

The Hastings' love affair with food

Keeping It Simple

BY MARINA FLEMING

When you pick up a copy of Chris and Idie Hasting's new cookbook, *Hot and Hot Fish Club Cookbook: A Celebration of Food, Family, & Traditions*, you're getting far more than the average breakfast, lunch, and dinner breakdown. The book has been in the couple's thoughts for about 10 years and has finally reached maturity. "We started the process a few times but didn't have the time, team, right information, or clear enough vision for what the cookbook needed to be," Chris Hastings says. "It's not the typical cookbook format, and we wanted it that way." It's evident that the wait was well worth it.

Chris Hastings is a James Beard nominee who runs the acclaimed Hot and Hot Fish Club restaurant in Birmingham with his wife and pastry chef Idie. He grew up vacationing in S.C. at nearby Pawley's Island, where he spent his childhood as the family creekboy bringing home clams, shrimp, and crabs for the evening table. Throughout the years, he learned about his family's history as well as the history of the surrounding rice plantations. His mother's family has been around Pawley's for about 180 years, with his earliest relative, Hugh Fraser, arriving in America around 1790. At that time, the social structure was set up where men would gather in clubs for social activities. "If you were in the military, you'd be in a military club," Hastings says. "If you were a rice planter, you'd be in a rice planter club." And thus began the beginnings of Hot and Hot, a social club where men would gather in salt marshes to collect oysters, shrimp, fish, and crab, and bring it back to the clubhouse to cook. After adding other provisions from the plantation such as ham, veggies, and rice, the men would have a full-blown feast. Not only were they enjoying food, but the men were also gathering with their friends, relieving their stresses of the day, and really enjoying life.

The Hot and Hot Club, as well as Hastings' rich upbringing, left a lasting impression and helped form his life values. Hastings has learned to value good food, gather with people, and truly enjoy the experience of a meal, which is why the cookbook turned out like it did, more of a celebration of life and the whole food process. When asked for a favorite recipe, Hastings can't even answer, saying it's less about the actual dish and more about what goes into a dish at a particular time. "I live through and appreciate each season, so I love those more," he says. "I really enjoy April and October." It's picking that perfectly ripe strawberry or carving the biggest pumpkin in the bunch that leaves the biggest impression.

The Hastings have put their love affair with food into a fully illustrated cookbook full of stories and pictures. They tried to keep the recipes simple and practical. "The problem with most cookbooks is that everyone wants to get too friggin' cheffy and show-offy with ingredients," Hastings says. So they kept their book focused so you really could just run down to the grocery store and pick up a dinner's fixings and not break the bank in the process. The chef and author

says they've received great feedback so far. "It's been incredibly rewarding," he says. "We've been able to articulate our philosophy about life, who we are, and how we value good food gathering."

Chris and Idie will be highlighting *Hot and Hot* on a Southeastern book tour throughout the end of the year. They'll be stopping in Charleston this week for a five-course dinner at FIG where they'll show off a few special selections from the book. They'll also be signing copies of their book at Blue Bicycle Books on Monday.

Tags: Cookbooks, Hot and Hot Fish Club Restaurant, Book Signing, FIG, Blue Bicycle Books

Related Events

Hot and Hot Fish Club Dinner at FIG @ FIG
Sun., Nov. 22, 6 p.m.