

5 Minutes with...

Celebrity Chef Marcus Samuelsson



Photo by Brent Herrig

Why are you head over heels about cooking?

I love the creativity of cooking and eating. Cooking is very rewarding. What I love about it is that you can cook a meal and can share it, you can share where you've been on a journey, you can share where you're going, you can share what you're excited about. It can be spiritual; you can really bring your mood into the food. But it is also something that still is both a craft and an art. I practice cooking almost every day. It's a combination of work ethic, craftsmanship, and artistry.

When did you realize you had the knack for it?

When I was a teenager. I started to make meals for my family and everyone loved my food, even the pickiest of eaters. My grandmother helped me find that passion and my parents gave me my work ethic. Working in France showed me what it would take, and then coming to this incredible environment here in New York City pushed me even more, working with the chefs from Harlem EatUp and other local chefs, like Jonathan Waxman, Daniel Boulud and Melba Wilson. They're the ones inspiring and pushing me every day.

Is there a difference between cooking for Americans and Europeans?

I do believe that there is. In America, you have a multicultural culinary base with a variety of different consumers, which makes it more interesting. In America, the biggest difference is we have diversity. The bigger the diversity the more you have to take into consideration. Maybe there won't be as much pork on the menu, maybe you have to think about more vegetarian dishes. You have to think about people's choices in order to feed a more diverse nation.

What is your favorite ingredient at the moment?

I am intrigued by seafood, even the most simple, like soft shell crab. I also like rhubarb.

Are you head over heels for a particular cookbook?

White Heat is my favorite, by chef Marco Pierre White. He showed me a different path in France. And I love Leah Chase's *And Still I Cook*. She is one of my mentors.

Julia Child said careful cooking is love. Do you agree?

I completely agree. It is a way of caring. I think it applies to everything we do. Everything that I know and every place that I have been has always revolved around cooking. Whether I am breaking bread with my family in Harlem or in Ethiopia, to me it is one in the same, and I love it.

How would you tailor a menu for the ultimate date night?

The menu would have intimate, shareable food. I'd begin with oysters. I think there must be champagne, definitely some bubbles. I love something that talks about a journey a couple has shared together, like the Caribbean—for instance, grilled lobster with rice. They'd finish with strawberries and buttermilk sorbet, to bring back some childhood memories. **EDGE**

Editor's Note: Marcus Samuelsson is a favorite contestant and judge on cooking competition shows, and owns Red Rooster in Harlem. He holds the distinction of being the youngest chef ever to receive a 3-Star review from the *New York Times*. As executive chef at Aquavit, he was named the top chef in New York City by the James Beard Foundation. Editor At Large **Tracey Smith** actually spent more than 5 Minutes with Marcus. Log onto edgemonline.com to learn more about Red Rooster and his life as a celebrity chef.