Go behind the scenes of 'Top Chef' ahead of Season 21

BV JOY SUMMERS

Minneapolis Star Tribune

A rotund Midwestern summer sun was beating down on a group of well-dressed strangers as we waited to be corralled into a mystery loca-

Despite the promise of an upscale setting, we were standing in an open-air parking lot in Madison, Wisconsin, lining up to sign paperwork and surrender our phones to ensure confidentiality. We were here to get a sneak peek behind the culinary competition "Top Chef" as it heads into its 21st season with a new crop of cheftestants, a new host and a mid-America location that is notably not Min-

A few weeks earlier, I'd been contacted with the tantalizing offer to be a background diner in an episode. Details were sparse, which is how I found myself in this holding pen that, after a cursorv glance around, was nowhere near a restaurant. My new stranger-friends seemed equally baffled.

Soon everyone had paperwork settled, shuffled and signed. We were ushered across four lanes of traffic, midblock (without the benefit of a crosswalk) by people radioing back-and-forth with the set crew: maws were on the way for feeding. It wasn't long before we were murmuring culinary assessments to be cut and spliced into an episode where one chef would

be crowned the winner and into different parts of myself. benefit of the camera and the not leave until 12 o'clock at scribed a dish and gave conanother sent to pack their knives.

making. The rhythm of the episodes is familiar to fans: Someone will likely flub rito catch up to one of the chefs and they'll miss ingredients on the plate. Personalities will emerge and names unknown right now will become familiar in the famous-chef circuit. But it does raise questions, like how does "Top Chef" find a way to remain fresh? And why not come to Minnesota?

It turns out that Wisconsin had made the hard sell. Magical Elves Productions, the company behind "Top Chef," worked with the state, ultimately deciding to split filming time between Madison and Milwaukee. According to had been wooing production to follow." to the state for the better part of a decade.

But there is love for Minnesota. After filming this episode, new host Kristen Kish, being a participant, to guest judge, to now holding down the job made famous by Padma Lakshmi, sat down to talk about her new position.

There are a lot of eyes on Kish as she assumes "Top Chef" hosting duties, but the

gaze wasn't stressing her out. of my jobs is that they're vast-

On 'Fast Foodies,' I'm a chef there's no makeup and that's This was TV magic in the really fun. 'Iron Chef' was very polished. 'The End of the World' for Nat Geo was outdoorsy — lots of mosquitoes." sotto, and the clock is going she said. "'Top Chef' was very much a homecoming."

The way Kish speaks of "Top Chef" mirrors how others might talk about grad school or other formative, educational experiences. "It's iconic in a lot of ways — it's also responsible."

The show's responsibility that Kish appreciates is due to chef Tom Colicchio, who's been a "Top Chef" judge since its 2006 debut. "He would give the chefs feedback like he would the cooks in his kitchen," said Kish. "All the critiques come from a place of wanting the chefs to be better not just to retain viewers. local news sources, Wisconsin Those dramatics just happen

Filming, then fasting

Back on set, eaters are corralled into a hushed dining room setting and seated; we who has worked her way from mutter excitedly to our seatmates. There's a rumor that the flowers on the table are bugged, and that's how they'll hear our reactions to the

Suddenly, we're called to attention and given the heads-up that the chefs are ready and the food is com-"The thing I love about all ing. They stand at the front, but we can't hear everything ly different, so I get to delve that's being said. It's for the

judges' table, which is in another room. The first round of At that time, the hard driving food comes and we all do our best to eat intelligently, delivering hopeful bon mots to the mums and each other like this is all totally normal.

filming," said Colicchio after production had wrapped for the day. "I have 20 different chef job, I was the first one things, I have to take a day off," he laughed. "I can't eat like that anymore."

handle eating four consecutive tasting menus in one day, but he's also experienced firsthand major shifts in the culinary world. "When I was at Gramercy (Tavern) I'd get

night — and that was fine." never ended for many chefs.

Colicchio has a unique perspective on the industry as a restaurant owner and someone with a front-row seat to "I have to fast the day after how "Top Chef" can change a person's career and life trajectory. "When I took my first in and the last one out and, yeah, it was too much. It's totally crazy hours and that's It's not just his capacity to not good for a lot of reasons, but you know you also have to

work hard. It's a profession." On my way out, I could see Kish on the monitor delivering her line, "So, tell us what you've prepared for us in at 10 in the morning and tonight." A faceless chef de-

text we wouldn't get with our bites. It was all part of the big show, and to find out what happens next, we'll have to

'Top Chef: Wisconsin'

When: Season 21 premieres tonight at 9 p.m. on Bravo, available the next day on Pea-

Added value: This season's episodes will be supersized at 75 minutes. There are two digital companion series, too: "The Dish With Kish" and "Top Chef: Last Chance Kitchen" will air on bravoty.com.

The judges: Tom Colicchio returns with Gail Simmons. Guests include Dominique Crenn and Sean Sherman.

A Celebration of Twelfth Night to return to Westerly

Westerly and Flock Theatre of New London announced Tuesday their plans to revive Hall on High Street in West-Westerly's holiday production A Celebration of Twelfth Night after a 10-year hiatus.

An annual community musical and stage extravaganza produced by the Chorus of Westerly for 40 years, A Celebration of Twelfth Night most recently took place in January

The Twelfth Night 2025 revival, with shows scheduled to take place on January 10-12, 2025, will be produced and offered as a unique partnership project between the Chorus of Westerly and Flock Theatre organizations. While the Chorus will serve as the show's overall producing entity and musical lead under the guidance of Andrew Howell, Flock Theatre will be re- in the early 1970s. Over the sponsible for the show's theatrical management, structure, and stage direction. Flock Theatre's work will be helmed by Derron Wood, Flock's executive artistic director, and Victor Chiburis, Flock's associate artistic di-

All of the 2025 shows will sic themes of good over evil,

Westerly — The Chorus of take place in Twelfth Night's light emerging from dark, and original venue, the Chorus's George Kent Performance erly. Those interested in auditioning for the show or participating in the production of the show in any capacity should visit this weblink: chorusofwesterly.org/twelfthnight to learn more about getting involved. The dates for auditions and ticket sales will be announced later this spring.

A Celebration of Twelfth Night was originally created in the mid-1970s by the Chorus of Westerly. Founding Music Director George Kent and other leaders of the Chorus were inspired by an early production of John Meredith Langstaff's Revels that took place in Kent Hall (then the Westerly Center for the Arts) years that followed, Kent, along with Chorus visionary Anne Utter, created and evolved a post-Christmas holiday show that involved drama, music, poetry, dance, and good humor, all webbed together by a basic play structure consisting with ba-

shared humanity.

In time, Twelfth Night became one of the region's most popular musical and theatrical events. The very large cast and crew was made up of many local amateurs and volunteers, who worked alongside professional musicians, actors, dancers, choreographers, technical personnel, and stage direction.

The Chorus made the decision to put the show on hiatus in 2015 to allow for an artistic and organizational reset.

A Celebration of Twelfth Night has always involved not just the singing members of the Chorus of Westerly who included both children and adults (presently ages 8 to 85) — but also a cast of nearly 100, many of who are also children, some appearing on stage for the first time in their careers.

Both organizations note that the 2025 revival is presently intended to be a onetime revival of the production. At this time, it is not either organizations' intention to restart presenting Twelfth Night on an annual basis.

Bride-to-be walks a fine line for her bridesmaids

DEAR ABBY: I recently started planning my wedding. Half the friends I want as bridesmaids are very conservative. They think sex is sacred and should be talked about only discreetly, not joked about, mentioned on TV, etc. I used to hold similar views, but I no longer do. Neither do the other half of the girls I want as bridesmaids.

My dream bachelorette party is the kind you see in movies, a group of girls going out on the town getting tipsy — maybe being a little stupid nothing dangerous, with sexy games/favors and casually swapping sex tips and doube possible with my straightlaced friends, whom I really like and would like to include.

I pick up on others' feelings easily, so I can't ignore when someone around me is unhappy. I want all my girlfriends to enjoy the party, but two or three of them won't appreciate the humor of drinking from a phallus-shaped straw. Should I split the guest list and have one prudish party and one sexy one?

- GOOD/BAD GIRL IN THE this?

DEAR ABBY

By Abigail Van Buren

DEAR GIRL: That's an excellent idea! And we all know which one you are going to enjoy.

DEAR ABBY: I just found out my husband has been texting with his high school sweetheart for the last three years. He contacted her and shares all day-to-day activities, like our vacations, new dog, etc. She lives 2,500 miles away. children. I snooped and read sponses that she is being po-

years and why he shares everything with her, as we have a close relationship and share everything. He did mention a vear ago that he was in touch with her. I didn't think much about it then, but now that I going on, I'm wondering why. Should I be concerned about

- PUZZLED IN MAINE

DEAR PUZZLED: What is happening could be innocent, or it could be crossing a line. You will never know until you discuss this with your husband. You MAY not have to disclose that you read the texts if you say you recalled him mentioning that they were in touch "a while back" and let the conversation evolve from there.

DEAR ABBY: I recently received an Evite to a surrogate baby shower. I was happy to attend. Each guest was asked to bring a box of diapers, our favor-She's divorced, retired like us ite children's book and a donaand has children and grand- tion to help cover the surrogate expenses A written explanation ble entendres. That may not his email. I can tell by her re- of how expensive the surrogate process is was also included.

In my opinion, when the I don't understand why he couple started the surrogacy contacted her after so many process, they were aware of how expensive it would be, and to ask the shower attendees to contribute to it is a little nervy. Was this proper etiquette?

- WONDERING IN NEVADA

DEAR WONDERING: No. Soknow how long this has been liciting the donation was over the top. I can't help but wonder how many invitees declined the invitation because of it. To ask for money was tacky.

YOUR STARS BY EUGENIA LAST

ARIES (March 21-April 19): Dream and believe. Take the power within and do something to improve your space and the world around you. Be brave, change what you don't like and head in a direction that soothes the soul and brings you joy. 5 stars

TAURUS (April 20-May 20): An intuitive approach to how you respond will ward off overreacting. Being able to adjust on the go will encourage others to follow. Understanding the dynamics of a situation will help you make better decisions. 2

GEMINI (May 21-June 20): Control your emotions; don't overreact or participate in gossip. Focus on your responsibilities, finishing what you start and honing your skills to ensure you outperform anyone who wants to compete with you. Don't let anyone limit you. 4 stars

CANCER (June 21-July 22): Doing things your way is OK. Routine is exemplary, but if you follow your instincts, you'll discover that something you enjoy doing can also earn extra cash. Don't let outsiders goad you into something that doesn't support your needs. 3

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22): Switch 21): Protect yourself from any-

gears, use intelligence and one trying to push you in a fine-tune what you enjoy doing. Opportunity suggests looking closely at the changes around you and plugging into your feelings and head in a dihow you can use your skills to rection that allows you to excapitalize on what's important to you. Choose the path that 5 stars feels like home. 3 stars

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22): If you feel it in your heart and it fits into your budget, carry on and don't look back. Trust your instincts and take a journey that impacts how you move forward. A commitment will encourage stability, gratification and strength of character. 3 stars

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22): Open Be careful who you trust. Only discussions that lead to knowledge, understanding and what you can do to improve your situation. Being willing to listen, evaluate and make sense of what others want will bring about better decisions. Don't ability to make changes withlet emotions cost you. 4 stars

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21): Considering what's best for you and fortifying your home environment from unwanted change will soothe nerves. A shift in attitude will reflect your emotions and encourage you to let go of what's holding interest; however, be careful you back. 2 stars

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec.

direction that doesn't fit your timetable. Choose the path that encourages you to share plore what makes you happy.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19): Do the work yourself. Fix up your space to suit your needs. Rearrange and create an environment that promotes success, gratification and opportunity. Look for bargains, keep your overhead low and proceed with a strict budget.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18): some people will share your values or support your goals. Ask questions, verify plans and change what's necessary, and you'll maintain financial stability, emotional control and the out interference. 3 stars

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20): Evaluate how you handle your relationships, money matters and staying updated. Incorporating the latest trends into your everyday routine will give you an edge in recruiting not to let the additions drown you in debt. Test first, find out what's valuable and eliminate dead weight. 3 stars



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