Jean is still away doing healthful and emotionally developmental things at Canyon Ranch, eating wisely, exercising, and engaging in oriental arts like Tai Chi and Zen Meditation. I am not. I am dealing with problems related to having too much to eat and too much to drink stashed away in nooks and crannies throughout the house.

In particular, I have several hundred more bottles of beer in the basement than I can reasonably expect to drink. I have far more smoked meats ... expertly smoked pulled pork, finally properly done after numerous earlier attempts to get smokiness, crispiness, moistness, and basic “pullability” in balance. I have sweet maple-rubbed maple-smoked ribs, hot Jamaican Jerk baby back ribs, brisket ... What am I to do with this? There are of course at least 3 options. (1) One of my colleagues, no longer here, a devout Evangelical Economist (this is much like a Scientologist only less rational), would have said “You have too much, so the shadow price is zero, your time dealing with this is expensive, so give it to me or throw it out.” Failing to get me to give it to him, he would have said (2) “There is indeed the possibility of gain from trade, and while it is not worth much to me it is worth something ... here is a dollar ... give me all of your beer.” This is not why he is no longer with us, but it is why he is not missed as a dinner companion. An old housemate from my undergraduate Animal House days would have said (3) “It’s too good for a food fight, so what about a Potlach!”

A Potlach, of course, is when you invite people you like and give them stuff. Pacific Northwest Native Americans seemed to do this and it seemed to do them no harm and it provided endless amusement to anthropologists. Rather than throw out the barbecue or sell the beer to David, I had dinner for some graduate students. This seemed like a Good Thing; my favorite MIT faculty member, Bob Rose, taught me decades ago when I was a student that faculty members’ feeding students was indeed a Good Thing. I had two Ph.D. students, an MBA student, a recent MBA graduate, and the wife and daughter of one of them, and we consumed too much beer, and even more barbecue, in the interest of Potlach.

When my guests arrived they were met by a spread of beer and other beverages, chips, cheddar home smoked over apple and pecan wood, chips, and dips.
We then retired to the dining room for sweet smoked ribs with a New England Maple Sugar rub, smoked over maple wood, Memphis Rubbed ribs, smoked over hickory, and pulled pork with a Memphis rub, also smoked over hickory. I am *wifeless* for the rest of the weekend, so the table settings were pretty basic, the *Financial Times* as placemats, plastic plates, and individually bagged sets of disposable airplane cutlery. Serving was easy and I knew that cleanup would be fast ... when finished we could just throw everything out! And we had a fine time reading each other’s placemats.

I had promised that dinner would cover the essential food groups in the Department of Health’s revised Food Pyramid — which are well-known to be Salt, Grease, Alcohol, Sugar, and Chocolate. The ribs certainly covered our requirements for salt and grease, the beer addressed everyone’s daily alcohol requirements, and a final course of chocolate mousse cake met everyone’s requirements for sugar and chocolate. Dessert was served with a *Mikkeller Beer Geek Breakfast Stout*, a sweet beer laced with coffee beans, and with heavy chocolate flavors produced by the interaction of the yeast with dark roasted malted barley. This was the hit of the evening, both as a beer, and a beer-food pairing.
And then, of course, it was time for cleanup. This was not especially difficult. Everything got thrown into bags. The plastic plates and cutlery were discarded. The bottles were recycled. There were a few serving pieces to wash, a few bowls, knives, or other utensils, but this was easy enough that I finished it pretty quickly after the students left. Jean would agree that it must have been easy ... after all, I did it, rather than relying on the husbandly default of leaving it for her to deal with on her return.
This was a pleasant evening and it did significantly reduce my barbecue inventory. The beer inventory is going to take some more work, but I am hopeful that my friends will help me through the stockpile. Indeed, people helped by leaving with a little something after dinner, a little pork, some ribs, the leftover cake, a beer. What are friends for?

I’m pleased to say I didn’t eat much, but of course that was the plan ... working down the inventory without actually over-eating myself. I’m not sure what the prior plan was for my beer consumption, but since I can still type and still spell I guess I achieved some degree of moderation there as well.

I will admit that I awoke the next morning with a considerable degree of apprehension — what, exactly, would I find in the kitchen? What sort of disaster had I left myself?
Fortunately, it really wasn’t bad. The rain had stopped, it was a bright sunny day, and I had knocked off everything, absolutely everything, in a slightly numbed, thoroughly cheerful, beer-induced buzz. Unless Jean snuck back home, or the Kitchen Clean Fairy did everything for me during the night, I had done it myself, actually quite adequately.

Now, if I can just find a couple of graduate students to eat the tortilla chips and corn con queso dip before I blow my cholesterol count through the ceiling I will declare the evening to have been without serious fallout!

ekc