



Vancouver Sun
Hell's Kitchen

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Hothead Gordon Ramsay can write a pretty good cookbook

Culinary Bad boy

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When it comes to bad-boy chefs, Anthony Bourdain's got nothing on Gordon Ramsay. The British celebrity chef's face is as creased and fissured as a sharpei's, possibly from years of angry growling. His size 15 platypus feet might have resulted from heavy stomping on frightened cooks. His tantrums could put a two-year-old to shame and his potty mouth makes Deadwood's Al Swearengen look tame by comparison.

And what, but bad-boy genes would drive one to steal the all-important reservations book from the very restaurant where he is the chef just so he could blame the theft on a rival chef, an equally raging bull and a former mentor? Ramsay admits to that perfidy. He committed it in 1998 in London in paranoia, fearing the much-celebrated Marco Pierre White was about to replace him as chef. "I knew it would [deleted] him and that it would call off the dogs," he told a writer for The New Yorker.

So why give a lout more press? Well, for the same reason I watch him on Kitchen Nightmares on TV, where he transforms a sad-sack, failing restaurant and ta-ra! gives it legs to get going again. He's a brilliant restaurateur and although, you don't see him performing his magic with food in Kitchen Nightmares, he is a brilliant cook as well.

He might trounce all over egos and reduce owners to tears but he's always right. He cuts through ineptitude and egocentric flounderings and sees all that is wrong and all that must be righted. It's not just me that reveres his restauranting and cooking talent. Michelin has awarded him 12 stars, spread through several restaurant properties. He's currently the only London chef and one of three chefs in the United Kingdom to have been granted three Michelin stars for a restaurant.

I've been in restaurants so hopelessly off-track that out of mercy, I don't write them up -- I could do a 'Gordon Ramsay', eviscerating and humiliating the chefs and owners but I'll leave that to A. A. Gill, another Brit with a savage tongue. In those restaurants, a thought often runs through me: "They need Gordon Ramsay!"

I don't have the same interest in watching Hell's Kitchen, his other reality show where a group of bumbling chefs compete for an executive chef spot in a restaurant. It's like watching a cockfight. Ramsay, lading out sadistic behaviour for shock and entertainment value, seems as exploited as the snivelling competing chefs.

And that brings us to the latest of his many cookbooks: Gordon Ramsay's Fast Food: Recipes from the F Word (in this case, the 'f' word is 'fast food', as in F Word, his BBC TV cooking show). This is do-able, homey food, a world away from his three-Michelin-star food, the kind that brings families together around the dinner table.

"Great fast food depends on using top quality ingredients," Ramsay writes. "Finding a good butcher, fish supplier, and farmers' market or greengrocer is the key."

"The whole thesis is, it's fast, delicious food that you can cook at home faster than you can have take-out delivered to you," says Jennifer Fox, publicist for Key Porter Books in Toronto.