



## King of the Grill

Viking's ritzy new smoker, plus a little gadget to monitor your grub, lets you achieve perfection

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE I used state-of-the-art technology to harass a neighbor. Readers of this column might recall how last fall, when I was locked in a race to build a better man cave than my friend's across the street, I abused my position as a consumer-electronics writer so I could invite my buddy Dorfman to come check out my magnificent new 65-in. laser-powered HDTV from Mitsubishi. Victory was mine, at least for the 15 days until I had to give the TV back.

But this spring, when I heard that an upcoming barbecue competition on our block would pit me against Stock (Dorfman's next-door neighbor), I quailed. Stock is a barbecue bully. During the last cook-off, he planked a salmon that was epic—and he never stopped gloating about it. Now, with the Great Chicken Grill-Off only weeks away, he was mincing about with a plan to kill his own poultry. And I? I had nothing.

Help arrived in an e-mail from the Viking Range Corp.: Would I like to try its new 30-in. gravity-feed smoker? Faster than you can say *baby back ribs*, I drove down to a Viking distributor in Hayward, Calif., where a fellow named Mike Love gave me a quick demo of the \$3,000 cooker. Most smokers I've used look like something from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. The Viking smoker is a sleek, 375-lb. (170 kg) stainless-steel vault built to resemble a



### FAIL-SAFE BBQ

- 1 CHIMNEY**  
Critical feature, also kinda cute
- 2 GRAVITY FEED**  
Controls 12 hours' worth of coals and wood chips so you don't need to keep feeding the beast
- 3 DRIP PAN**  
Easy to remove and clean
- 4 ADJUSTABLE LEGS**  
No wobbling!



**Active thermometer**  
The DigiQ II ensures a stable pit temperature

high-end refrigerator. A cute little chimney vents smoke from the middle. The "gravity feed," Love pointed out, is nothing more than a long chute. It works much like a cat-food dispenser; you fill it with charcoal and smoke woods, which drop down as the lower stuff burns out, so you can set your temperature at a nice 250°F (about 120°C) and walk away for 12 hours. Hillbilly-type smokers require a lot more tending.

As if the cooker wasn't cool enough, Love handed me a palm-size thermometer. "Viking recommends you use this," he said of the DigiQ II (\$260 from thebbqguru.com).

With a tiny fan and two temperature probes—one for inside the pit and one for inside your food—the DigiQ ensures stable heat by using the fan to stoke the embers. It also sounds an alarm when your meat's cooked.

Stock was a dead man. And he didn't even know it yet. Over the next 10 days, I smoked chickens, ducks, brisket, pheasant and, most

delectable of all, ribs. I had lungs like a coal miner's but continued to smoke anything I could find. I almost threw my wife's little dog in there.

On the day of the competition, my neighbors arrived with their chickens. Stock brought something he called "Chicken Salad in the Style of Zuni Café." I took him out back and, with a flourish, unlatched the smoker door. Stock looked stricken. Then he brightened as I pulled out my entrée. "Ribs?" he snorted. They would disqualify me for it, but they would love me too, for these were the best ribs ever. Stock hasn't mentioned his salmon since. ■



### Boys and Grills

Josh Quittner takes on his friend and BBQ nemesis at [time.com/smoker](http://time.com/smoker)