

A Taste for *ADVENTURE*

BY STEPHANIE WILSON

Anthony Bourdain takes us to parts unknown.

Anthony Bourdain has made quite a career out of eating his way around the globe with some cameras in tow, allowing armchair travelers everywhere to live vicariously through his taste buds. So it shouldn't come as much of a surprise that his culinary awakening took place on a cruise ship.



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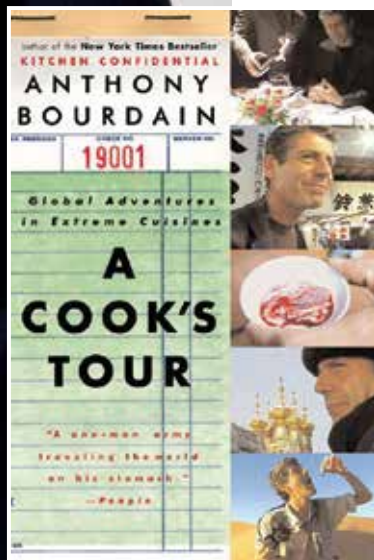
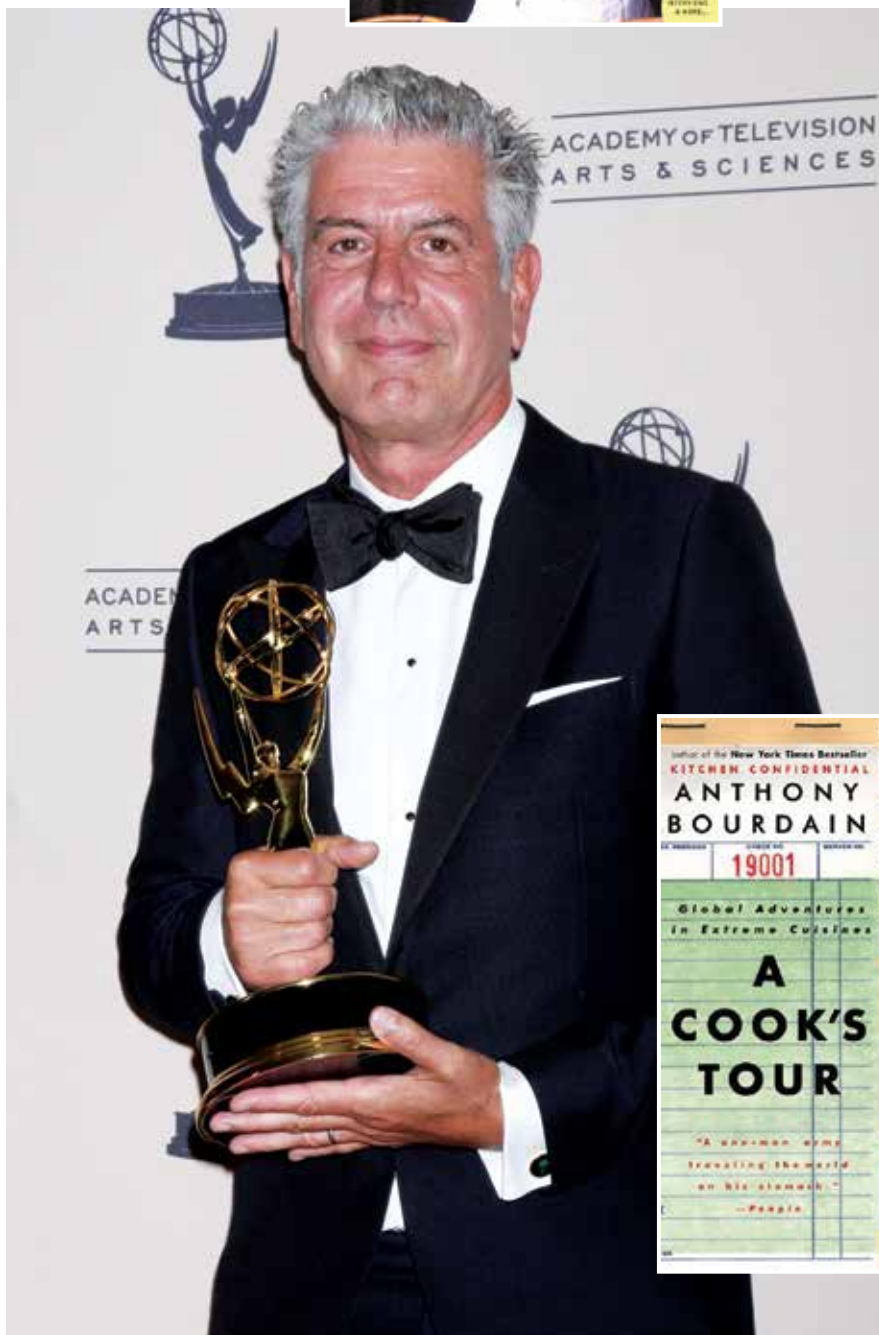
Recipe for Success
 Bourdain's books led to his award-winning television career.

It happened in the cabin-class dining room aboard the *Queen Mary* during a transatlantic voyage from New York to Europe. He describes the moment in great detail in the opening sentences of the "First Course" chapter of his memoir, *Kitchen Confidential*. He writes: "My first indication that food was something other than a substance one stuffed in one's face when hungry—like filling up at a gas station—came after fourth-grade elementary school....It was the soup. It was cold." Before that fateful summer vacation, the young Bourdain had eaten in restaurants, sure, but this magical liquid dish called vichyssoise was the first food he *noticed*, the first he enjoyed and remembered enjoying. It resonated, made him aware of his tongue—and in some ways prepared him for future events.

Bourdain wasn't aware just how true that statement was at the time he wrote it. *Kitchen Confidential: Adventures in the Culinary Underbelly*, published in 2000, is his candid, hilarious, and sometimes shocking portrait of life in restaurant kitchens, filled with anecdotes from his career as the top toque in some of New York's finest establishments. The best seller not only showcases Bourdain's epicurean prowess but also provides a taste of his smart, biting wit. The memoir, which has been translated into over 28 languages, ultimately served as the catalyst that kick-started his career outside the kitchen.

"As much as anything could change your life, *Kitchen Confidential* changed mine," he says. He's at CNN, talking with anchor Don Lemon about *Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown*, his Emmy-winning cuisine-travel-culture series that premiered on CNN in 2013. "I was forty-four years old standing next to a deep fryer looking forward to pretty much more of the same for the rest of my life, and I wrote this little book thinking that a few cooks and restaurant people in New York would read it. And almost overnight the world became my oyster, and I found myself with the best job in the world."

He followed up *Kitchen Confidential* with *A Cook's Tour: In Search of a Perfect Meal*, an irreverent book that he parlayed into a cable show of the same name that followed Bourdain around the globe as he did just that. Since embarking on that world tour in 2000, he hasn't really stopped, yet he somehow found the time to author a handful of novels and put together a



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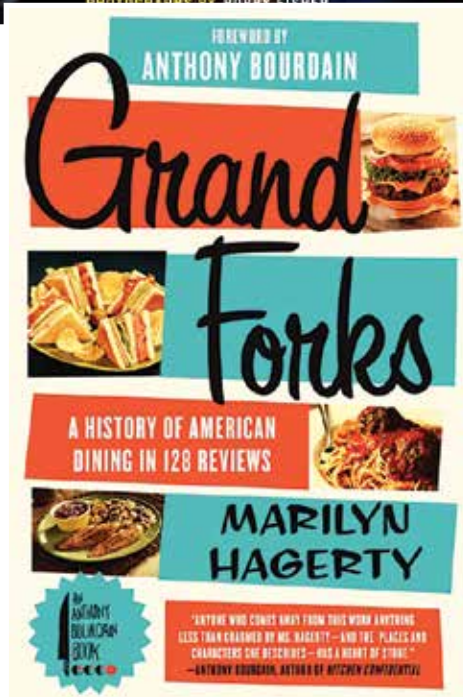
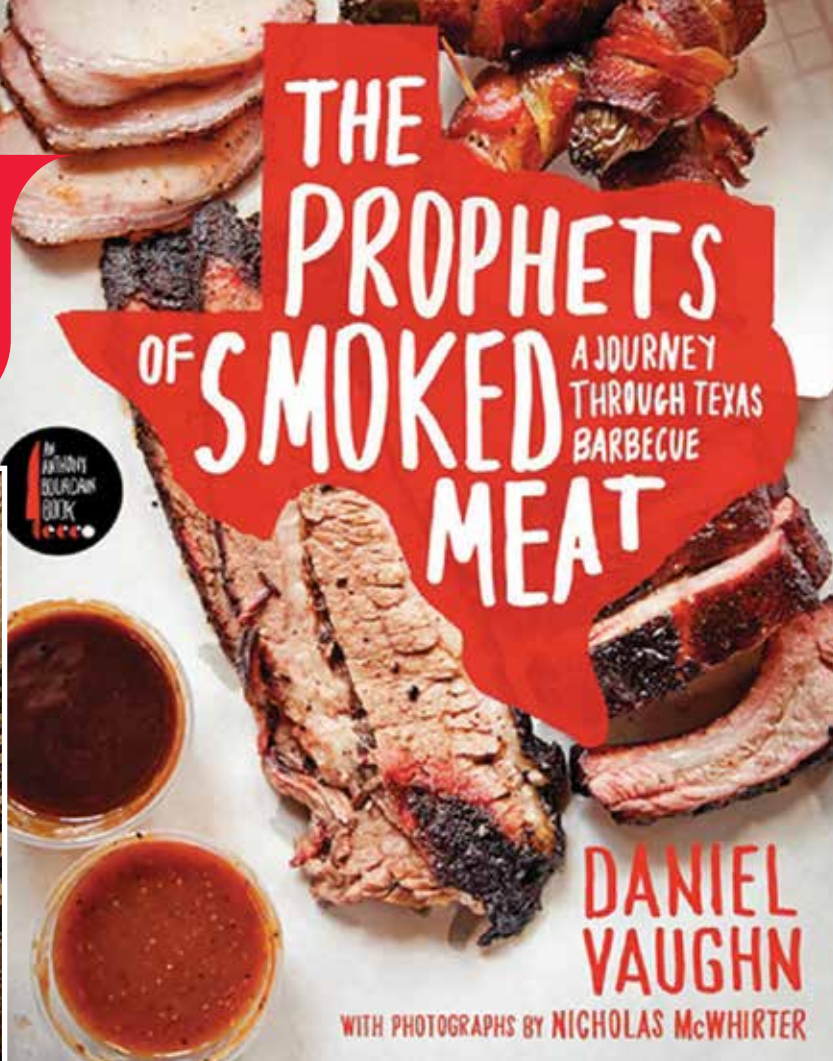
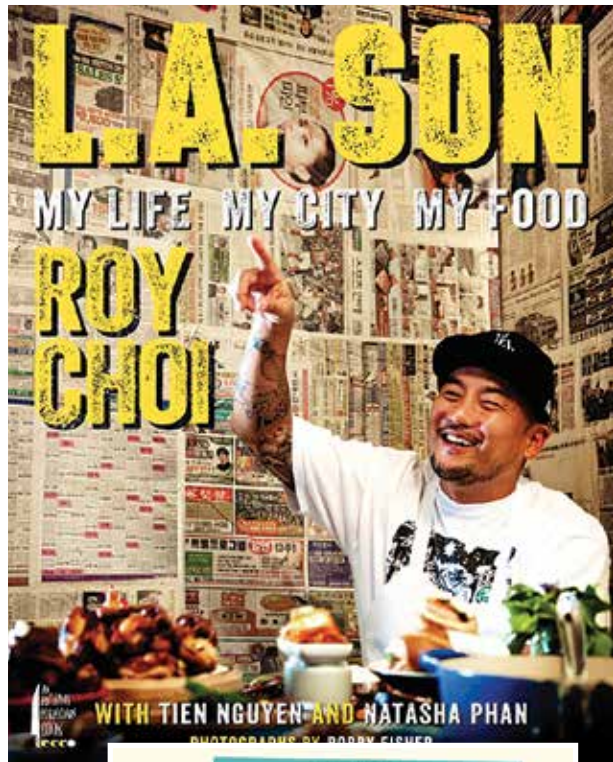
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from Bourdain's
line of books with
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cookbook with recipes from his tenure as executive chef of New York's famed Les Halles restaurant. After *Anthony Bourdain: No Reservations* debuted in 2005 on the Travel Channel (joined a few years later by his series, *The Layover*), Bourdain became a household name—recognized not as a celebrity chef but as culinary's leading bad boy, a wry adventure-enthusiast with a dry sense of humor, an insatiable curiosity, a penchant for discovery, and no patience for mediocrity. His shows come with viewer-discretion warnings; he doesn't sugarcoat his opinions. He speaks his mind, and some situations call for saltier language than others.

Which makes CNN seem like an unlikely partner for the six-foot-four television personality with the big personality. But the news network contacted him with an offer that ultimately lured him away from the Travel Channel. At CNN, Bourdain is able to continue to do what he does best—travel around the world, introducing himself and his audience to various cultures through the cuisine—but now he does so with the backing of a worldwide news organization that can help his crew get into places like Libya and the Congo, two destinations explored during the first *Parts Unknown* season. As a result, *Parts Unknown* is more than just a food-on-the-go show. It's a look at the way people live their daily lives in lesser-known parts of the world—or in lesser-known parts of the well-known world covered from an unfamiliar perspective. It's produced by Zero Point Zero, Bourdain's independent production company, which is also behind shows such as *MeatEater* on the Sportsman Channel, *The Mind of a Chef* on PBS, and Esquire Network's *The Getaway*.

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*Top Chef
Bourdain is
juggling roles as
a travel host and
a reality cooking
show mentor.*

On *Parts Unknown*, Bourdain visits places as diverse as Detroit, South Africa, Colombia, and Morocco, where he breaks bread with locals who share their perspectives on life in their little parts of the world. CNN heavyweight Christiane Amanpour describes *Parts Unknown* as a program that “showcases Bourdain’s gift for finding the essence of a country or a culture while sharing meals with the people who live there.” The series premiere explored the fabled country of Myanmar, an extremely rare glimpse of a nation where film crews had been banned for over a decade. Bourdain’s team was among the first to visit after the government relaxed travel restrictions. The episode earned Bourdain and the ZPZ team two of the four Emmy awards the production took home in 2013.

Parts Unknown, which airs Sunday nights at nine o’clock, is CNN’s top-rated program, and it’s the No. 1 cable news show in its time slot. Its success is causing the news network to adjust its tried-and-true programming recipe. CNN Worldwide President Jeff Zucker revealed in an interview with *Capital New York* in December 2013 that CNN needs “more shows and less newscasts,” especially during prime-time hours.

While *Parts Unknown* does appear on the leading cable news network, Bourdain is quick to clarify that he is not a journalist. While discussing the show with Amanpour, he explains that he is “looking at these places from the point of view of someone who is interested in how people live, in what they eat. I am not reporting hard news, I am introducing audiences to people and cultures so you can get to know a little bit about them so that when hard news happens, you know who it is we are talking about.”

While Bourdain’s Travel Channel programs maintained a light, jubilant tone, *Parts Unknown* is refreshingly non-formulaic, with each episode tailored to best showcase the essence of the destination. Some weeks are lighthearted, spotlighting delicious culinary trends in European capitals; others are tight-focused stories

told from the perspective of a few individuals. In Jerusalem, he visits with local winemakers and amateur cooks, and he rides with the Speed Sisters—the first all-female Palestinian racing team. The episode opens up with Bourdain’s declaration: “By the end of this hour, I’ll be seen by many as a terrorist sympathizer, a Zionist tool, a self-hating Jew, an apologist for American imperialism, an orientalist, a socialist, a fascist, a CIA agent, and worse. So here goes nothing.”

He isn’t one to shy away from controversy. He does, however, tend to avoid that which is too comfortable. On his Tumblr, anthonybourdain.tumblr.com,

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HOW PEOPLE LIVE AND
WHAT THEY EAT.”*



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Zero Point Zero
 Scenes from shows produced by Bourdain's Emmy-winning production company.



he offers personal insight about each episode, sometimes discussing what went into making it, other times expanding upon the info discussed on the show. Recapping an episode filmed in Copenhagen centered around Noma, a restaurant consistently ranked as one of the world's very best (*Places* contributor Bill Fink discusses Noma in "Local Catch," page 118), Bourdain writes in a post titled "Happiness":

"I do not, by temperament or inclination, gravitate towards Scandinavian countries. I am intimidated and made uncomfortable by safe, clean, orderly places where everything works and people seem creepily content. I'm a guy who falls in love with hot, messy, barely functional places—where fiery arguments are common—and one is pleasantly surprised if one's luggage arrives in good order—if at all."

The episode focuses on clean Nordic cuisine made with fresh ingredients foraged from local fields, with Bourdain participating in the foraging. The Tumblr post discusses the tactics used to film the visually stunning episode—a feast for the eyes captured by cameras moving freely suspended by wire for every single shot. With this bit of behind-the-scenes info, viewers may watch with a greater appreciation for the results.

Given Bourdain's multiple best sellers, it shouldn't come as a surprise that his blog is so well written. But it does, perhaps for the very fact that it is just that—a personal blog, often a catchall for incomplete thoughts, bad grammar, and poor use of punctuation. Free from such typical distractions, Bourdain's blog is filled with whip-smart accounts of whatever it is he feels like writing about. Topics run the gamut from episode recaps and ZPZ news to personal anecdotes that hint at the home life of a man always on the go. As one recent post shows, Bourdain knows how to do vacation right.

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The Taste
Bourdain acts as
a judge/mentor
on the ABC
reality cooking
competition.



"This was my second 'real' vacation of the last decade," he writes toward the beginning of a lengthy summary of his family's interlude of respite by the shore. "Many of you will no doubt be thinking, 'Uh...wait a minute, asshole—your whole life is a vacation.'

"Fair enough."

He goes on to say he meant a *real* vacation—a new experience for the globe-trotting television host, brought about by his recent entrée into fatherhood. He admits, "Vacation, for me, is idealized, admittedly overromanticized, total immersion into fatherhood, into the suburban/vacation dream, backyard barbecues, entertaining at home....After years on the margins—followed by years of traveling—now that I'm finally an actual dad, and finally able to take some time off—I admit, I do, occasionally, go overboard with my enthusiasm."

As is to be expected, the chef's enthusiasm manifests itself as epic meals, meticulously planned and executed multicourse feasts of freshly sliced local heirloom tomato salad, steamers served with drawn and clarified butter, lobsters thoughtfully cracked ahead of time, corn on the cob that arrives at the table still steaming, all followed by a carefully curated cheese course. Dessert? You're on your own. He's not a pastry chef.

Bourdain is as passionate about words as he is about food. In 2011, he joined the writing staff of HBO's *Treme*, contributing to the story lines of the drama about life in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. In 2012, Ecco, an imprint of HarperCollins publishers, announced the Anthony Bourdain

line of books. The first three titles—*The Prophets of Smoked Meat* by Daniel Vaughn, *Grand Forks* by Marilyn Hagerty, and *L.A. Son* by Rob Choi—were published in 2013, with additional titles in the works. "This will be a line of books for people with strong voices who are GOOD at something—who speak with authority," Bourdain said in a statement. "Discern nothing from this initial list—other than a general affection for people who cook food and like food. The ability to kick people in the head is just as compelling to us—as long as that's coupled with an ability to vividly describe the experience. We're just as intent on crossing genres as we are enthusiastic about our first three authors. It only gets weirder from here."

Back on the broadcast front, Bourdain is also a mentor on ABC's cooking competition *The Taste*, which is airing season two in 2014. He earned an Emmy nomination in 2013 for his role as host of the reality show, of which he is also executive producer. And preproduction work for season three of *Parts Unknown* has already begun.

In fact, it began just as the second season concluded its final episode on Detroit with a live broadcast from Atomic Liquors in Las Vegas, a former package store and café where patrons could watch nuclear test blasts from the roof. During the special broadcast, Bourdain hosted a lively debate with a medley of guests that included chefs, a comedian, an actress, and a CNN news anchor. The group got into it on topics as wide-ranging as food sustainability and guns in America, which ultimately set the stage for what's bound to be an incredible season three of *Parts Unknown*. **12**

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