

# OCEAN DRIVE





# KISS THE COOK

*Giada De Laurentiis sets Miami's burners to "high" as the Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival turns 10.*

*By Andrew C. Stone • Photograph by Kim Myers Robertson*

**T**he celebrity chef world used to be reserved for tough guys and granny types—not the playground of Botticelli-esque beauties with trim figures and million-dollar smiles. But Giada De Laurentiis—granddaughter of film producer Dino De Laurentiis—has cooked and charmed her way into countless hearts (via people's stomachs, of course), and shows little sign of slowing. Over the past decade, De Laurentiis has juggled the roles of devoted mother and wife, best-selling cookbook author, *Today Show* correspondent, *Next Food Network Star* judge, Oxfam America ambassador, Barilla spokesperson and Emmy-winning host of *Everyday Italian*, *Giada's Weekend Getaways* and *Giada at Home*.

As her new kitchen-product line, Giada De Laurentiis for Target, flies off shelves, she heads our way to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the Food Network South Beach Wine & Food Festival. The four-day event benefits Florida International University's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management Teaching Restaurant as well as the Southern Wine & Spirits Beverage Management Center. "South Beach has a vibe all its own," De Laurentiis says. "I live in LA, and most of the culinary world lives in New York. We're like a big fraternity or sorority, and we all go down to Miami together."

Southern Wine & Spirits' Lee Brian Schragar, who has turned the festival into one of the food world's most highly anticipated events, was an early champion of De Laurentiis. "He was the first person who said, 'It would be great to have Giada come down and do a demo.'" She was unsure of herself, but Schragar remained enthusiastic: "He said, 'I know you can, and you need to try.' I was so nervous, but once I got down there, the vibe was so great and the people were so warm. They helped me do it."

She confesses that her looks were a mixed blessing at first, forcing her to convince skeptics of her culinary worth. "My recipes are my life, and they work. That's ultimately what people care about. You can be glamorous and enjoy food. That's the essence of Italian culture!" The secret behind her own glamorous waistline? "Small portions. I don't eat huge plates of pasta—I eat a little bit of everything I like."

Budding Giadas often ask her how to get their own cooking shows, but—as she had no personal game plan initially—she's not sure what advice to give them. "There are a lot of great chefs who may be better Italian cooks than I am, but who don't really work in front of the camera," she explains. "If you're not able to teach someone else, it's not going to work. But there are so many different avenues you can take as a chef these days, and new ones are being forged every day. I always say, 'If you're passionate about something, it will come through.'" **▀**