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HIGH DESIGN FOR A CHEF

The Food Network's Giada de Laurentiis and her Family at Home in Southern California

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Giada De Laurentiis's Italian heritage and Hollywood pedigree—her grandfather is the producer (and serious foodie) Dino De Laurentiis—would seem to be ideal qualifications for her hosting gigs on the Food Network. But according to the telegenic chef, her relatives nurtured some family legacies better than others. “We all worked on film sets in the summer to figure out what we wanted to do in the

business,” she explains over a home-cooked dinner of Trinidad chicken stew and Swiss chard. “My grandfather, who’s from Naples, is especially Old World: When women get married, they have children, they don’t work. And if they do work, they don’t work in a professional kitchen.”

Discouraged by her parents from attending culinary school after graduation from high school, the celebrity cook, who was born in Rome and raised in Beverly Hills, earned a degree in anthropology from UCLA before moving to Paris to study at Le Cordon Bleu. When she returned to California, she settled down with her then boyfriend, Todd Thompson, a clothing designer for Anthropologie, in his Spanish-style bungalow in Pacific Palisades. She toiled as a restaurant chef, a private chef (to Ron Howard), a food stylist and a caterer before her talents were discovered by the Food Network in 2002. Since then she has hosted a number of series and specials for the network in addition to penning three best-selling cookbooks.

In 2005, two years after getting married, De Laurentiis and Thompson decided it was about time she had a professional home kitchen. “We loved the charm of the Spanish house and started out just wanting to redo the kitchen,” recalls Thompson. “But we figured out that we couldn’t really live here during the renovation, and it was going to take about the same amount of time as doing the whole house, so we said, ‘Let’s just tear it down and do what we really want to do.’” What they really wanted to do was build a simple, modern residence that took full advantage of their awe-inspiring address—a bluff-top site overlooking the headlands of the Santa Monica Mountains and the blue swath of the Pacific Ocean. And they knew who they wanted to build it. Thompson had long admired the work of Peter Cohen, an architect and neighbor who shared both Thompson’s love of surfing and his passion for clean, contemporary design.

Inspired in part by a Richard Meier house in Malibu that had caught Thompson’s attention, Cohen came up with a two-story composition of African teak, stucco and glass that conveys a De Stijl-like sense of harmony and order. “Just having that much glass opens up the space,” notes Cohen. “We also used a minimum number of interior walls, and the proportions of the space—the ceilings are nine feet instead of the standard eight—help too.” To provide a measure of privacy for the prominent but small property, the architect set the upstairs master suite back from the street, installed motorized shades in the front windows and used opaque glass inside the balcony railings and in neighbor-facing side windows.

This article was published in the December 2008 issue.

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