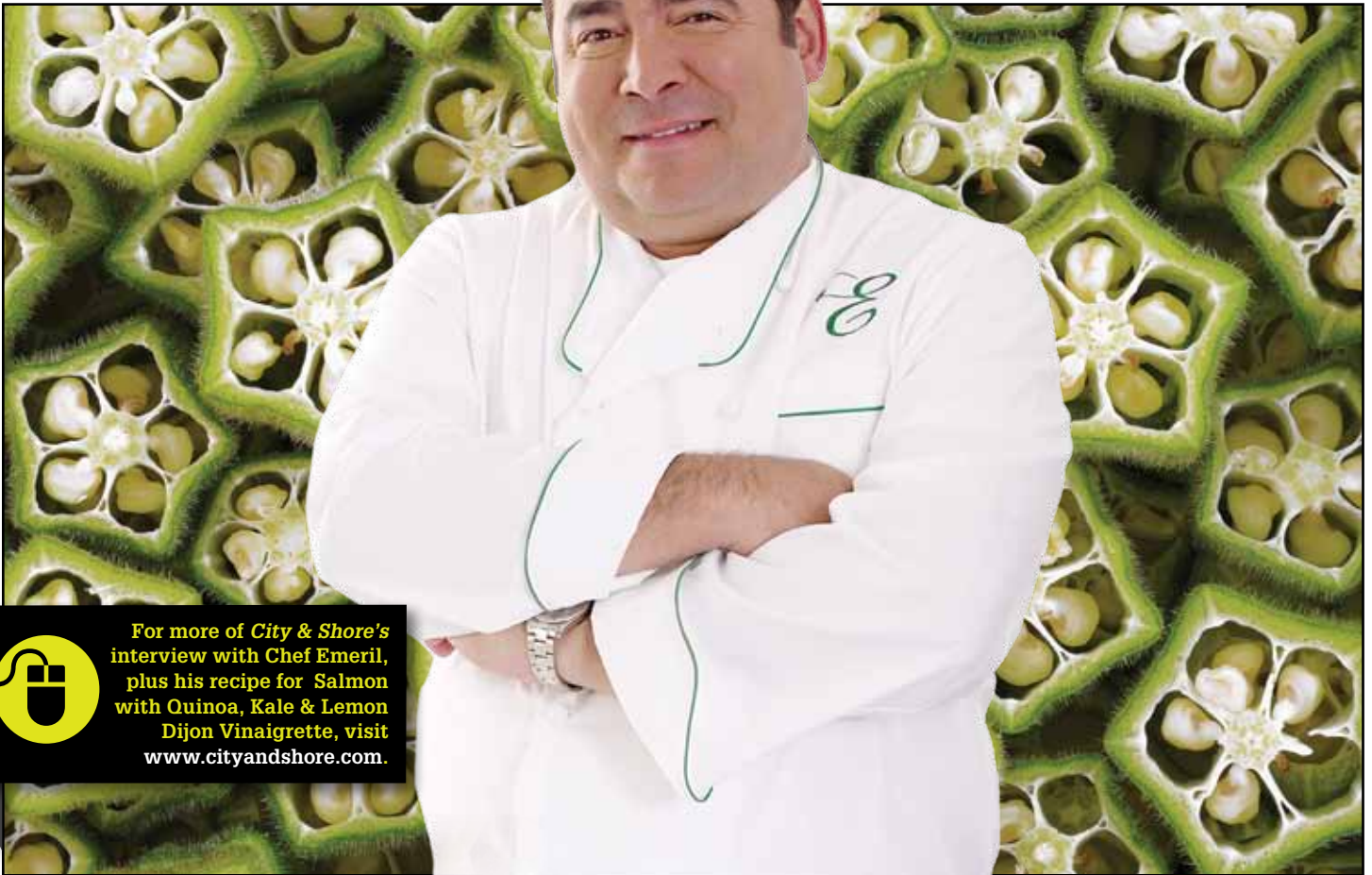


IN THE CITY

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For more of *City & Shore's* interview with Chef Emeril, plus his recipe for Salmon with Quinoa, Kale & Lemon Dijon Vinaigrette, visit www.cityandshore.com.

A toast to **EMERIL**

Celebrated multitasking chef, star of the upcoming American Fine Wine Competition Gala in Boca Raton, feeds the dream as he dreams of fishing

By ELIZABETH RAHE

Seafood and wine are on Emeril Lagasse's mind. They come up several times during a conversation with the iconic chef/author/TV personality. It's no surprise, given that he has been promoting seafood from his beloved Gulf of Mexico, and that he will be doing his chef-as-entertainer appearance at the American Fine Wine Competition Gala (April 19 at the Boca Raton Resort & Club, see p. 28).

"There's a magic with pinot and salmon," Lagasse says, responding to a question about his favorite food and wine combination. Of course, salmon is not from the Gulf, but he goes on to assess other seafood complements.

"I try to stay away from really oaky chardonnays when it comes to fish and shellfish. There are other varietals that you can use, like Albariño, Riesling, even Sauvignon blanc, if it's not too acidic. I always tell people that champagne basically goes with everything and anything. I love Sancerre with oysters...and I could go on and on and on and probably bore you to death."

Boredom is not a word typically associated with the TV chef who interjected "Bam!" and "Kick it up a notch" into his early '90s taping marathons to keep the crew awake. That he holds forth on wine reflects a personal passion, which he shares in his restaurant wine lists. Two of his 13

restaurants, Emeril's New Orleans and Delmonico Steakhouse in Las Vegas, can claim the *Wine Spectator* Grand Award, given to only 74 restaurants last year. Even the annual New Orleans fundraiser for his Emeril Lagasse Foundation, *Carnivale du Vin*, revolves around wine.

"I'm fortunate to have a master sommelier and eight really great sommeliers, and we feed off each other," says Lagasse, 52. He is quick to add, however, that he is no wine snob. "It's not so much the white vs. the red or white goes with this and red goes with this. It's really about personal taste."

As for seafood, he has been promoting the safety of fish and shellfish from the Gulf of Mexico in the wake of the 2010 BP oil spill. "There's more testing of our seafood than probably anywhere in the world," he says. (The Food and Drug Administration and The Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services have assured the safety of Gulf harvests.)

Lagasse also has a personal passion for fishing. With a residence in the North Florida town of Destin – nicknamed the World's Luckiest Fishing Village – he says he loves getting out on the Gulf to catch dinner. Finding time for it is the trick.

His crowded schedule includes visits to his restaurants in five cities, including two in Orlando, Emeril's Orlando and Emeril's Tchoup Chop. Emeril's South Beach closed last August. "From a business standpoint, it was just in our best interest that we not renew our lease and move on," he says. There are no current plans for another restaurant in South Florida, but he says, "We always have our ears to the ground."

He also has commitments to Martha Stewart Living Omnimedia, which bought the rights to his television shows, cookbooks and product lines in 2008. On television he appears on ABC's *Good Morning America*, Hallmark Channel's *Emeril's Table* and Bravo's *Top Chef*, in addition to shows from previous seasons on The Cooking Channel. With 15 cookbooks to his credit, he is always working on the next one – this year he tackles sandwiches.

Then there's work for his foundation, formed in 2002, which has granted \$5 million to programs that promote mentorship, education, nutrition and the arts for children in New Orleans, his company's Homebase, and other restaurant locales. At the New Orleans Center for Creative Arts the foundation funded a state-of-the-art teaching kitchen for a high school culinary arts program.

"It tickles me to see these kids get their hearts touched by something culinary-wise and see them have hope," he says.

Lagasse also takes great joy in his own kids, two grown daughters from a previous marriage, and his young children with wife, Alden Lovelace, E.J. (Emeril John Lagasse IV), 9, and Meril, 7.

He talked about his family, as well as fishing and wine, during a wide-ranging conversation. Here are some excerpts.

You have so much going on in your life. You always give credit to your team, but how do you balance it all?

Being in a good place mentally helps out. I'm also trying to work physically on myself. The balancing sometimes is tough, the demands are certainly hard, but I'm not really doing anything half. I either do it right, or we're not going to do it. Obviously, I have responsibilities with the Martha Stewart brand, my restaurants, the foundation, my personal life. I don't have a lot of time to be fishing in Florida, which is what I want to do. But I'm going to get there eventually.

How are you working on yourself physically?

I'm exercising three, four times a week. I basically redesigned my diet. I'm not *on* a diet. I'm just eating healthier. I eat a lot of fish and shellfish from Florida and Louisiana. My wife and I expose our children to dining, but they also know there is a moderation and balance in everything. We cook healthy, and it's part of our daily life.

With your busy schedule are you able to spend much time around the family table?

I'm working as hard, if not harder, than I was before. I thought it was supposed to get easier. But I've trained myself over the last several years to balance my schedule to be as much of a dad and husband as I can. The family table is important to me, whether they visit with me at the restaurant or whether I go home.

I understand your son, E.J., has inherited your telegenic personality.

Meril has a great personality, as well. It's amazing for me to see how they have hardly any fear – or really *any* fear – to just entertain. Particularly E.J., musically. He sings, and he has learned how to play drums. It's amazing to me, how much talent they have at a young age.

I understand your older daughters, Jessie Lagasse Swanson and Jilly Lagasse, have a gluten-free cookbook coming out in October. Did you give them advice?

I was pretty shocked when they told me that they were going to do a cookbook. Jilly is the one who has the more serious celiac problem, but they both have it. I gave them a few of my recipes that I do gluten-free...but it was something they totally did on their own. I kind of just clapped and smiled and said, hey, good luck. It's a tough business out there, the book business. They'll bring something to the table that is educational and delicious – I feel very confident about that.

When you became chef at Commander's Palace in New Orleans 30 years ago, could you even imagine having 13 restaurants?

I had this amazing opportunity to work for some of the best restaurateurs in the world, Ella and Dick Brennan. I had great mentors, and it made me realize that I had to mentor. My goal was to become best chef I could be for New Orleans and for myself... I opened Emeril's in 1990. The only reason why I have more than one restaurant was because I had a strong team that wanted to stay intact and grow. The only way to do that was to expand. And that's how I got into this mess.

What are you seeing in young chefs today?

[At e2 Emeril's Eatery in Charlotte, opened in January,] I look around the kitchen...and I'm blown away that these kids are 19, 20, 21 years old, and they're cooking with heart, and they have the education and knowledge of exactly what I'm trying to create. It tells me that there's a younger and broader group out there that's been educated from a young age to be interested and passionate about food.

Do you think that's due to their exposure to chefs on TV, which you helped pioneer?

Yeah, I've seen it this season on *Top Chef* – the quality, energy, passion of these cooks, chefs. It just blows my mind. It's continually raising the bar. I want to be honest that I'm talking about real cooking. I'm not talking about this molecule stuff and frozen stuff and all that. I don't know how that works.

You don't really relate to molecular gastronomy?

I really don't relate to that. I guess I'm at a different age. ●



Watch Emeril's TV legacy through video clips at www.cityandshore.com



American Fine Wine Competition President Shari Gherman, right, with Steve Mariano, CEO of presenting sponsor Patriot National Insurance Group.

Gala Uncorked

Chef Emeril and more than 600 wines flavor American Fine Wine Competition

Chef Emeril Lagasse was a natural choice as the star of the Fifth American Fine Wine Competition, the gala invitational event set for April 19 at the Boca Raton Resort & Club.

"He's a big wine guy... We're a bunch of foodies and wine lovers like him," says Shari Gherman, president and co-founder of the American Fine Wine Competition.

The gala is expected to attract up to 600 oenophiles to dine on fine cuisine and sip from among 600-plus wines entered in the competition. Gherman and Monty Preiser, co-founder of the event with his wife, Sara, taste and evaluate the wines to determine which to include.

"We don't enter wines unless they are worthy of a medal," Gherman says, adding that many come from small boutique wineries unfamiliar to most South Floridians.

Throughout the evening, guests will have the opportunity to enjoy the wines, poured by 50 volunteer Wine Angels. Chef Emeril will entertain at the gala with his trademark flair, preparing the main course theater-style. Guests may enter a lottery to win one of eight seats onstage for an up-close view of the TV chef's culinary talents and larger-than-life personality.

Proceeds from the lottery as well as live and silent auctions benefit the gala's charities, the Diabetes Research Institute and the Golden Bell Education Foundation. In the past four years, AFWC has raised more than \$430,000 for its causes.

Alan Kalter, announcer for *Late Show with David Letterman*, will be the emcee and auctioneer for the evening. Jazz Saxophonist Dayve Stewart & The Vibe will provide musical entertainment.

American Fine Wine Competition and Gala, April 19, Boca Raton Resort & Club, www.AmericanFineWineCompetition.com, 561-504-8463. Tickets, \$310, available via the website

—Elizabeth Rahe

Guests of Otters

Museum adds spirits and critters to Wine & Culinary Celebration

The recently opened **EcoDiscovery Center** adds an exciting dimension to the annual Museum of Discovery & Science Wine & Culinary Celebration – new exhibits such as the live North American river otters playing in their rocky habitat and the Storm Center with its swirling tornado.



The 34,000-square-foot expansion of the Fort Lauderdale museum has more than doubled the exhibit space, and in turn, the celebration space.

An estimated 1,800 guests are expected for the March 30 event, which will feature wines from around the world and, for the first time, a selection of champagne, spirits and craft beers. More than 40 of South Florida's top restaurants and chefs will prepare foods that pair with the wines and spirits. This year's featured chefs are Angelo Elia of Casa D'Angelo, Sean McDonald of ilios at the Hilton Fort Lauderdale Beach Resort and Chi Chan of Truluck's. The evening also features a silent auction, tasting seminars and a complimentary Reidel wine glass for every guest.



For VIP guests the celebration begins with a martini reception and champagne tasting paired with a culinary demonstration. It concludes with admission to the Hilton Fort Lauderdale VIP Lounge for food, drinks and dancing.

Museum of Discovery & Science 17th Wine, Spirits & Culinary Celebration, Fort Lauderdale, March 30, 954-713-0954, www.mods.org. Tickets: VIP \$150, general admission \$85.

—Elizabeth Rahe