

# MUNCHIES

TORONTO FOOD & DRINK

VOLUME I

THE RAVAGES OF

MATTY  
MATHESON



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DEAD SET ON LIFE  
DEAD SET ON LIFE

# THE RAVAGES

OF

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A night out with the Vice Network star and Parts and Labour chef used to mean coke, whiskey by the pint and public nudity. Then, at age 29, he suffered a catastrophic heart attack

BY COURTNEY SHEA | PHOTOGRAPH BY DANIEL EHRENWORTH

**Matty Matheson drops F-bombs the way Jamie Oliver drops “Pukka tukka!” the way Emeril Lagasse drops “Bam!” He averages roughly 150 expletives per episode on his new series, *Dead Set on Life*, the most of any show on the recently launched Viceland television network, which probably means the most of any show on any network, maybe ever.**

**O**n each episode, Matheson visits a different community (bison ranchers in Alberta, French chefs in Hanoi, seal hunters in Nunavut), arriving bull-in-china-shop style to learn about their cultural and culinary traditions. It’s a cooking and travel show, but it’s really a vehicle for Matheson’s personality, which would be supersized even if he were the size of a chihuahua.

As it happens, he’s more of a St. Bernard—a massive dude of massive appetites. And he’s currently on the brink of massive success. *Dead Set on Life* started streaming online in Canada in February, but the wider television launch, in Canada and the U.S., happens this month. If all goes according to plan, he’ll be our country’s most successful culinary export since peameal bacon, our most adored jolly fat man since John Candy and our most charismatic charmer not named Trudeau.

In Toronto he’s already achieved a certain level of celebrity. Pretty much anytime he leaves his Parkdale house, he’ll hear “Hey, Matty!” and he’ll try to figure out whether the person is a friend or just someone who recognizes him. There is that type of famous person you see and you think, *Where do I know that guy from, again?* Matheson is the exact opposite of that guy—the size, the volume, the tattoo count that is excessive even by hipster chef standards.

Maybe you know Matheson from his restaurants. He’s been the executive chef at Parts and Labour since the west-side resto-rock bar opened in 2010, and he consults on menus and marketing strategy at the Dog and Bear pub and Maker Pizza. Lately, though, it’s just as likely you’ve noticed him building his brand away from the kitchen. Matheson is an undisputed “influencer,” social media speak for people who have managed to turn their existence into fruitful side gigs, if not full-time jobs. He has 101,000 followers on Instagram, which is more than double any other chef

in the city. His feed is a mix of family and friends, food porn, and partying with Leonardo DiCaprio, which he did when Vice sent him to St. Barts over the 2015 Christmas holidays. Matheson’s most liked photo to date is a topless selfie with his son, Macarthur, who arrived in March—just one of dozens of #nakedselfies that, if not part of his official job description, have become integral to his success. Haughty culinary types are loath to admit it, but Matheson could be the most relevant chef in the country right now, even though he hasn’t worked in a kitchen for over a year. Even though he hasn’t changed the way we think about food provenance like Jamie Kennedy, or topped best-restaurants lists like Rob Gentile and Susur Lee. Even though it’s unclear whether he truly is a chef anymore, or just plays one on TV.

Instead, he’s a testament to how the once humble vocation of cooking food has become a springboard for stardom. It’s not that he can’t cook. He can, and he does it well—recently at the four-day Chefs Club event in New York, put on by Food and Wine magazine, where VIP guests paid \$100 a plate. It’s just that Matheson’s talent for being a chef has always been secondary to his talent for being himself, even back when that meant being Toronto’s most irrepressible party monster, which is the other place a lot of people know Matty from.

Maybe you saw him chug whiskey like it was water or spent eight hours with him at an after-hours club. Or maybe you were at the New Year’s Eve party where he got wrecked and invited his friends to punch him square in the face, or you were there when he got so wasted he ripped the lighting equipment down from the ceiling and started a riot—at his own restaurant.

The title for *Dead Set on Life* is based on a song written by the Canadian metal band Cancer Bats. The lyrics go like this: “The day the doctor told me son, you’re gonna die / If you continue to live like this / You’ve got another year at best.” The song, as you’ve probably guessed, is about Matheson.

Early this year, Spike Jonze—the movie director who is also creative director of *Viceland*—came to Toronto to speak at a launch event at the Vice Media offices in Liberty Village. The TV channel is the first mainstream foray for a brand that has always taken pride in its outsider status. It’s a joint venture with the comparatively khaki Rogers Communications, who announced the \$100-million partnership in the fall of 2014. The plan is to create content that is “platform agnostic,” the industry’s favourite buzz-term for programming that works on any screen. Jonze explained how at Vice, they knew almost nothing about making television, and how that was an asset.





At Le Sélect with head chef Rang Nguyen in 2004.  
Photo courtesy of Matty Matheson

Instead, they are all about finding interesting people and pointing the camera at them. In addition to *Dead Set on Life*, the new lineup includes *Gaycation*, a travel series in which the actor Ellen Page visits international cities to check out LGBT culture; *Weediquette*, a show about the new world of marijuana, featuring a correspondent named Krishna Andavolu; and *King of the Road*, a series about extreme skateboarders. Matheson, who attended the launch, explained to the assembled media that his show is “the most anti-Food Network show I can make,” referring to the formulaic nature of most chef shows. *Vice Canada’s* head of content, Patrick McGuire, has a slightly different take: “We basically just ripped off what you already see on food television. It’s just that when you put Matty in the driver’s seat, it becomes something totally different.” McGuire started working with Matheson in the spring of 2013, back when the former was a rookie producer and the latter was establishing himself as the John Belushi of the Toronto food scene

McGuire says he could have packaged any kind of show around Matheson—music, gardening, ghost hunting. “Food is what Matty fell into, but really he’s just an interesting guy who’s been through a lot and has a lot to say.” Or rather, he has a lot to shout. In 2006, Matheson was hired at *La Palette*, the Kensington Market bistro (since moved to Queen West)

that was the nucleus of the restaurant industry party scene at the time. “It was *Kitchen Confidential* every day,” says Matheson, referring to Anthony Bourdain’s bestselling tell-all that laid bare the sex, drugs and everything else that goes on behind the scenes in the restaurant industry. Matheson would wake up around 11 a.m., get to work at noon and crack his first beer a few minutes later. The staff downed shots of cooking brandy before first service, between seatings and after close. A typical night for Matheson entailed a couple of grams of coke, 10 to 15 beers and lots of whiskey. He also frequently ate mushrooms, took MDMA, dropped acid and indulged in pretty much anything else he could get his hands on. The goal, he says, was to get as fucked up as possible.

Two years later, Matheson heard about a job opportunity—Brian Richer and Kei Ng, the creative partners behind the Canadiana design label *Castor*, were planning to open a restaurant called *Oddfellows* that would feature their offbeat furnishings. Matheson impressed his prospective bosses by cooking at a few of their dinner parties as a kind of audition, and got the job. “It was his food, but it was also I just really liked him,” says Richer, who was less impressed when his new head chef asked if they could push the opening date by a month. Matheson wanted to go on tour with his metalhead buddies. Richer sat him down and asked, “Do you want to be a roadie, or do you want to be a fucking chef?”

Matheson stayed home and helped open the small restaurant at the corner of Queen and Shaw in late summer 2008. *Oddfellows* was the sort of place where customers would come for dinner and stay until 3 a.m. He could always be counted on to keep the party going, spraying friends with beer when the mood struck and hosting after-after-parties in the *Winnebago* parked out back. “We just did whatever we wanted—it was our place,” he says. “It was like, ‘Oh, you think the music’s too loud? Then go somewhere else.’ And then I’d crank the music louder.”

## “Do you want to be a roadie, or do you want to be a fucking chef?”

Professionalism of any kind has never been Matheson’s thing. He loved to plan elaborate dishes, but he wasn’t big on nuts and bolts concerns like ingredient costing. More than once his bosses caught him taking money from the register. “It wasn’t the type of behaviour you would get away with in one of Susur’s kitchens,” says Richer. “I think if Matty had worked anywhere else, he would have been fired.” But they had grown to love him, and, just as importantly, it was Matheson who was bringing in the crowd they wanted. Rather than axing him, they brought him along on their next venture. The plan for *Parts and Labour* was *Oddfellows* on acid—bigger, louder, crazier. Richard Lambert and Jesse Girard (the nightlife guys who were running the *Social* on Queen West and would soon open the *Hoxton* on Bathurst) came onboard as business partners, and the place was an instant it spot when it opened in the summer of 2010. The basement was a live music venue, which meant diners could often feel their table vibrating while they ate. Critics were largely positive about Matheson’s *Fred Flintstone*-friendly menu—his fried pig’s face (really just deep-fried head-cheese) was the must-try stunt food of the season. As much as the food, though, Matheson himself was gaining notoriety. *Parts and Labour* was known as “Matty’s place,” even though he had no

financial stake in the business. In the winter of 2011, he threw the first annual *Matty Fest*, a three-day bender concert series where he was host, guest of honour and the guy most likely to get so fucked up that he forgot the entire thing. Tickets cost \$10, and Matheson used the proceeds to fly in a bunch of his metalhead friends from around the country. There was ample booze, a pharmacy’s worth of narcotics and even merch (“*Matty Fest*”—emblazoned T-shirts, tote bags and hats).

Matheson’s antics were a constant source of conflict among his four bosses. Their meetings frequently devolved into arguments over whether to rein him in or fire him. One night in June 2012, on the tail end of a three-day bender, Matheson clocked out from work and walked to his nearby apartment, where he flopped into bed beside his wife, Trish. He woke up around 7 a.m., several hours earlier than normal, in extreme pain. He told Trish it felt like his heart was

being squeezed in a vice. She drove him to St. Joe’s hospital, where a doctor tested his enzyme levels and told Matty that he’d had a heart attack. He was 29.



Matty in Kensington Market, 2006.  
Photo courtesy of Matty Matheson



In early November 2013, Matheson texted his drug dealer, instructing him to come to the restaurant. In the open kitchen, Matty handed over cash and pocketed a baggy of coke, in full view of customers and staff. Lambert, one of Matheson's bosses, walked up and said, "You're done." He considered firing him, but two days later, Lambert contacted three of Matheson's other close friends and decided to stage an intervention instead. Lambert says he was worried about his friend and his restaurant. "It was, 'What are we going to do without Matty? It's going to be sad and it's also going to suck for our business.'" They summoned Matheson to Hammell's apartment. Matheson was suspicious, since they rarely spent time there, and when he saw his closest friends, plus a guy he knew who had entered a 12-step program, he realized what was going on. Hammell says the scene was emotional: "There we were, a bunch of sketchy-looking, grown-up men, all crying. We told Matty, 'You've got to stop.'" Matheson went to his first meeting the next day. "He was definitely humouring us initially," says Hammell. "But then something clicked. He realized how much he needed help." Matheson says the intervention worked because he was ready, exhausted and, deep down, he was really sad.

After getting clean, Matheson called McGuire, his boss at Vice. He told him he wasn't going to be able to get sloshed anymore, but that he was still interested in working with him. McGuire didn't hesitate. "Matty is just a guy who is meant to be on camera. When he got sober it wasn't a question of whether we still wanted to work with him. It was just about figuring out what we wanted to do."

For Matheson, there was more to figure out. In the early days of being clean, his anxiety kept him up most nights. He lay in bed wondering who he was now that he wasn't the party guy—would people still like him, would his friends still want to hang out with him, would chefs from out of town still want to party now that his pint glass was filled with club soda and he went home every night at 10? He avoided the Parts and Labour basement—the site of the

infamous Matty Fest bashes. It was a while before he felt okay to return to any of his former haunts. The first time he went back to Ronnie's Local 069—the Kensington Market dive where he once spent 15 consecutive hours partying—he felt awkward and out of place. It was even longer before he realized that most of the people who knew him were relieved to see him getting his life together: "I thought we were all partying and having fun together, but afterward there were a lot of people who told me, 'Dude, no. You were really fucked up.'"

Dead Set on Life is already filming a second season, which will focus a little less on food and a little more on Matheson himself, which is fine with him. "Bourdain can do whatever he wants and people will watch him because he's Bourdain," he says.

## "He realized how much he needed help"

As for what Matheson wants, the answer is "everything." In the space of one brief conversation, he tells me he wants to open "the sickest restaurant in Toronto," open restaurants all over North America, never work in a kitchen again, win tons of James Beard Awards (which would require working in a kitchen), start a fashion line, be a millionaire by age 40, make television, quit making television, make a Hellmann's mayonnaise commercial, never make a McDonald's commercial, and just generally "do a bunch of cool shit." It all sounds contradictory, and it is. Really, he's just saying whatever pops into his mind in the moment. And acting on impulse has proven a pretty effective career strategy so far. "Of course I want to be famous," he says, his tone implying that anyone who would say differently is full of it. He knows there are "the cheffy chefs" who think he represents everything that's wrong with the industry, but he also knows that at least a few of them have failed reality show sizzle reels collecting dust in the back of their closet. Some celebrities wear their fame with a scowl and a pair of dark sunglasses; Matheson wears his like a lime green suit.

Matty Matheson stopped drinking for the most sensible reason there is—to avoid his otherwise inevitable death. But he's not the kind of sober person who hates on his former lifestyle. He's not wracked with guilt and he doesn't regret a single drug he ever did. He still blares heavy metal in his car and his kitchen; he says he still identifies as a punk kid who thinks it's cool to wake up with a spilled ashtray on his bed. And sometimes he still misses drinking. Last fall he was in Denmark for the Mad

Symposium and visited Noma, the restaurant that's regularly named the world's best. He ordered the tasting menu, which comes with a flight of rare wines. "Did I want the wine pairing? Of course," he says. Instead, he had to settle for the juice, which was actually pretty delicious. "It wasn't any of this mocktail crap."

Parenthood, sobriety and the ever-increasing stakes of success have changed Matheson. At 34, he has started buying art for his walls, works out with a trainer three times a week and is thinking about buying an Eames chair. When he's not on the road shooting, he spends almost all of his free time with Macarthur and Trish—they go for walks, make family ice cream

expeditions—which all sounds about as punk as a Teletubbies concert, but Matheson doesn't care. "Everything is 10,000 times better than I ever thought it would be. I love things genuinely now," he says. And he can still be genuinely crazy when the mood strikes.

A few months ago, he was in New York for Vice upfronts, where media come to assess the new programming. After the presentation, he went to join a bunch of the Vice bigwigs for dinner at Le Bernardin, a triple-Michelin-starred restaurant that he never dreamed he'd be able to eat at. He drove over in his pickup and pulled up right outside the restaurant, which has a wall of street-level windows. He needed to change into his suit, and rather than attempting to do so in the cramped truck, he stepped onto the sidewalk and stripped down to his tighty whities, put on the suit and walked in to join his group. It was one of those amazing moments that, for Matheson, is the very definition of cool—living his life on his own terms and still getting to eat caviar that costs more than his rent.

For anyone who happened to be dining at Le Bernardin that night, it's just another crazy story to tell about Matty Matheson.



# TO BANNOCK

# AND BEYOND

At Kū-Kūm Kitchen, chef Joseph Shawana reimagines traditional Indigenous recipes with fine dining techniques

BY MARK PUPO

One of the questions I often get asked when someone finds out that I review restaurants: what's the strangest thing you've ever eaten? Seal loin tartare, served by chef Joseph Shawana at his new Davisville restaurant, Kū-Kūm Kitchen, would be right up there. The seal meat was a forbidding midnight black, wet and alien, topped with the quivering yolk of a raw quail egg. It tasted of brine and iron, bringing to mind ice floes, waves raising a mineral foam on rocky shores, and a diet of cod and krill.

Paul McCartney won't be pleased to hear I liked it, though not so much that I'd want it to supplant steak as Toronto's tartare of choice. Seal, raw or cooked, makes a big statement—until now, I'd never met a chef brave enough to serve it.

Shawana spent months researching and vetting federally regulated seal suppliers; he found one that flies in flash-frozen wild seal loin every week from northern Quebec and Newfoundland, where annual commercial hunting quotas keep the seal population stable.

Kū-Kūm is a restaurant with a philosophy of showcasing what Shawana calls the "whole ingredient," by which he means using what's readily available and respecting the source of our nourishment—Mother Nature. He's a patron of foragers, and Indigenous fishers and hunters. It's his deeply personal brand of locavorism. He's also, not insignificantly, making a case for Indigenous cuisine, which has been near-invisible in this city, at least since chef Aaron Joseph Bear Robe shuttered Keriwa in 2013.

"Seal, raw or cooked, makes a big statement—until now, I'd never met a chef brave enough to serve it"







Chef Joseph Shawana at his new restaurant, Kū-Kūm Kitchen

**K**ū-Kūm is among a handful of Indigenous-owned restaurants that opened in the past year. At Kensington's Pow Wow Café, which is the home base for a food truck that's popular at music festivals, there's a changing menu of Ojibwa "tacos" that are in fact open-face sandwiches of buttery bannock piled with a small hill of your choice of spicy meat, plus shredded cheddar and beets, sour cream, herbs, and nasturtium petals. It's a good spot for lunch—I've enjoyed the smoky pulled pork with an Ontario strawberry soda.

NishDish, which is run by the catering chef Juhl Whit-educk Ringuette, recently took over the Koreatown corner formerly occupied by Tacos el Asador. You sit at long communal tables under a hand-drawn ceiling mural showing the 13 moons of the Anishinabe calendar. A chalkboard lists comfort food like venison stew and sweet potato-leek soup, none of which I can enthusiastically recommend, especially not the bland, soggy-bottom veggie quiche or a salad of wilted mixed greens.

Of these new places, Kū-Kūm is the most ambitious and exciting. Shawana, who is 35 years old, was raised by his Odawa family on the Wikwemikon Unceded Reserve on Manitoulin Island.

("Unceded" because the reserve's tribes did not sign a treaty with the government.) A dishwashing job at the age of 13 led to cooking positions at bars and golf course clubhouses.

In 2006, wanting better opportunities, he moved to Toronto. He cooked at Herbs Bistro, the Windsor Arms and Pusateri's, and took on bigger roles cooking for crowds at the Rogers Centre and the Direct Energy Centre. He ramped up his fine dining skill set as Corbin Tomaszewski's sous-chef at the now-defunct C5, the momentarily brilliant restaurant in the ROM. Most recently, he served as executive chef at Snakes and Lattes, the successful board game café-bar with two locations, where you'll stick out if you're not in a Magic: The Gathering tournament. Playing Dungeons and Dragons for hours on end makes people hungry.

In 2016, Ben Castanie, the owner of Snakes and Lattes, encouraged Shawana to plan a special one-off menu for Aboriginal Day. The two realized they were onto something when it sold out, and before long they'd signed the lease for a midtown location formerly occupied by the bistro Mogette.

## “The restaurant is, in several respects, a tribute to the women in Shawana’s life”

“Kū-Kūm” is Cree for grandmother. The restaurant is, in several respects, a tribute to the women in Shawana’s life. Over the bar there’s a hand-painted mural by the Indigenous artists Monique Aura and Chief Lady Bird depicting Shawana’s grandmother, his mother and his mother-in-law. He tweaked the recipe for his grandmother’s cake-like bannock by sweetening it with maple syrup—to better complement smoked and cured fish. He also serves a traditional Three Sisters soup of corn, yellow beans and squash. Yet aside from those two recipes and that mural, you might not notice you’re participating in a celebration of Indigenous cuisine. Most of Shawana’s menu would fly at Canoe, the posh Canadiana restaurant high in the TD tower, or at Antler, Boralia or Montgomery’s, where the locavore cooking follows the seasons. Shawana’s genius is to seamlessly weave his favourite Indigenous ingredients and recipes together with a classic French approach. (“I’m trying to tell my story,” he told me over the phone, meaning he’s not going to pretend he hasn’t been influenced by his time at the likes of C5.) His plate of preserved cattail hearts and milkweed pods, with a smear of plum jam, hits the pickling trend currently sweeping the city. He flatters the gaminess of venison rack chops with peppery nasturtium leaves, fruity hibiscus leaves and a mellow purée of roasted onions.

A pheasant and pearl barley stew, brightened by a white wine sauce, is both homey and elegant, like a fancy pot pie filling. The standout is a plate of elk, which he roasts after a spell in a sous-vide bath with spruce tips and juniper, and serves with fingerlings and a creamy purée of artichoke. The deep forest scents serve as a reminder of where the beast once roamed. His hybridized approach to dessert is less successful. A rhubarb ice cream balances tartness and creaminess, but doesn’t need to be sprinkled with leathery dried berries. And he infuses the cream of a crème brûlée with sweetgrass (he forages his own), though it mostly tastes of its over-burnt caramel shell. My preferred dessert option is actually an appetizer, a lettuce-free salad composed of a drift of rose hip-flavoured whipped cream covered with wild blackberries, strawberries, blueberries and edible flowers. A Manitoulin reinterpretation of an Eton mess, it was one of the prettiest and tastiest plates of the summer. The other question I get asked often about reviewing



restaurants: do they know you’re coming? The answer is no. I let my dinner dates make our reservations, and I review anonymously. But it can be tricky to go unnoticed at a small place like Kū-Kūm, where there’s only the one server, who happens to be one of the most gleeful and personable in the city. I risked a second visit less than a week after my first, which would usually raise suspicions. She remembered me right away but assumed I was from the neighbourhood. A lot of customers are coming back to try everything on the menu, she told me. Shawana’s fans can’t get enough seal.

THE WORLD STREAMED DRAKE’S  
“MORE LIFE” 62 MILLION TIMES  
ON IT’S FIRST DAY





# THE GREAT CANADIAN COCKTAIL

BY DAN CLAPSON | PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ASHTON

Since its conception in 1969, the sodium-ridden, tomato-based Calgary cocktail become one of Canada's most popular cocktails, but it's not what's inside that makes it great. The garnishes alone make this the Liberace of all Canadian libations.

As proud as the average Canadian can be of maple syrup and poutine, Calgarians are quick to point out that our booming Albertan city is the home of the most popular cocktail in our great nation: the Caesar. No, not the salad.

Since its conception in 1969, the sodium-ridden, tomato-based Calgary cocktail has soared to the top of the boozy charts in Canada, becoming one of this

country's most notable drinks. No one's really sure why the beverage's popularity grew so rapidly, but it's estimated that more than 350 million Caesars are consumed by Canadians every year. That's approximately ten Caesars per person, per year—and if you took a poll in Calgary, that number would be significantly higher. Calgary often gets labeled for being all “cowboy” and “steak and potatoes,” but as a local, I think of it only as the birthplace of the drink that saves my life almost every

Saturday morning. I'm not saying that the Stampede haze that cloaks this city every July isn't worth taking note of—teeming with delicious, barbecue-based gluttony, tons of whiskey, strapping cowboys and cowgirls, etc.—but without this Calgary cocktail, a 40-year-old local treasure, what would we be cheers-ing with? A Bloody Mary?

The man who poured this cocktail into existence, Walter Chell, was the bar manager of what is now The Westin hotel in downtown Calgary, and drew inspiration from a classic Italian pasta dish made of tomato sauce and clams. The basic formula for a Caesar is pretty straightforward: Clamato (sourced from various American cities like Seattle, Washington or Whitefish, Montana), Worcestershire, Tabasco, a variety of spices—typically salt, celery salt, and black pepper—and vodka. (The inclusion of clam juice is crucial, as it adds a robust, umami flavor that offers a lot more depth than its American cousin—the Bloody Mary.) And most importantly: some very serious garnishes. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to make one at home, but Canadian bartenders have created variations on the classic continuously over the decades, putting spins on it by opting for a variety of ingredients like cucumber-infused

gins, muddled herbs like basil or rosemary, and sometimes even fruit juices. The uninspired may finish off the cocktail by shoving a celery stalk in there, but any self-respecting Caesar lover knows that the garnish on this drink is just as—if not more—important than what you're sipping on.

The decorations alone make this the Liberace of all Canadian cocktails. In some establishments, you can even eat an entire meal on top of your cocktail. Pickles, beans, and olives are pretty standard, but if you're lucky enough to find a pepperoni stick, bacon, a big chunk of smoked salmon, or even some fried chicken atop your tomato-y bevvy, then you're drinking this beverage as Walter Chell would have wanted you to.



FRIED



CHICKEN



HOW THE FRIED CHICKEN SANDWICH  
CLAWED ITS WAY TO THE TOP OF  
TORONTO'S FAST-FOOD CHAIN

BY COREY MINTZ | PHOTOGRAPHY BY VICKY LAM



**P**awel Grezlikowski knows the precise window for frying a piece of chicken: between six minutes and 15 seconds, and six minutes and 45 seconds. The sign above his 192-square-foot Little Italy chicken shop simply reads "FRIED CHICKEN SANDWICHES," and few diners know the proper name is P.G Clucks.

Fewer know what goes into the sandwich, that Grezlikowski buys whole chicken legs, deboning each in under a minute. That the leg meat is brined, then soaked in buttermilk and dipped in seasoned flour twice before frying. (The second dip, at the last minute, is what prevents the crispy shell from sliding off like a cheap onion ring.) That Grezlikowski ferments chilies for his own hot sauce, adding a bit of xanthan gum for an emulsified gloss. That the buns are custom-made for size and density. That ordering your sandwich spicy doesn't just mean extra hot sauce, but a dip of the chicken in a house-made oil infused with cayenne, garlic, onion and brown sugar. For \$7, no one would expect that amount of labour. "Because of the small store and low overhead," says Grezlikowski, who makes about 250 sandwiches a day, "I can keep my food cost low and sell this sandwich with a pop for under \$10. I couldn't do that with burgers."

Chicken is cheaper than beef. Even ground beef. And that's the simplest explanation for why the fried chicken sandwich has become the new burger. Food fads come and go (rest in power, charcoal ice cream). But lasting trends are intertwined with larger market forces. In the aftermath of the 2008 recession, a new fancy burger shop opened every week in Toronto. Shant Mardirosian emerged as the winner: his Burger's Priest chain went

national, with everyone else copying his four-ounce smash-griddled burger style. But since then, beef has gotten expensive. According to Statistics Canada, the price of ground beef and bacon has gone up 32 per cent since 2013. Even the non-prime cuts—the collections of chuck, neck, brisket, fat or other trimmings that might go into ground beef—have skyrocketed.

Chicken, meanwhile, has inched up a mere 2.4 per cent. It's no coincidence that so many seasoned restaurateurs have since gotten into the chicken game: Cory Vitiello (formerly of the Harbord Room) with Flock Rotisserie; Yannick Bigourdan (Nota Bene, Carbon Bar) with Union Chicken; Craig Wong (Patois) with Jackpot Chicken Rice; and David Adjei (of Restaurant Makeover) with the Chickery.

But chicken, with all due respect, does not have the same allure as some of its beefier, porkier protein counterparts. Not unless you fry it. That's how, over the past few years, fried chicken sandwiches have crept on to menus at the Gabardine, Bar Fancy, Electric Mud, Porchetta & Co., Indie Ale House, the County General, Rose and Sons, Cluck Clucks, Kitson and Co., Knuckle Sandwich, Kaboom, Beast, Pray Tell, LBS, the Federal, the Wren, and so on. Even Burger's Priest now offers a fried chicken sandwich. They're as ubiquitous in Toronto as delivery vehicles parked in bike lanes, and there's an unending poultry-based arms race to slather them with sauces, slaws and cheeses. But it wasn't too long ago that they were strictly the domain of fast food restaurants.



Like vampires, these sandwiches have always lived among us. The popular U.S. chain Chick-fil-A has been around since the 1940s, and McDonald's has offered its "McChicken" sandwich in some form since the 1980s. Even before the recession, foods of the American south were becoming fashionable: smoked brisket, corn grits and collard greens, all kicking the sawdust off their boots to join the rarefied upper echelons of dining.

In 2009, restaurateur David Chang made fried chicken chic, serving it on family-style platters in one of his Momofuku restaurants. By 2015, Chang had distilled the fried chicken delivery mechanism into a sandwich business, Fuku. The following year, hamburger juggernaut Shake Shack introduced their own "Chick'n Shack" sandwich. Kensington Market butcher Peter Sanagan had been operating a retail business since 2009, but hadn't noticed a surge in chicken's popularity until he began supplying restaurants. "I started wholesale in 2014. It was around then that I started seeing the spike in chicken thigh purchases," says Sanagan. "Boneless chicken thigh was, by far, our number one seller in terms of volume. It was crazy."

Based on his wholesale prices of \$3 to \$3.50 a pound, Sanagan estimates a cost of 80 cents for a chicken thigh. "And then you put in the labour. If you're doing a buttermilk soak, and the batter and bun and everything. You can still get away with a decently-costed item, under \$2." Burger meat, he estimates, wholesales between \$5 to \$8 per pound. "Ground beef is more expensive now, per pound, than boneless chicken meat," Sanagan says. "You're putting the same bun and toppings and stuff, but

you're adding to your food costs, just based on that protein." He adds: "You can only sell a burger for so much money." But just because the meat is cheaper doesn't mean you can't mark up a fried chicken sandwich. At the Gabardine, a proper restaurant in the stratospherically high-rent Bay Street district, the twice-fried battered chicken thigh with a sesame-gochujang sauce, iceberg lettuce and a sweetened mayo on a sesame egg bun from Jules Café Patisserie runs \$20.

"One of the main reasons we put it on our menu was because it is cost effective and is a guaranteed local Ontario product," says Kate Rodrigues, owner of the Gabardine. "Beef will sometimes come from P.E.I. or Alberta. Another reason is that chicken offsets the cost of beef so we can keep our burger at an affordable price." (Despite the higher cost of beef, the Gabardine's burger is just \$21.) At P.G Clucks, the chicken (which includes the thigh and leg) weighs between six and eight ounces, with the food costs ranging from about \$1.50 to \$1.75 a piece. And yet the sandwich is among the cheapest in Toronto. Sanagan, however, doesn't believe the relatively cheaper price is the only reason for the trend. "I think people like fried chicken. And putting it in a sandwich makes it that much easier to consume."



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# MUNCHIES GIFT GUIDE

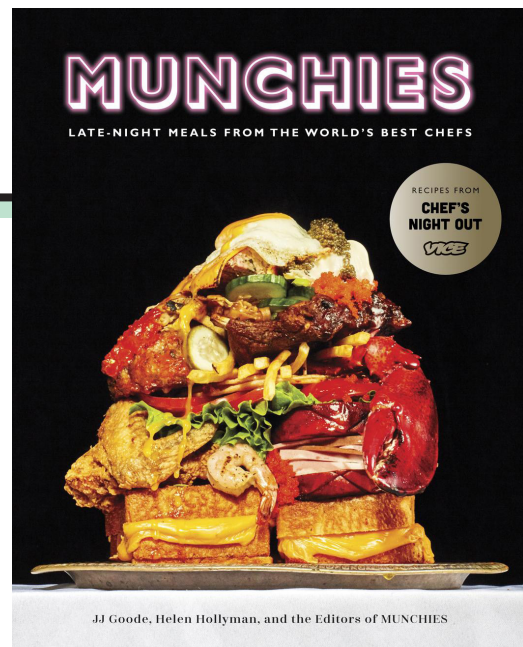


BY MUNCHIES STAFF | PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIA KANTROWITZ

## 2017 was an awesome year for cookbooks, at least

This year may have been a trash heap when it comes to... well... most things, but fortunately for food-lovers, 2017 was a big one for cookbooks. For your gifting pleasure, we've narrowed the flux of lovely new cookbooks down to a list that covers everything from Thai food to cocktails to bread-making. Give your iPad a damn rest, light your fireplace, sip on some mulled wine and prop up one of these bad boys on your counter.

Cookbooks are truly the gifts that keep on giving; unlike other books, which you might read once and then shelve forever, they're loaded with future cooking projects that will fulfill all your daydreams of kitchen greatness.

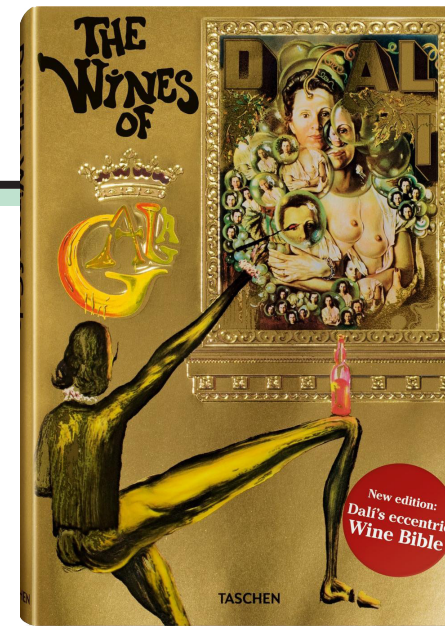


### MUNCHIES: LATE-NIGHT MEALS FROM THE WORLD'S BEST CHEFS, \$30

Obviously, we believe that MUNCHIES' very first cookbook deserves a prime spot on this list. Inspired by the meals and mischief of our flagship series Chef's Night Out, we got some of the best chefs on the planet to share their secrets for late-night eats and next-day hangover cures. The best fried rice, grilled cheese sandwiches, and "things with tortillas" that you'll ever taste are all within.

### MODERNIST BREAD, \$625

"Modernist bread" might sound like an oxymoron, but baking is science, and science is technology. This five-volume boxed set behemoth covers every aspect of making bread, from starter to finish.

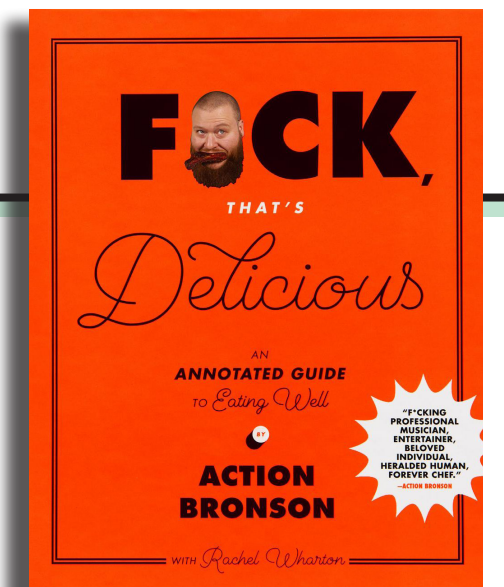


### DALÍ: THE WINES OF GALA, \$60

This big, beautiful, golden book about wine is not a book about wine in any traditional sense, mainly because it was illustrated and written in part by perhaps the most famous surrealist in history: Salvador Dalí. It's a radical approach to understanding and consuming wine that will make you want to live and drink like an artist, and its intriguing visual appeal offers a taste of its eclectic contents. Thought wine was boring? Not after a spin through this book.

### F\*CK, THAT'S DELICIOUS: AN ANNOTATED GUIDE TO EATING WELL, \$28

Our partner in crime Action Bronson, rapper extraordinaire and host of Fuck, That's Delicious, put together a cookbook that's every bit as unhinged and oddly informative as his VICELAND show of the same name—which is quite an achievement, given how wild Mr. Wonderful's mind can be. It's much more than just recipes; it's a peek into the psychedelic, nostalgic, and worldly ways that Bronson approaches food.



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2017