

Mario Batali

A conversation with the chef, restaurateur, and family man.



PERHAPS THE MOST celebrated of America's celebrity chefs, Mario Batali presides over an epicurean empire that includes everything from television shows and restaurants (20 and counting) to brick ovens and pepper mills. The 51-year-old entrepreneur recently added a new show on ABC (*The Chew*) and a new cookbook to his burgeoning portfolio, but food is not just a business for this boisterous redhead; it is a way to bring family and friends together. Batali explores this time-honored tradition in his latest book, *Molto Batali: Simple Family Meals from My Home to Yours*, which espouses the notion that if you put something great on the table, your family will follow. Nowhere is this more evident than at Batali's own tables. Whether it is at their summer home on Lake Michigan or in their dining room in Manhattan, the Batalis—Mario, wife Susi Cahn, and their two teenage children—are proof that food and family are inseparable. —CHRISTINA GAROFALO

How did childhood shape your love of cooking?

Growing up in Washington [State], we always pickled and preserved and made pies, because it was free and it was there. I thought that was something everyone did, until I went to my friends' homes and they had things like packaged sausage. At the time, that seemed like luxury because it was so foreign to me. Now all I want to do is get back to those traditions I grew up with, and we do that at our summer house in Michigan. It gives my kids the chance to grow up with an understanding of food the way I did. Our house is on a big beach in a small town with one traffic light. Every year there, we go to the annual cherry festival, and afterward we bake soufflés and pies.

Do your children enjoy helping out in the kitchen?

I wanted my kids to have a home that was conducive to cooking together. I built my kitchen with a large island so if they come home with 10 of their friends, we can pull out my KitchenAid electric roller and make pizza or pasta together. Making pasta is so fun with that thing—you just put the dough through the machine and all these squiggly noodles fly out. We always have lots of laughs over that together.

What brought you to the table as a child?

My grandmother's biscotti. I've carried her recipe in my wallet since I was in college. She made it with hazelnuts, and she made them really crunchy by baking them extra long the

second time around. Whenever she would eat them, she always had to dip them into her red wine. It was so gross to me as a kid, but now I can't resist it. Every time I make those biscotti, I have to dip a little into my red wine.

What is your go-to red wine?

I love Brunello di Montalcino, Barolo, and Recioto della Valpolicella, as well as Rhônes, but I actually prefer whites. But I'll pretty much open any bottle as long as someone will sit down and drink it with me. I have about 6,000 bottles in my apartment, which I'm pretty sure is maximum capacity.

Do you collect anything else?

My passion is really food, and wine because it goes with food. Somehow this has translated into a quirky collection of spatulas. I'm not sure how it started, but every holiday and birthday since my kids were about 3 and 4 years old, they've bought me at least one spatula. Now I have about 10 years' worth lined up on our kitchen counter. They're of no monetary value, but they're my most sentimental kitchen items.

What is your definition of a life well lived?

Successful children and a comfortable home—not only a home of luxury, but one where I can be involved with food outside of business and where I can continue the traditions I've grown up with and grown to love... maybe for 180 years. That seems like a good amount of time to live. ☐