

Cooking With Ted

Ted Allen has a new cookbook out called
The Food You Want to Eat: 100 Smart, Simple Recipes

BY HOPE S. PHILBRICK

Perhaps best known as the food-and-wine guy on Bravo's Emmy Award-winning show *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, Ted Allen is also an award-winning journalist.

Born in Columbus, Ohio, and raised in Indianapolis, Allen earned a B.A. in psychology from Purdue University and an M.A. in journalism at New York University. He launched his journalism career in Chicago—which he calls “a great food town”—working first at a community newspaper and later at *Chicago* magazine as a senior editor and restaurant critic, where he won two writing awards from the Society of Professional Journalists.

The 40-year-old Allen currently lives in New York City with his partner of nearly 13 years, interior designer Barry Rice.

The Wine Report met with Allen when he was in Atlanta promoting his new cookbook, *The Food You Want to Eat: 100 Smart, Simple Recipes*.

The Wine Report: So, what do people want to eat?

Ted Allen: The cookbook title came from two places: It's about the food you want to eat, not the food that people are telling you that you should eat. It's about enjoyment, not diet, although I do try to be sensitive to the use of fat and oil because I just don't like food that's overly rich for no reason. At the same time, I only want to cook with natural ingredients, so I'm not going to use margarine. The other reason for the title really was that the recipes are quite eclectic. It's just a very personal collection.

TWR: With so much information available these days, are people intimidated by the kitchen?

TA: Absolutely. Although the food revolution in our country for the last couple of decades has really been exciting. It all began with Julia Child and came up through Martha Stewart, Mario Batali, Bobby Flay and many great people; even Starbucks. There are so many forces in the culture that have made great food so much more widespread. The previous generation was all about, “How can I feed my family as quickly and easily as possible with whatever prepackaged junk I can throw into a microwave?” We've rediscovered the joy of cooking. I think that's a very cool thing.

TWR: On *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, you get to peek inside kitchens and make sure folks are properly equipped. What are you looking for?

TA: I love gadgets, and it's hard to have fun doing anything without the right tools, so I do have a



Ted Allen; journalist turned TV star turned author

lot of junk in my kitchen. But the only things I think are really important to have are a great chef's knife and a beautiful skillet that heats evenly. With other stuff, you can really get away with less expensive things. You don't need a \$400 stockpot, because you're not likely to burn soup. I hope.

TWR: In your new cookbook, you suggest wine pairings with every main dish. What's your food-and-wine-pairing philosophy?

TA: On the one hand, I think it's great to tell people to drink what they like, as there aren't necessarily any hard-and-fast rules. On the other hand, there are many people who don't even understand the most basic rationale behind food-and-wine pairing: that is, red with steak and white with fish. The world of wine is enormous and intimidating. Many people respond to that intimidation by just not drinking wine at all. What I try to do, both on the show and in the book, is suggest there's no need to be afraid to ask for help. I ask questions all the time. People who are really into wine love to share that knowledge.

TWR: What's the key to creating a memorable food and wine experience?

TA: Give your guests a fun experience, something they maybe haven't tried before. Get a menu that you're comfortable doing—things that don't require a lot of fussing around when company comes over because nobody wants to watch you panic—then take that menu to a wine shop and say, “Give me something surprising.”

TWR: What do you typically drink?

TA: Whatever I can get my hands on. I love Pinot Noir. I had a great Cab a couple of days ago—an Opus One, such a powerful, gorgeous, structured, fat, wonderful wine. It's one of my favorites. As far as varietals go, there's really nothing I don't like. I'm not a big White Zin guy, although I do like rosés and I'm not adverse to sweeter wines. I love off-dry wines like Riesling, Gewürztraminer and Pinot Gris, especially with Asian food or sweet-spicy food.

TWR: Is there one question you're asked most often?

TA: Everybody always wants to know, “Where's the next great restaurant?” But the cooking questions I get tend to be very specific and personal.



FROGTOWN

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 reservations required

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Tasting Room Hours:

Friday from 12 to 5
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