in the *New York Times* and on the Today Show. The wooden sign welcoming visitors and the dusty rock road that winds back onto the ranch that houses the steakhouse aren't much changed since the Perinis first opened the doors in 1983. While the Perini Ranch brand has expanded

in the 40 years since the Steakhouse opened, the hospitality, quality of food, and focus on flavor that Tom Perini and his wife, Lisa Perini, are so proud to claim remains the same.

"Our theory is quality and consistency," says Tom. "If you're using a good product, no matter what you're making, and you do it right and are consistent, you've got a chance to make it work."

The steakhouse is roughly 30 minutes south of Abilene, Texas, in a small rural town called Buffalo Gap. Tourists visit for the food, to purchase a souvenir at The Perini Ranch Country Market, or stop for coffee at The Gap Café after staying overnight at the Perini Ranch Guesthouse. It's a full-service experience, expanded from when Tom first began catering cowboy events with his chuckwagon in the 1970s.

"We had a [cattle] operation in Stamford, Texas, and I had a chuckwagon on the ranch," Tom says. "Some of the big ranches around us—Swenson Land and Cattle Company, the Four Sixes, the Pitchfork, Matthews—would call me when they had a function, and I would go over and cook for







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*Tom and Lisa Perini know good food and good wine—Lisa is a wine sommelier and Tom has written three cookbooks.*





Whether seated inside or outdoors, diners at Perini Ranch Steakhouse leave with full bellies and great memories.

these folks. It was an extra way to get cash flow into my operation.”

Tom followed family friend and fellow rancher Watt Matthews’ advice to sell out and focus on food. Since then, the Steakhouse, created from a barn on the ranch, has grown into a brand with a podcast, two cookbooks and an anniversary book, mail-order beef, and a catering operation. Tom has received the James Beard Award celebrating his contributions to America’s food culture.

Many menu items have remained the same. And quality Certified Angus Beef is cooked on an open fire for extra flavor.

“We started with an old-fashioned green bean, green chile hominy we developed, and the zucchini Perini is an old Italian family recipe,” Tom says. “I did not want to do French fries and compete against McDonalds, but everybody else was doing them. We started with dishes that were our own, and good beef.”

For Lisa, the menu represents her favorite foods no matter the season. While the business is celebrating 40 years in 2023, it is a new experience for many people.

“After 40 years, maybe the food resonates again,” she says. “Everything comes back around! I think that because our menu and our brand and our atmosphere has stayed true all these years, people find comfort in that. There are lots of fancy steakhouses you can go to any day of the week, but what draws people is familiarity, the rural setting in rural America, and the authenticity and not a show. That is what we offer. To be authentic and allow people to experience that, and it tastes good—it seems to resonate.”

The experience offered to diners coming from the local area or making the trek from Fort Worth, Texas, is an added bonus to the award-winning food. Visitors watch Longhorns roam, a Texas sunset that typically provides a beautiful backdrop, and then a starry night.

“We have people that drive to us for an authentic experience,” Tom says. “It’s coming to the ranch, having that culture while having a steak. We are not a fancy restaurant. People have come for generations, and that makes us extremely proud. It is very flattering to us.”



## VISIT BUFFALO GAP

Approximately 25 minutes south of Abilene, Texas, the tiny town of Buffalo Gap boasts fewer than 500 residents. However, it receives visitors on a regular basis, most bound for Perini Ranch Steakhouse, just outside of town.

There are other stops to make driving down the main street, including Perini Ranch Country Market—a great place to pick up a souvenir—and The Gap Café for coffee, breakfast or lunch.

For more information, visit [periniranch.com](http://periniranch.com).



## Ranch-Made Recipe Green Chile Hominy

When Perini Ranch Steakhouse was looking to add authentic and flavorful recipes to its menu, family friend and fellow rancher Louise Matthews inspired a long-standing favorite, green chile hominy. It's a signature side and honors Matthews' New Mexico roots while sticking to the Perini's goal of quality ingredients full of flavor.

This recipe can be found in *Perini Ranch Steakhouse: Stories and Recipes for Real Texas Food* by Lisa and Tom Perini.

Serves 10 to 12

- Vegetable oil spray
- 10 slices bacon
- 1 cup chopped onion
- Four 15-ounce cans white hominy, drained, with ½ cup liquid reserved
- 1 or 2 pickled jalapeños, minced, with 1 tablespoon liquid from the jar
- 1 cup chopped, roasted, peeled, and seeded New Mexican green or poblano chiles
- 8 ounces (2 cups) shredded cheddar

Heat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9x13-inch baking dish at least 2 inches deep with vegetable oil spray.

Put the bacon slices in a cold skillet. Turn the heat to medium-low and cook bacon for 3 minutes on one side. Turn the bacon and cook on the other side to desired doneness. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towels.



When cool enough to handle, crumble the bacon with your fingers and set aside.

Carefully pour off all but 2 to 3 tablespoons of the bacon drippings. Return the skillet to the stovetop and stir in the onion. Cook over medium heat until the onion is tender, about 5 minutes. Pour in the hominy liquid and jalapeño liquid and cook until reduced by about one-half, approximately 5 minutes. Add the hominy and jalapeños, and heat through. Stir in half of the crumbled bacon and half of the cheese.

Spoon into the prepared baking dish. Scatter the remaining bacon and cheese over the hominy. Bake for 25 minutes, until the cheese on top melts and the hominy mixture is bubbly. Let sit for 5 minutes before serving. 🍴