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Kitchen Tour: Inside Michael Chernow's Home Kitchen

By Helen Rosner



Michael Chernow, co-owner of New York City's Meatball Shop restaurants, grew up in a tiny apartment with a tiny kitchen. "The whole apartment was 650 square feet," he recalls. "It was my mom, my dad, my two sisters, my two cats, and me." Still, his mother was always cooking: grilled cheese with tomato, chicken cutlets, roasted rosemary potatoes, string beans. The experience taught Chernow the extraordinary culinary efficiency of a small kitchen, where every appliance and ingredient is a reach or a pivot away.

That's part of why he loves his current kitchen: "It's incredibly, incredibly functional," Chernow explains of the U-shaped countertops, which face into a light-drenched living space. "It works really well for entertaining, but it works especially well for cooking." Between his own kitchen activity (right now he's feeling inspired about vegetable soups, and he makes a mean stuffed French toast) and his wife Donna's baking, the kitchen gets plenty of opportunity to prove its usefulness.



Photo: Noah Fecks

During an extensive search for a standard pot rack, Chernow accidentally stumbled upon the sled that hangs over the counter. "We were looking for stuff for the Stanton Street restaurant and I found this and I thought 'Huh, I could use this as a pot rack.' I found it at an antique shop upstate for like 8 bucks. I'm a bit of a haggler when it comes to the antique thing - I learned from my father."



Photo: Noah Fecks

"I love a country kitchen, I think it's warm and inviting," Chernow explains. "So when we were conceptualizing what to do with what we had here, we looked at a lot of country kitchens, which have open cupboards. The cabinets that came with the kitchen were ugly, so we pulled off the cabinet doors on some, and painted the ones we kept white."



Photo: Noah Fecks

"I love this knife because it has a rounded top," Chernow explains of his prized blade from Korin, New York's holy sanctum of Japanese cutlery. "When I use a knife with a flat top, I get a major callous." He also finds the octagonal handle easier to grip than a traditionally rounded one.



Photo: Noah Fecks

While there are shelves of cookbooks in the bookcase in the living area, Chernow and his wife keep their most-used volumes right next to the stove. Sara Jenkins' Olives and Oranges has particular emotional resonance: one of Chernow's first restaurant jobs was helping break down the pork sides at Jenkins' New York city restaurant Porchetta.



Photo: Noah Fecks

Of all Chernow's cookware, this All-Clad stockpot gets the most use. It's wider and shorter than an average stockpot, which he prefers for a smaller kitchen since it's easier to store. The greater surface area helps stocks and stews reduce faster, even though the pot needs to be used over two burners.



Photo: Noah Fecks

On the wall across from the kitchen hang oversized utensils (another antiquing find) and a framed page from a Danish cookbook, a gift to Chernow's wife Donna from her grandmother. "My grandmother-in-law is also a really great cook. The whole family makes pretty traditional Danish food, but it's incredible. We go to Denmark every Christmas."



Above: Chernow and his wife both attended culinary school; their toques sit on top of the cabinets and watch over the kitchen. The pulls on all the cabinets (below) are more antique finds.

Photo: Noah Fecks