



Famous foodie feasting on success

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You know you've made it as a chef when you get a car as a tip for good service.

Culinary veteran and *Restaurant Makeover* star David Adjey was given the 1966 gold-on-gold Chevy Impala by Dan Aykroyd in 1977. Not too shabby for a summer's work at the actor's Kingston home.

"It was a stunning car and in mint condition. I actually got tipped a car," Adjey says.

Of course, Adjey has enjoyed many other memorable career moments, before and after that experience, that have transformed him into a published cookbook author, speaking circuit regular, and household name among Food Network devotees.

Food became interesting to Adjey back in the 1970s, when he witnessed the themed dinner parties his parents used to throw. His first industry job was as a dishwasher at a Greek greasy spoon around the corner from his Scarborough home.

In 1990, after completing two years of study at the elite Culinary Institute of America, Adjey landed his first real job — at New York City's trendy Melrose (now closed), under the tutelage of esteemed chef Richard Krause.

"Here I was, a kid from Scarborough, working for this guy who was an innovator of cuisine and who apprenticed with Wolfgang Puck. It really opened my eyes to how amazing the world of food is," says Adjey, 44.

Adjey's enchantment with the culinary realm, and his own innate talents, propelled his rise at various established venues such as San Ysidro

Ranch, a luxury hotel in southern California, and at upscale Toronto dining destinations such as Far Niente and Sassafras.

Adjey partly attributes his success as a chef to his engaging personality.

"People hire you to be a good cook, but it's also about your charisma," he says. "The chef needs to be an ambassador or storyteller who can talk with passion about food and get you hungry as you look at the menu."

That's an easy job for Adjey, who admits he's passionate to the point of being obsessive about food. It's a passion that has helped him develop his interests and abilities in a number of areas, for the most part to great effect.

"I'm an emotional person and I cook the way I live."

David Adjey, culinary veteran and *Restaurant Makeover* star

His colourful, candid style in the often-decrepit kitchens of *Restaurant Makeover* shows — Adjey's second Food Network show — shocks and inspires the chefs he's there to help, and makes for fantastic viewing.

His lively personality has also entertained plenty of restaurant owners, corporate executives and more through the public speaking he does across the country.

As well, Adjey has shared his unique and compelling culinary insights in two published cookbooks, most recently *Deconstructing the Dish: Inspirations for Modern-day Cuisine*.

"I'm an emotional person and I cook the way I live," he says. "The

book is based on my four emotions — hot, warm, cool and cold — and really shows how I think about food, and the different elements that go into a dish."

Adjey did venture into the tricky terrain of chef-ownership in 2003 when he was a partner in T.O. restaurant Nectar. The business work, however, left a bad taste in his mouth, and he left three years later.

The downtown denizen also harbours some regrets about what his laser-like career focus has cost him: marriages, friendships, even his health.

But in the main, Adjey is relishing his über-foodie lifestyle, and is constantly cooking up new culinary initiatives. He recently pioneered Ultimate Dinner, which lets average folks across Canada hire him to cook dinner in their own homes. It's a full-service affair in which Adjey buys the ingredients, cooks and entertains guests, and even cleans up afterwards (www.davidadjeycuisine.com).

"For people to be able to ask questions about why certain ingredients go with a meal is a really neat and interactive experience," he says.

Adjey is also currently working with the Food Network to develop another show in which he'll coach new restaurateurs to success.

He says he feels lucky to be doing what he loves in a culture that's so receptive to culinary innovation.

"This generation realizes that eating is the most important thing we do next to breathing, and we are so in tune with what we eat," he says. "It's been a wonderful food revolution, and I've been happy to be a part of it."

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