

Richard Blais on His Top Chef Secret Sandwich Theory and The Perfect Way to Cook Chicken Wings

This week, on the season finale of *Homemade*, host Sabrina Medora is joined by season eight *Top Chef* winner — and mentor on FOX's new Gordon Ramsey show *Next Level Chef* — Richard Blais! Hear Richard divulge the secret theory he applied to every challenge on *Top Chef*, his dream Christmas meal, and the most useless tool in every home cook's kitchen. Plus, an amazing hack for chicken wings and how he's dealt with anxiety in the fast-paced culinary world.

SABRINA MEDORA: Hey, food fans! I'm food writer and culinary entrepreneur, Sabrina Medora, and you're listening to *Homemade* by Allrecipes. Each week, we bring you talented home cooks, authors, chefs, and celebrities to discuss the memories and traditions behind their favorite foods along with discussions on what's happening in food culture today.

It's hard to believe, but we've come to the end of season two, and what a phenomenal season it has been. A special thank you to all the listeners who have been with *Homemade* since the very beginning and to all that are new to our *Homemade* family. We are so very grateful for you!

And now, allow me to introduce our guest for this season's finale. Taking time off from his own podcast — *Food Court* — not to mention his extremely hectic TV and restaurant schedule, here he is to chat with us about sandwiches, chicken wings, and so much more. Easily recognizable across many food TV shows, he's probably best known as a *Top Chef Allstar* winner. And, fun fact, his answer to the question 'Why do you want to become Top Chef?' is what prompted me to quit my job in advertising and become a food writer!

In between opening *Ember & Rye*, a new restaurant in Carlsbad, California, he's also acting as culinary director for the San Diego Symphony's newest performance space, The Rady Shell at Jacobs Park. He's also opening a new restaurant called *Four Flamingos* in Orlando, Florida. And he's slated to star in FOX's *Next Level Chef* culinary competition show with Gordon Ramsay. You can also watch him on *Top Chef Family Style* on Peacock TV. Everyone, please welcome to *Homemade*, our final guest of the season, Chef Richard Blais!

It's great to have you here, Richard. I know there's lots of stuff happening on your end. You've got new shows coming up. You've got new restaurants coming up. Tell me what this year has been like.

RICHARD BLAIS: Oh, a lot of anxiety. Truly like right before I jumped on with you, we were going through with my wife Jasmine, going through the schedule and it's all great things but there's a hundred moving parts and as you know, when it comes to restaurants and anything related to food or filming food, it's a lot harder than people might think, even when it just comes to setting up a camera and showing someone how to chop an onion, which was a request I got today from one of my partners for a video. So yeah, great problems to have. But we're very, very busy. We're opening up new restaurants. We're trying to write our third cookbook, which I'm way behind on, you can see the anxiety coming through, probably hear it in my voice right now.

We're opening up a restaurant in Orlando in a couple of weeks, and we're shooting a pilot for a show coming up that I can't really discuss. We have a new show on FOX coming out, we got another project in development. So, I'm very happy, very grateful. And probably at a point where we need to hire a few people, which is good. We're one step away from probably having to grow a team from three people to five or six, at least, which is a big change in staffing.

SABRINA: Well, hey, if this podcast doesn't work out for me, I'm going to come knocking on your door.

RICHARD: Oh my gosh, okay. The door is there to be knocked on. And I think the podcast is working. So, we will not hear from you. But we get to spend time today.

SABRINA: Yes, yes. I appreciate it. So, this podcast, we love talking about cooking at home, cooking with family, favorite cooking memories. So, we're really going to dig into all of that. I know that our audience loves you because of everything they've seen on TV, all the way back from *Top Chef* season four back in Chicago to today. Gosh, that's been a long time now.

RICHARD: It has. Yeah, 12 years, 13. Something like that. I always forget until you see one of my castmates from that show put a picture — or myself. And you're like, 'oh, wow, we were literally babies.' It was like *Muppet Babies* like now that that show of *Top Chef*, the franchise has gone on for as long as it has. You can go back and look at some of those early seasons and be like, oh, this was like *Top Chef Muppet Babies* version. Look at clean shaven, chubby Richard Blais. Angry Dale and so many of my friends. It is fun to see the throwbacks. Yeah.

SABRINA: Angry, Dale. That's hilarious. Yeah, I mean, we get to see a little bit of your family through social media, which I love. So, you have two beautiful girls.

RICHARD: Yes.

SABRINA: Wasn't your younger one born during the finale of *All Stars*?

RICHARD: Yes. Both of my girls have been born in the orbit of my finales on *Top Chef*. So, it's been very, very interesting a matter of fact that the season that I won, the preferred season if you're in our house, my youngest daughter was born truly right after I came back from winning. My wife was so pregnant that there's usually that scene where they invite family members in, but she couldn't travel. She couldn't go on a plane because she was that pregnant. So, my uncle came out there. So yes, they both have been born right in the orbit of *Top Chef* finales.

SABRINA: Well, first of all, huge kudos to your wife, Jasmine, because navigating a pregnancy right in the third trimester, it could not have been easy and to do that with anxiety of having your husband trying to win *Top Chef*, I mean, she's Superwoman for sure.

RICHARD: One hundred percent. A lot of people don't see that with these reality shows, especially the competitions, the ones like *Top Chef* where when you are on that show, you're totally disconnected from your reality. They take your wallet, they take your cell phone, you're not reading newspapers, you're truly in an alternate reality for six weeks, seven weeks, whatever it is. So, the strain that that causes on significant others, and family members, and friends, and businesses alike is incredible. It's a show within a show to be honest. And yeah, I give a lot of credit to my wife, she's always figured out how to best navigate my personality which is filled with anxiety, and stress, and tension to begin with and how to work with me to make sure that we succeed.

SABRINA: Oh, you did. They called you the professor for a while. In fact, we still refer to you as the professor in my house.

RICHARD: Unwarranted. I failed chemistry in high school. That's an odd fact. As a sophomore in high school so.

SABRINA: Really?

RICHARD: Yes, so my thirst for knowledge didn't come till later in life, but it's cool to be called the professor but I don't know how much actual knowledge is up here. People think I'm the molecular gastronomist, the science guy. But if you were here five minutes before we jumped on, Jasmine was helping me set up the headphones, so I'm not as much of a tech guy as people think I am.

SABRINA: I got you. So, your kids love cooking with you. I know, I've seen them in videos with you. How early did you start getting them in the kitchen?

RICHARD: Yeah. Do they love cooking? I mean, I think they love cooking and they're around, we don't force it. I think a lot of people are always like 'chef's kids, they must be great cooks,' or

‘they must eat so many interesting things.’ And that’s true and false. Everyone’s their own individual. And my two girls are very much so. So, we don’t force them to get in the kitchen. I do think that when kids are doing anything with their own hands, they will have a greater appreciation for it. Right? So, whether it’s art, crafts, whatever they’re doing. So cooking is one of those, they’ll eat food that they cook just like they love the art that they draw or paint. So, I do like getting them in the kitchen, but it’s definitely not anything that’s forced because it’s such a hard profession. And I am certainly trying to send them to a non-culinary profession for sure.

SABRINA: Are there any favorite family recipes that are constantly on repeat in your house?

RICHARD: There are — I mean, a lot of health and wellness and sort of fitness here even for the kids who are both young athletes. So, we’re very mindful of what we eat in this house for sure. That being said, when dad’s cooking, it’s a little more relaxed. I love carbs. I love pasta. Spaghetti Bolognese or simple pasta dishes are on repeat here 100% for sure. And then, turkey sandwiches, actually — a real highlight of my career and cooking world the other day — my youngest, I was filling in for Jasmine, my wife, for a couple days making all of the lunches and my little one told me that I make better sandwiches than mom and it was a very, very big moment because there’s nothing that I do better than Jasmine to be honest. She’s a better driver. She’s certainly more educated. She handles all of our finances. She’s much more organized. And my kids love her food much more than my own. So, when I got that one little like perk like ‘oh, well hey, you know what? Your turkey sandwiches are next level dad,’ made me feel pretty good. And the key is just a little bit of salt. Very, very basic, but just like a little bit of salt on the mayonnaise. Got to have the right ratio of mayonnaise to mustard for the sandwiches that we make. Thin, thin shaved cheese, you need a chef’s touch for some of these things.

SABRINA: Okay, I want to dig into this because, actually, you’re hitting on something very personal. We just had a big discussion about it in my household. My parents are visiting right now. And I was like, ‘I’m starving, but I’m super busy.’ And my mom goes, ‘let me make you a sandwich.’ I go, ‘no, you’re not allowed.’ In fact, nobody is allowed to make me a sandwich except my husband. Even I’m not allowed to make myself a sandwich because my husband has this method. I don’t know what it is. He is not a good cook. If you ask him to do something, it’s a big chore but he will get every bite of that sandwich to perfection. The ratios are perfect. There’s a bite of everything. The banana peppers just right, the chicken is right there. The mustard is perfect. Meanwhile, I’ll make myself a sandwich and I have a whole mouthful of just mustard.

RICHARD: It’s an art. Listen, I, actually, I’m going to bring this back full circle to when I won *Top Chef*. You get to bring in a moleskin with you and you take notes. I’m even taking notes here. And I would fill it up with notes because you can’t come in with any recipes. Everything’s improv but if you remember things, you can write it down. You can draw pictures, whatever you want. So, you get an empty notebook. And my whole notebook was filled with this saying called

‘the sandwich theory,’ this is a real thing, no one's ever heard this, you're getting a world premiere here. The sandwich theory, which is that any dish, any fine dining dish, anything that you make, that you should be able to translate it to a delicious sandwich, meaning what makes a great sandwich? It might have sweet and sour. It's got textural contrast. It's got temperature contrast from maybe cold lettuce and warm chicken like you just mentioned, whatever it is, there's fat, there's acidity.

So, I always thought about all of my dishes on *Top Chef All Stars*, I said ‘could I make this braised pork shank with chile Verde and grits? Would that be a delicious sandwich?’ And if I could, in my mind, figure that out as being a sandwich, it was all green light to go ahead and proceed. So, sandwiches are tough. And if your husband's making great sandwiches, hats off to him because he understands then, salty, sweet, textural contrast, temperature contrasts, all of these things that make food great. That take food to the next level for sure.

SABRINA: Totally. I made sandwiches for four years in college. That's my job. That's what I did.

RICHARD: Oh, wow. Where did you make sandwiches?

SABRINA: I was at a cafe in my university. I went to IU, Indiana University. I worked at Ballantine Cafe for all the Hoosiers listening out there. I worked there for four years. My first boss was Susan and then I had Drew and it was awesome. And all I did was make wraps and sandwiches for sometimes 12 hours a day. And you would think I would have gotten good at it. But no.

RICHARD: There's also this side of it, though, I think you've also stumbled into another part of great delicious food. It does taste better when someone else does the work. Especially when it's someone that you love. There's no more show of care and love than cooking for someone. That's why we do it, right? So, when your husband is making a sandwich, it's coming from a totally different place and you are receiving all of that love through a delicious bite, every bite of his sandwiches, which are perfect. What's your go to sandwich then? What is your ultimate sandwich?

SABRINA: Oh my gosh. That's a really hard question.

RICHARD: Okay, what about this? Did you go to any fast casual sandwich places? I don't know. Like, I love Jersey Mike's as an example. I have no affiliation, but I like Jersey Mike's. I'm a number seven guy Mike's Way as an example. Do you do the Subway or the Jersey Mike's or Quiznos?

SABRINA: I got to tell you. It's Jimmy John's.

RICHARD: Yes.

SABRINA: Yeah, their bread man!

RICHARD: Is it the bread? Ok, I haven't been to Jimmy John's in forever.

SABRINA: The bread so good. I do their Billy Club.

RICHARD: I don't know if you know the comedian, the late Mitch Hedberg, who's a master at dry one-liners, but he's got a great couple of lines on club sandwiches.

MITCH HEDBERG: I ordered a club sandwich all the time, and I'm not even a member, man, I don't know how I get away with it. I like my sandwiches with three pieces of bread. So do I. Well, let's form a club then.

RICHARD: At one point, someone decided to throw an extra slice of bread into a club sandwich. It's got three slices of bread in it. That's a crazy decision. If I did that on *Top Chef*, it would be molecular gastronomy. That's a big deal. We're going to make a triple decker sandwich.

SABRINA: Tom would be like 'I wasn't sure about this idea. But you sold it. You did it.'

RICHARD: Right and then you put the frilly toothpick in there. Did you think? We can't eat the frilly toothpick.

SABRINA: We can't eat the toothpick?

RICHARD: Right. It's an inedible garnish. What is going on? If you watch cartoons like I did as a kid, watching *Tom and Jerry*, every toothpick that was on a sandwich had olives and peppers and all of these. To me, that's what Ember & Rye, which is a throwback restaurant, I love that. We had to bring that back, every frilly toothpick should have a cornichon, an olive, and a pickled banana pepper on it, everyone.

SABRINA: You know what's good? Have you ever had a cheese toastie?

RICHARD: No, but I want to, now that you say, like a cheese toastie? It sounds very trendy.

SABRINA: Okay, I don't know about trendy, my mom used to make it for me when I was a kid so I may just be telling you a family recipe. I don't know but she used to have this old school panini press in India which looks like a cross between a panini press and a weird flippable grill. I'm explaining this really badly now. But she'd put the bread, she'd slather it with mayo and then just cheese cheese cheese but she used the grated kind and just really just get it all in there. And then she chopped little chiles like green chiles and put it into the cheese. And then smash it in there, get it nice and toasty. And that's it. That's a cheese toastie.

RICHARD: I love it. Now, is this authentic Indian cuisine or is this?

SABRINA: Oh God, I think this just may be my house, although we did used to eat it on the roadside stalls sometimes, at the roadside stalls.

RICHARD: I just love when you find those items too, that they cross cultures and you're like — whether it's an Indian dish — and you're like, wait, this would also be perfect in South Texas. Because you're also saying cheese and chiles. And I could see myself on the road eating that in Texas. And I love when you find those fusion moments because everything is the same. Once you realize that everyone's got the same type of dishes. To me, that's just fascinating.

SABRINA: You're listening to *Homemade*. When we return, Richard reveals his dream Christmas meal, the most useless tool in every home cook's kitchen, and tips for the perfect confit. All that and more, after the break!

Thanks for listening to the season finale of *Homemade*! I'm host Sabrina Medora and my guest this week is *Top Chef* season eight winner — and mentor on the new FOX program *Next Level Chef* — Richard Blais.

I want to circle back to something you said about the sandwich theory on *Top Chef*, you said that every dish you tried to do, you tried to hit that sandwich theory. I recall a dish you made. And I believe it was fried mayo.

RICHARD: Yes.

SABRINA: How would that translate into a sandwich?

RICHARD: Well, I mean, we already know mayonnaise works well with sandwiches. And we also know that fried little things on top of sandwiches are great, like potato chips on a ham and cheese sandwich. When I was in high school, I thought that was the greatest invention that we ever made in the cafeteria there. So how would it go on a sandwich? I would just have those fried mayonnaise tubes on the sandwich. And now you have these crispy bits of warm, ooey, gooey

liquidy mayonnaise with crunchy bread crumbs on it, so you just add them. Or now that I'm just spit balling maybe the bread is two discs of fried mayonnaise, which is — I've been on TikTok too long.

SABRINA: You know, I bet that would be a hit.

RICHARD: Or as I said about fried green tomato. It's a big fried disc of fried mayonnaise. And that's like you got a tomato and you got bacon. You got that club sandwich and it's got fried mayonnaise on it. And it's just, when you squeeze it, right? You got to get to get all those hearts and those likes on social media when you squeeze it, cut into the middle of it. That mayonnaise is just tripping out of it. And that's it. That's how we eat nowadays. Right? We just go online and we see something that just looks outrageous. And we're ready to order it.

SABRINA: What's the most outrageous thing you've seen on social media that you have then made at home?

RICHARD: Not too much, to be honest. I'll pick up little techniques, like I just said, like cutting, if you cut a sandwich in half and you open it up to the camera. I don't know where — I mean, I was doing that on a show called *Burger Lab* that we had on YouTube, like, 15 years ago, 10 years ago, whatever it was. But little things, you see. Or like a classic TikTok move people can't see me but I'm like holding my tangerine LaCroix right now, bringing it to the camera. Just little moves that you see, and some of it's just photography or just film like that really, really helps out. I can barely hold this in my hand, the camera is looking down at my food and I can see a little corner of my sneaker because I also love sneakers.

So, I pick up little tips and techniques on how to present things which is fun, I think one great thing about social media, whatever the platform is, is that it has made food fun. Especially me, I am an older chef, I came from very serious kitchens. We are talking about my early days on *Top Chef*, where I was a much more serious chef, wasn't that I was more serious person. I've always been sort of fun. But I was just trained to be so serious about food. And it's fun to every once in a while take a cube of butter and throw it across the room into a pan. Be safe kids. Get your parents' permission before you start chucking knobs of butter around the house. But I think that food is fun and social media has helped with that a lot.

SABRINA: Yeah, I would say it's made fine dining even way more approachable.

RICHARD: Definitely. So yeah, it's also created that good, sort of, well, what's the difference between a dish on social media or a dish in a restaurant? It helps both sides. This is a place where you can be a little bit more fun. Gordon Ramsay who I'm doing a new show with, I mean, he's on TikTok dancing and if you just said serious chef in the dictionary, probably Gordon's the

picture of the most serious chef most people would recognize from a television screen. And he's having fun and dancing with his kids and cooking on TikTok. And I just think that's great for our world.

SABRINA: Oh my gosh, you said Gordon Ramsay. We've mentioned him a couple times on this podcast, too. But I don't know why I suddenly remembered probably one of my most embarrassing food moments was at a Gordon Ramsay restaurant at Heathrow Airport of all places. I was by myself; I'm going to blame the jetlag and the fact that I had some sort of crazy 12-hour layover that happened by surprise. So, I hadn't planned for anything. But I went to his restaurant to have breakfast and I felt so fancy sitting at his restaurant, I must have been 16. And I ordered I think it was langostino and it came, and I didn't know how to eat it. And I didn't know like is the shell edible? Is it not edible? So, I was crunching my way through shell and not really quite understanding. And I was so embarrassed, I just will never forget that.

RICHARD: No, but you should take the other side of it. You ordered the langostino. You were so adventurous and so into it, that you ordered something that you didn't even know how to eat or maybe even what it was. And you had that experience and now you have this great story. I've had a similar experience at Heathrow with my wife is off camera right now. But the one time we had our honeymoon, we spent our honeymoon in London. And at the airport, we got a British dish called a bacon butty. Have you ever had a bacon butty? It's a sandwich. It's basically bread and a medium rare slice of bacon and that's it. That's all it is. And it was really just like a lot of that, especially British food. It's just like, oh, here it is. It's this and that, or you go to Spain even, right? And it's like, this is our most famous sandwich. It's ham and bread and olive oil. It's so simple. But this was just a slice of British bacon. I like medium rare bacon by the way, but there's nothing else on it and like we're used to our breakfast sandwiches are croissants with an egg, and cheese, and sauce and all of these things. Anyway, I was disappointed. This was a long time ago. Now I want a bacon butty but I was disappointed.

SABRINA: So, the holidays are coming up, do you have any fun plans?

RICHARD: They are. Wow. We have been discussing the holidays a lot. It kind of depends. So, we usually split each year traveling. We have family in New York, we have family in Florida, we live in California. So, it depends where we end up. I've always wanted to though, let me change the question. I've always wanted to just roast a goose. We've cooked goose in restaurants and stuff, but I've never just been like, you know what we're going to do? We're going to roast a goose. Doesn't it sound like something I should be doing?

SABRINA: Its sounds decadent. Fatty, drippy, delicious.

RICHARD: Yes, yes. I don't know. I've never done that. That's like the Christmas meal I've always wanted to do. We mostly end up eating out in New York City, like Christmas Eve or the day before at one of my favorite restaurants Carbone down by NYU. As a native New Yorker, just like that very New York Italian food, a big bowl of rigatoni alla vodka sauce and some burrata, shave some truffles on something and we don't get to New York as a family a lot. But this is a trip we usually take, and we'll be doing that again this year, I'm sure. So that's a tradition.

SABRINA: I really need you to make this goose now.

RICHARD: I know.

SABRINA: I'm going to need you to do it.

RICHARD: No one's going to like it. I will say this. It will be one of those things I'll cook at home, and they are tricky. Geese and duck, these are items that when you do cook them, most people tend to under cook them. You know what? I should fry a goose. Now you've inspired me. You've inspired me. We should fry goose this year. I got the fryer out back. We should maybe sous vide it or slowly confit it and then for the last 20 minutes of it just drop it in the fryer and just have all this crispy goose skin. And then drop some potatoes in the fryer that's been perfumed with all of the goose drippings. Now I'm getting hungry actually. This is me because this is my...

SABRINA: Literally I'm salivating.

RICHARD: I was going to say, I feel like I'm doing — I feel like it's a casting. Like I'm rehearsing for a show, when you do get to do some the Food Network stuff, and it's like, you have to be able to say things like, ooey gooey, stretchy, and chewy and you have to be able to enunciate. And it's really tough when you're doing audio with food, to make something sound delicious. But some words, just do it, drippings. Right? You said it, I said it. Drippings. Yes. Of course, I want my toasted bread slathered into goose drippings. Yes, it works.

SABRINA: I'm thinking about maybe confiting some duck legs? But that's a little ambitious. I don't know.

RICHARD: No, it's not. It's not ambitious.

SABRINA: Walk me through it.

RICHARD: Ok so confit, which means preserved or cooked in its own juices or fat to be more specifically, is the best technique in the world. Any slow roll, and it's usually all the world's

greatest food. Every culture have these dishes that have just been like, how did you do it? I put it in a pot, and I cooked it forever. That's literally — doesn't matter if it's mole, or if it's beef bourguignon, or if it's duck confit, whatever it is, whatever culture. There are these dishes that just like, oh, how did you do it? Oh, we put it on the stove, we cooked it forever. So, confit, you literally just open a box of salt. If you get a bay leaf and some fresh thyme and you pack these duck legs down for a couple of hours, you rinse off all the salt, that's the key to confit. If you've never confit, when you take the item out of the salts, you have to rinse it off. Because if you leave the salt on there, it's going to be really, really salty.

And then, I mean, nowadays, you can go buy duck fat anywhere. So, you go to the local grocer, and you get a pail of duck fat, which also sounds delicious. And you literally put your duck legs in duck fat. If you don't have duck fat, don't worry, just use a neutral-flavored oil, which is the most author thing I've said on this podcast so far. A neutral-flavored oil. Don't you love cookbooks that say things...

SABRINA: Like avocado oil, grapeseed oil?

RICHARD: Grapeseed oil, maybe avocado to me might have a little bit too much flavor, but it could literally be whatever oil you have. I mean, if you had just olive oil and you had that coin, go ahead and confit duck in olive oil, whatever you have is going to work. And you just slowly cook it. You just bake it in an oven 325° for a couple of hours until the duck is just falling off the bone, just like anything else delicious. By the way, you know what my favorite thing is to confit?

SABRINA: Tell me.

RICHARD: Chicken wings.

SABRINA: Oh yeah.

RICHARD: So, you take the same technique that you use for duck, but you use it for wings. You pack them in salt, you rinse them off, rinse that salt, you cook them in a neutral-flavored oil, and then after they've cooked in the oil, you throw them in the fryer under the boiler, in the oven, you crisp them up. Chicken wings confit for the big game. Number one hack.

SABRINA: I love that. Well, I mean, you are the one that made me become a food writer.

RICHARD: It's hard to believe. With that comes a lot of responsibility.

SABRINA: It does.

RICHARD: It's kind of like being Spider Man now.

SABRINA: It's so funny, I post that story every year, every time *Top Chef* premieres. I post the same story on Instagram, like, years ago, I was sitting at my desk at work, and I was so depressed and I was watching Richard Blais on season eight. And really, that speech you gave man, I mean, if I listened to it today, I'd probably still weep. It just gave me chills. But that love that you had, I kept thinking, oh my God, he is so in love with food and what he does, and I just want to feel that way. And then I realized I was sitting there crying like an idiot and in public. I'm like, oh well, I do feel this passionate and hey, it's also about food. So here we go. And now here we are.

RICHARD: Well, it's very reflective. So, the first time you ever told me that story, and when you go on a TV show and you start hearing certain stories like 'oh, you inspired me,' or 'I changed my career.' Whatever it is, you realize what a big deal it is. There's a responsibility every time you're in front of a microphone, every time you're in front of a camera, that you have the ability to affect someone's life and trajectory and so I take — I guess it's an incredible honor for you to say that. And then it also because I have anxiety, then I also feel the pressure like, oh my God, I hope you're doing well. Obviously you've got your own podcast, you're crushing it right now. So, it's working out.

SABRINA: I wouldn't be here if it weren't for you. But I get it. I have major anxiety too. So, I fully understand, so the pressure is on.

RICHARD: Because you want to be great. So, it just like, you always hear athletes, I had butterflies before the game or the match or the bout or whatever. And that's normal. As long as it just doesn't become a constant thing. But like I told my kids because I perform a lot of live shows now. This is a part of my world that people don't know, I go up on stage. I just came back from Iowa, where we did two shows, I did five shows last week. And it's part standup comedy, part cooking show, part science class, part magic show. And every time I go on stage, I am still like, oh my God, will people like me? It's like I've never done it before, every single time for that first three, five seconds. It's like I've never been on stage before. I've never been in front of a mic. I think that's good. It keeps us grounded.

SABRINA: Okay, so to wrap everything up, I love hearing about chef's kitchen failures, whether it's at home or on camera. What's a really big kitchen fail that you've had recently?

RICHARD: Recently? You know where the biggest fails have come recently have been someone sent me — again, very blessed. I love when people send me equipment and stuff like that to try out. But someone sent me a pizza oven. Like a mobile pizza oven that you just hook up to a propane tank and it's awesome. It's great. Because if you've had Pizzaiolos, or people that

are into the pizza world, like the key is you need 900° of fire to make a legitimate pizza. So, I got this great pizza oven, and I just suck at making pizza dough. I'm just really bad. So much so that my youngest, who's 10, had one of her soccer friends come over. And I was in charge of the entertainment that night. And I was like, we're going to make pizza, kids love pizza. Of course, everyone loves pizza. And the outside of the crust was too burnt, the inside of the dough was too wet. And it's not just that one time, just to be clear as I'm telling you about my recent failures. I continually fail at pizza. I try to make it too perfect I think, the dough is too wet. I look at really advanced recipes because maybe I think I'm better than I am. So, I look at the ultimate hydrated no knead pizza dough. Listen, if you need a recipe. Do you know who's really great with recipes? Martha Stewart. Regardless how you feel about her, you just find a Martha Stewart recipe you know that it's been tested 1,000 times by 10 people and seven of them got fired during the testing process. You know that the final recipe made it through some tough cuts. But pizza has not been working out well for me. So, I will tackle it again soon.

SABRINA: Okay. We are going to do a really quick segment. We like to call it fire five. I'm going to ask you five questions. They're super fast and you can't think, you just have to answer them. OK?

RICHARD: OK.

SABRINA: Most overrated trend in food?

RICHARD: Stunt food. Just stunt food. People aren't eating it. It's 19 burgers on a sword that's all drippy and gooey. Just people doing things just for social media. It's an overrated trend. It still has to be delicious. You still have to fit it in your mouth. I'm guilty of this trend as well. But just over-the-top stunt food.

SABRINA: Okay, turkey or ham?

RICHARD: Probably the all year answer is ham. Right? The fact is, even when I'm cooking on *Top Chef* or when I'm cooking competitively, pork tends to be the go-to because it's more forgiving. Pork fat is totally different than beef fat or lamb fat. And you can have much more success with pork. That's why everyone loves bacon, it's because of the fat.

Totally overrated kitchen appliance. You didn't ask me this question but let me give you the answer anyway. The potato masher. The potato masher has no use except to get your cupboards cluttered. It is the ear lobe of the kitchen utensil drawer, there is no use for it. The potato masher. Don't tell me you use it for also making your tortillas or crushing up your carnitas or your ground beef for a Bolognese. Don't tell me that, the potato masher is overrated. It's a tool that we don't need. And it should just go on every garage sale table this weekend, overrated.

SABRINA: Well, thanks for stealing my next question. Love when the guest does that. No, I'm kidding.

RICHARD: There we go.

SABRINA: But I was going to ask the most outrageously useless but super fun kitchen tool?

RICHARD: Oh, well useless but fun. Useless but fun. Maybe it's not useless, but it's the rasp, right? The microplane, right? Which was 20 years ago, everyone's — do you really need it? You don't. You can mince garlic. You got a knife. But there's something — even just the sound of it. You're grating cheese with it. Ginger, garlic. It's got some uses, but you don't need it. But it is my favorite probably useless utensil because I like it. I like it. You gotta watch your fingers. But it's the microplane. And I'll probably have 10 other answers in 30 seconds, but let's move on.

SABRINA: I thought you were going to say something like a smoker.

RICHARD: I mean, listen, as the molecular gastronomist, the immersion circulator, the vacuum packer, I love these things and specifically for restaurants or if you're doing some heavy cooking, but you don't need them. Do you know what you need? You need water. You need fire. You need one good pan, some salt pepper vinegar. And that's all you need. And some organic vegetables, done, lights out.

SABRINA: Who's tougher with judging, Padma or Tom?

RICHARD: Tougher judge, Padma or Tom? Wow, I mean, it's a cop out answer, I guess. But equally as tough. Equally as tough. Both pretty hardcore critics. I mean, you watch the show. I mean, what would your answer be?

SABRINA: My answer is Padma.

RICHARD: Really?

SABRINA: Yeah.

RICHARD: Yeah, I mean, listen. Anytime you're cooking for a judge, the thing that is crazy about all of these shows is that if you learn a little bit about the judge what they like, do some research on them. At this point is 20 seasons of *Top Chef*, you could probably go back and realize as an example, a basic example but Padma has a pretty high threshold for spicy food. If you're a competitor on *Top Chef*, you should know that and you should when you're cooking for

it, if it is a dish that is supposed to have spice, that it should have spice or else she's going to ding you for not having spice in that dish.

Tom, as an example, is very much a classicist of a lot of traditional European cuisines. I remember for me myself, I called something a paella once and it was more of a pilaf. And we're in this ridiculous conversation about the difference between paella and pilaf. I mean when I was younger, give me a break, but as a judge that's something that he really looks to you, like, 'hey, if you're going to call something a name, it should really be what that is.'

Gordon Ramsay who's someone who I know really well right now, Gordon Ramsay is a technician. If you're cooking for Gordon, and you say something is mid-rare, we all know it better not be raw. It's raw. So, my lesson there is, they're all tough judges as someone who's cooking for them you need to know, just like you do for your guests in your restaurant, generally speaking, what they like.

SABRINA: I almost feel bad to end on such a boring question but I always like knowing this, so I know what to stock my kitchen with. What's the kitchen tool that you just can't live without?

RICHARD: I'm looking. I'm in my kitchen. Kitchen tool that I can't live without. Okay. It is the heavy bottomed cast iron pan or even more specifically, pot. Right? So, it doesn't matter what the brand is, but like a workhorse you need heavy bottoms. Cast iron pan or enamel coated cast iron. I'm looking at three of them on my stove right now. And they get work. I have plenty of pots and pans but there are three pots and pans that get everything. Braises, soups, stews, pasta dishes, whatever it is, there's a couple of pans that just get lots of work and I'll work them for years. And they last forever so to me that's the go to kitchen utensil/piece of equipment.

SABRINA: Awesome. Well, I'm on track then because I'm the same way.

RICHARD: Well, especially now too, like in some of these brands, I work with Le Creuset, they're beautiful, you get the right color. And then all of a sudden, you get a great backdrop regardless of what your kitchen looks like, if you get that beautiful aquamarine or sunset rust pan back there. Whatever it is. It makes a big difference.

SABRINA: Yeah, I have two Le Creuset that I will say those are my basic go to for pretty much everything. I'll cook in them year-round. But I do have a Staub that I was given as a gift, and I love making biryani in there. Something about the way it handles the rice. It's just so good.

RICHARD: Any dish that cooks for a little longer, they are easy to clean, they're the number one. I'm a big fan of a nonstick pan. A lot of people when they hear that as a chef, they get very offended. I thought chefs don't like nonstick pans. No, I mean, who really wants to make an

omelet without a nonstick pan? You can do it. But you're just showing off. Use a nonstick pan, why? We have the technology, use the technology, you'll make a better omelet. But yeah, people give chefs a hard time about that sometimes.

SABRINA: And that brings us to the end of our final episode for season two of Homemade. We hope you enjoyed as much as we have! As always, you can find all our guests on social media. Richard is [@RichardBlais](#). You can also listen to his podcast, Food Court or watch him on *Next Level Chef*, out January 2 on FOX.

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This podcast was produced by AllRecipes with Digital Content Director Jason Burnett. Thanks to our production team of Rachael King, Matt Sav, Danielle Roth, Jim Hanke, Maya Kroth, and Andy Bosnak at Pod People.

This is Homemade, I'm Sabrina Medora and remember: Cook with love, eat with joy.