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Giada

heats things up!

She's shown us all that a strong, sexy woman's place can be in the kitchen. And in this candid interview during one of the toughest weeks of her life, Giada De Laurentiis revealed a fierce spirit we've never seen before.

most of the time we're a little jealous of Giada De Laurentiis (her looks, her career, her undeniable way with pasta, and her amazing, pasta-proof body). But not on the particular day REDBOOK interviewed her this winter. The sexy host of *Giada at Home*, who avoids the Hollywood spotlight with the same distaste she might have for frozen pizza, had just made national headlines when a tabloid printed a story falsely charging her of hooking up with musician and infamous cad John Mayer. Immediately after came the devastating news that her famous grandfather, Dino De Laurentiis, the guiding force in her life, had passed away. This hailstorm of events would have sent the average celebrity straight into hiding, but not



Giada believes food brings people closer, including the very deserving couple she surprised for this story. Meet them on page 134.

THE GIRL WHO PLAYS WITH FIRE

"I think Italians are so passionate, and people are drawn to that," says the Food Network star. "Who doesn't want passion in their life? Everyone is searching for love."

HAIR: ROB TALTY USING RESE FURTERER AT THE MAGNET AGENCY.COM; MAKEUP: MONIKA BLUNDER FOR THE WALL GROUP; MANICURE: CARLA KAY FOR CLOUTIERREMIK; STYLISTS: KARLA & KEMAL FOR THE WALL GROUP; DRESS WITH GOLD CUFFS: GUCCI.



By Lori Berger Photographed by Andrew MacPherson

“It can be hard for any man to home I try to be Giada, the girl he met

Giada, 40. She scheduled our interview for the little time she had between her grandfather's funeral in Los Angeles and the second one in Italy. What's more, when she walked into the lobby of the Casa Del Mar hotel, she looked totally TV-ready in leggings, low buckled boots, and a black cape. She's even more petite in person (if you can believe it) and, oddly, more approachable: Think California girl-next-door meets Sophia Loren. And she was as open as a close friend, talking freely about those crazy cheating rumors, her bond with her husband, Anthropologie designer Todd Thompson, her working-mom guilt (daughter Jade is 2½), the curse and blessing of her own sexiness—and her belief that time in the kitchen is better than a \$200-an-hour shrink. Listen in!

RB You've had an incredibly difficult time this last week. What's helping to get you through?

GDL That is a really good question. The John Mayer incident was completely unexpected. I was shocked. And not so much for me, but for my husband and family. My family is used to that sort of thing. But my husband's family is *not*. Todd was embarrassed that his family in Michigan would see it and think, *What is going on over there in Hollywood?...* What made it all even more surprising is that I haven't had any contact with John Mayer in three years. You know how you'll briefly get introduced to somebody? Maybe we chatted for five minutes, but I wouldn't consider that intimate.... I know these things happen, but maybe I was naive to think that they are usually based on some facts.

RB How do you think the horrible rumor could have started?

GDL I think the only things that could possibly have tied us together is that we were at the same hotel that weekend in question—which, by the way, my husband was with me there as well.

RB You've been with Todd for 20 years, since you were 19. Is that longtime connection giving you strength right now?

GDL Yes. He knows I'm not capable of that.

RB So you're reeling from this, and then your grandfather passed away just a day later. What do you miss most about him?

GDL Any time any of us had a question, we would always call him first. I saw him nearly every weekend for the last year. He really wanted his family around. He loved to sit and chat with us.

RB He wasn't so approving of your career when you started out. Did that change over the years?

GDL Over the years, I think he became quite proud, and maybe even a little shocked, at my success. You have to understand that coming from a Neapolitan family, men head up the empire. I think from time to time he had his own thoughts about

the way I created recipes—that they were too easy, maybe too dumbed-down. I remember him once saying to me, “How can you tell people to open a jar of prepared pasta sauce?” Those were the kinds of debates we would have.

RB A lot of people think of you as pretty perfect in every way—beautiful, successful. Is there anything that's *not* perfect?

GDL [Laughing] I come from a place where I think life is never perfect. If we look deep inside, there are issues everywhere.

RB Okay, enlighten us. How has life been less than perfect?

GDL I have been blessed with a good, fun, and wonderful life, but I've also seen a whole lot of pain. I lost my brother when he was 30, and that was devastating for me. I don't know if I will ever get over it. Plus, I had a very tough childhood. I came here from Italy in the '70s and didn't speak a word of English, so the kids at school tormented me. Truly, it was horrifying the names they called me, and the teachers never really did a thing to stop it.

RB What did you learn from that?

GDL It's one of the reasons I work as hard as I do to make my show as clear and fun and unthreatening as possible. If people are made to feel uncomfortable in the kitchen, they won't go in there. That's why I think children learning to cook can be such a wonderful thing. It can help build confidence, make them feel good about themselves. It helped me build my ego and even start to get acceptance at school. I'd bring things to class that I'd cooked at home, and my classmates were like, “Wow. This is amazing, and that girl with the funny name cooked it!”

RB Do you ever still feel pangs of intimidation and self-doubt?

GDL For sure. In fact, pretty much every time I try something different or do something in front of a live audience, I truly think they might throw peanuts at me. I feel like that child again. But I also think that pit-in-your-stomach feeling is what keeps you alive and better at what you do.

RB You really embrace your sexiness and femininity. How do you own that without saying, “I am cooking's sex symbol?”

GDL It's only been the last five years that I've become comfortable with that. A lot of it has come with age and being a mom. I felt like I had to show Jade that her mom is proud of who she is.

RB What made it hard for you to accept yourself before now?

GDL I developed breasts when I was 9 years old, and I was the only one in my class. I would literally sit in class hunched over because I was so embarrassed about my body. I think I still carry some of that around with me. I didn't want to be known

pay for not being home and for missing moments that were important to her. I also try to remember that I should be thankful that she has people around who love her, and who she loves so much.

RB You look like you've lost weight since the last time you were featured in REDBOOK. How did you do it?

GDL I changed my diet. Before I had Jade, and during the pregnancy, I ate a lot of sugar. I mean, I'm talking six packets of sugar in a cup of coffee. When I was pregnant, my doctor told me to be careful about my sugar intake. After Jade, I knew I had to get it under control. So I started using agave nectar instead—it's sweeter, so you need less—and I started to see my body shrink.

RB Okay, sorry to get personal, but did losing that weight make your breasts smaller? That always seems to happen!

GDL They shrank—that's usually the first thing to go for women because, well, they're a lot of fat. That, of course, is the one thing you don't want to go! When I was trying clothes on at the photo shoot, I kept saying to the stylist, "What about my boobs in this dress?" And she'd say, "Oh you'll be fine." But I had to tell her, "Hey, these are real, and they just don't stay up by themselves. I had a child, and they just don't perk up on their own anymore."

RB When you think about the next 10 years, what do you see?

GDL I would really, really love to work with kids in public school and bring back—I guess what would be called Home Ec. Schools are supposed to prepare kids for the real world, and I feel like we need that again. I wasn't good at sports or music, so thank goodness I had food. There are a lot of kids out there who have talents, but we wait too long to expose them.

RB You planned a Valentine's Day menu for two fans, Gary and Yoko Scullin, to honor Gary's return home from the war in Afghanistan. How did you decide what to serve?

GDL If you asked my husband what sexy food was, he'd tell you a beautiful piece of perfectly cooked and flavored beef. That's one of the reasons I chose beef tenderloin for my Valentine's Day menu. Yes, it's an expensive piece of beef, but for only two people, it's not that bad, and it's easy to cook. And this was a special moment. To me, the sexiest item on the menu is the chocolate almond tart. It's silky, velvety, smooth, and the best darn bit of indulgence ever.

RB Why is planning and making a meal for someone such a powerful gesture?

GDL There's nothing like a home-cooked meal—nothing! When people ask me what the best restaurant in L.A. is, I say, "Uh, my house." It's more intimate. Food can connect people in a forever sort of way.

RB How did you feel creating that meal for the Scullins?

GDL It's always so special for two people to sit down alone. I went into this field to cook for people and see the smiles on their faces when they eat the food I prepared. I try to help people create intimate settings that let them bond. It's my way of giving them love. That's the way my family gave me love. Watching the Scullins enjoy that meal together solidified why I do what I do. ●



Giada says

Every military couple deserves a dreamy after months apart—to a serious night out.

Gary and Yoko Scullin, who have been married for 13 years, just went through something that most couples in this country can barely imagine. Gary, a captain in the U.S. Air Force, spent two months at a base in New Jersey and six in Afghanistan, the roughest place he says he's ever been stationed. (The runner-up? Bosnia.) Yoko stayed home in California and took care of their two children, speaking to Gary only once a week due to a 12½-hour time difference. He once had to phone to tell her he was okay after an attack on his camp appeared on CNN. "I saw the aftermath—a pool of blood and blood trails," he recalled.

The day he came home, Yoko waited at the bottom of a long escalator at Los Angeles International Airport with kids Joshua, 12, and Monet, 10. Joshua held a handwritten sign that read, WELCOME HOME, DADDY. Monet carried a bag filled with chocolate-covered strawberries.

First, they spotted Gary's dusty combat boots on the top step. Then his uniform, and finally his tired, beaming

face. Moments later, the family fell into a long bear hug while bystanders watched and teared up. "I'm just so happy," Yoko said later that night. "Now I can stop worrying every day about his safety."

Six days after their reunion, a car picked Yoko and Gary up and whisked them to a secret destination for a dinner prepared by our cover star, Giada. "This is so much fun," Yoko said as stylists glammed them up. "Everyone's treating us like we're friends."

As they sipped champagne, the couple chatted about adjusting to life with Gary home. "I was a little nervous," Yoko confessed, "but it's gone smoothly. The parts I love most about having Gary back are the little things. Going to the supermarket with him, picking up the children together. I used to take those moments for granted, but now I realize how nice they are."

Gary's adjustment has been trickier. "In the military, we're always charging forward because so-and-so wants this done now," he said. "But family life is about care and patience. Right now I'm trying to understand the days from Yoko's point of view: How does she handle the



BIG HUGS
AND TEARS
OF JOY...



OKAY, LET
THE FUN
BEGIN!

“welcome home”

Valentine's Day, so REDBOOK treated one pair—newly reunited Thanks to Giada, it was *magical*. (Cue the waterworks!)

homework? The meals? If you try to jump in and do too much, it can be stressful for the whole family.” But Gary has time on his side: He believes he won’t be redeployed for 2½ years.

Before the meal, Giada walked

into the room, and Yoko burst into tears. “I had no idea you were going to be here!” she said. “I’m a big fan. Your show is so inspiring.” Gary was shocked for a different reason. “A story about food and passion? Did

they pick the right people?” he joked. “Our date night is pretty much going to Starbucks. We’ll take ‘em when we can get ‘em!”

When the second course, lobster risotto, was served, Gary

took one bite and grinned. “This beats any food I’ve had before,” he said. Yoko agreed, but her favorite part? “Dessert! The flowers, the candles, this is all going to be such a good memory.” —ELIZABETH JENKINS



Want to have what they're having?

Turn to page 157 for Giada's recipes.