

Guy Fieri- What a Guy

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With his bleached blonde spikes and retro bowling shirts, Guy Fieri is easily one of Food Network's most recognizable characters. He won our hearts as the winner of "The Next Food Network Star" in 2006 and has gone on to host "Guy's Big Bite" and "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives," a show that has featured numerous Valley dining destinations. When he was in town this winter for the Guy Fieri Roadshow, we caught up with the man himself about the local dining scene.



Photography by Sherrie Blondin

You've been to Arizona several times for "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives." What is your impression of our dining scene?

[Prior to the show,] I'd only been here a few times going to Lake Havasu back when I was going to college in Las Vegas. When we started going here to shoot locations, I was really happy to see how many great places you have here. We have not been disappointed, from Chino Bandito, which is definitely one of my favorites, to Matt's Big Breakfast and Los Taquitos. It is a great place - I think Arizona's got it going on in the food world. You have a lot of diversity, too. You think, 'It's hot, it's a bunch of Tex-Mex.' But there is a good amount of diversity.

What are your favorite dishes that you've sampled here?

It's difficult to say. There have been a lot that I've really enjoyed. The Navajo taco at Salsa Brava or the green pork chops at Matt's. Each place has its shining star. It's not one; it's hundreds.

Has food always been your life's passion?

Oh yeah. I've always been a big food fan. When I was a little kid, when I was getting up in the morning, the first thing I would ask my mom is what's for dinner. She came up with a rule that there's no asking what's for dinner until we've had lunch. I swear she fed me lunch at 3 p.m. sometimes just so she didn't have to decide what was for dinner.

Why did you decide to try out for "The Next Food Network Star"?

My buddies pushed me into it. I didn't watch a lot of TV. My buddies had seen the show and thought for sure I would do well with it. They coerced me into it, and I did it. I was just happy to be on the show—I thought it was pretty amazing. It turns out that I made it to the finals and won. It was a launch pad.

I think you have everyone's dream job. What is the best part about what you do?

Highlighting these mom-and-pop joints [on "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives"]. There's nothing that can bring greater success to a small joint than shining the national spotlight on them. It changes their business profile forever. It is amazing what [the show] does. There are a lot of tough components, too—you're traveling a lot. Overall, being a small restaurant owner and chef myself [Fieri is the owner of Northern California's Johnny Garlic's and Tex Wasabi's], and knowing what it takes and what it does for them, it is pretty remarkable.

As a dad, how do you get your kids excited for cooking?

One of the best things I can recommend is not forcing them into it. Let them make some of the decisions about what you're going to make. Get the boring stuff out of the way. Kids don't want to measure out spices. Try to make that part for them quick and fast. Let them get bit by the bug. Let them feel the excitement of putting it together and tasting the result. If you make it too labor-intensive or tedious, it's not going to be so interesting. Video games are fast and now you push the button and the game starts. It's all quick, quick, quick. You have to make sure you keep them in their type of environment.

When you're not traveling for work, what do you enjoy doing?

I like hanging out with my kids and [my wife] Lori and going to my restaurant. And just being the guy I was before all the craziness of The Food Network. The simple things are my favorite right now.