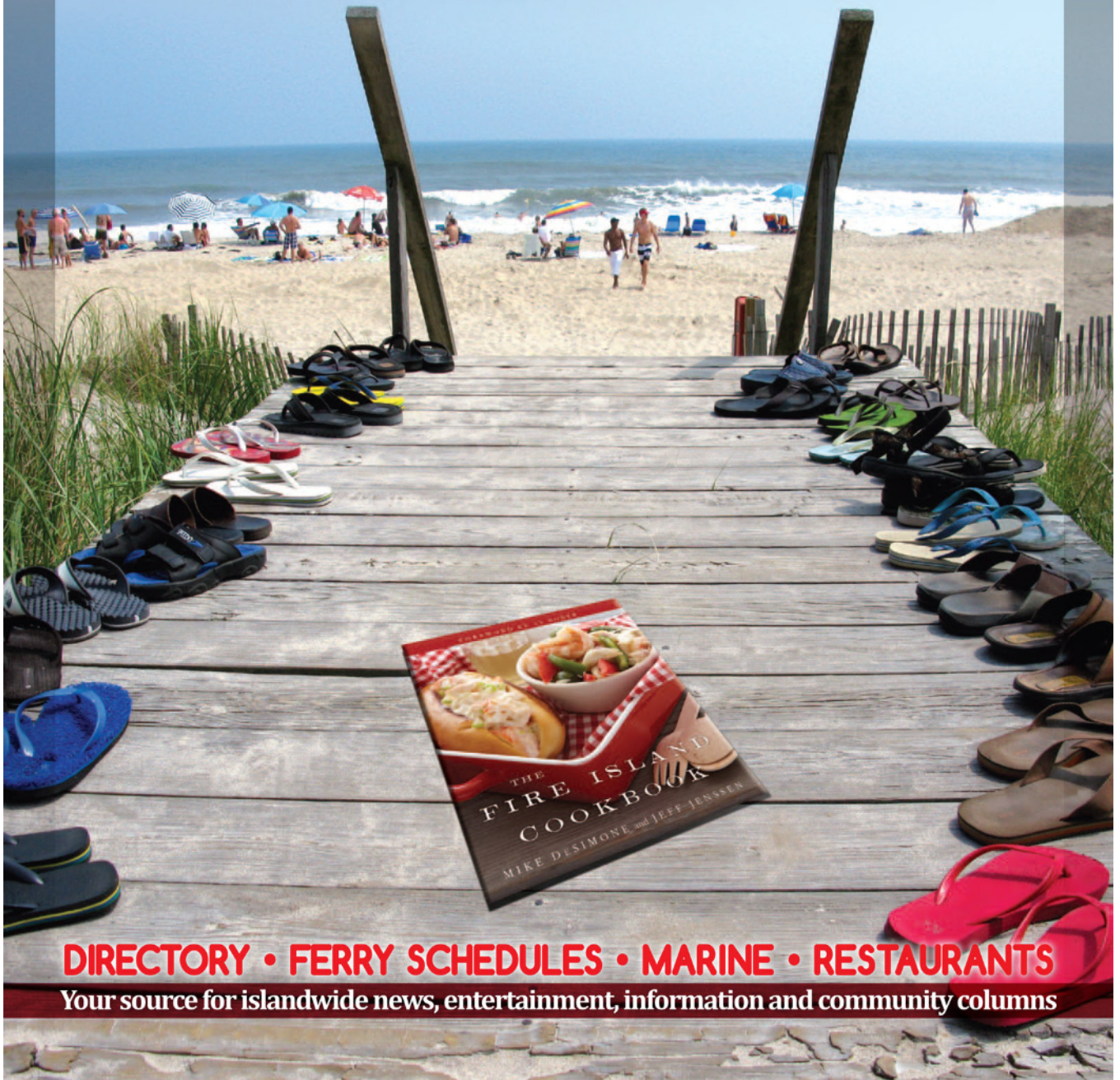


# Fire Island Tide

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# Fire Island Food Fest

**T**oday was the day I was going to meet the authors of *The Fire Island Cookbook*, Mike DeSimone and Jeff Jenssen, and enjoy a meal they prepared along with our *Fire Island Tide* publisher and foodie, Kate Heissenbittel. I was ready to drink wine, eat, and take notes while they did all the work.

Arriving promptly at the designated 1:30 p.m., I found our irrepressible Kitchen Diva Kate in her immaculate white kitchen pacing around and worrying about whether it was okay that she did not buy filet mignon for the recipe but had purchased skirt steak instead. "The filet just doesn't have any taste," she fretted. "I hope the skirt steak is okay. I bought fresh peas at the little farm stand in Brookhaven and shelled them this morning."

The family dogs, Rocky and Smudge, were exiled to another room with daughter Katie to amuse them. Not one stray hair was to find its way into the kitchen.

A few minutes later the two chefs arrived, breezing into the kitchen and assuring Kate that the meat she purchased would be fine.

"We just did a book signing at Bloomingdales," said Mike. There were more than 300 people. We prepared sliders in their demo kitchen."

The popularity of their new cookbook has been extraordinary. In the big Barnes and Noble



Jeff Jenssen, Kate Heissenbittel and Mike De Simone enjoy a glass of wine before dining.



store in Union Square in Manhattan it is featured prominently in their cookbooks display. On Amazon it is a best seller among home entertainment books.

*The Fire Island Cookbook* is a scrumptiously illustrated collection of meals using seasonal and local ingredients, one for each weekend from Memorial Day through Labor Day -- the Fire Island "season." The recipes are the result of the authors' travels in Italy, France, Spain, Greece, Mexico and Hungary, and include wine pairings for each course.

So how did two guys come to write a cookbook?

"We live in Fire Island Pines during the summer," said Jeff. We were staying in a house with six people. One day we were walking along the beach and our friend Stephen said,

"What are you going to cook tonight? When you guys are out here everyone wants to be a dinner guest. You guys should write a cookbook!"

And so they did. "We designed the cookbook especially with Fire Island in mind," said Mike. "I love to cook for dinner parties. With our cookbook you can actually sit at the table and enjoy your guests. I'll make Tuna Nicoise, for example. Prepare the salad ahead of time on eight plates and put them in the refrigerator. It takes just a few minutes to sear the tuna just before serving. When we grill it takes only 10 or 15 minutes, and people can come out with a glass of wine and talk while we are grilling. I knew a woman who could not cook. She lived on take-out. I picked out three dishes for her to learn how to make. 'Your friends will have no idea that you can't cook,' I told her. So now she invites her friends to dinner and no one knows she can't cook!"

So how did they go about writing the book?

"We take chefs' recipes and translate them for the home cook," said Mike. "Pro recipes are too intimidating. There is nothing in here that you can't find in the local grocery store or farmers' market. We use a lot less equipment. When we wrote the book one of us would man the stove. We tested everything ourselves. For instance, we would shake the amount of salt we use in a recipe into a bowl, and measure it. Then we had a chef cook every recipe. And we had tasters. We have ten doormen in our building who were tasters. They are all our best friends."

Mike and Jeff are journalists who have traveled the world writing articles, researching the book and collecting recipes. They were most recently in Italy, Spain and Croatia where they won the Golden Pen



Award for journalism. "We are the only U.S. journalists to win this award. Other winners have been from Italy, Spain, Germany and Ukraine."

Jeff explained that Croatia has a big wine industry, and that they had written a Croatian wine travel article. His ancestry is Eastern European. When they went to Croatia they went to small towns, and through cemeteries, and found Jeff's relatives. They found Tukszar headstones, his great grandfather's name on his mother's side. "We went there to find my roots," said Jeff. We traveled north of the Hungarian border." Jeff, who speaks Hungarian and Croatian, knew that his great grandfather could have only come from one of three towns. They found out where he was baptized.

### THE "FIRE ISLAND TIDE" COCKTAIL

This tropical drink is as blue as the Atlantic on a hot summer day...and just as refreshing!

Muddle 3 slices of peeled fresh ginger in the bottom of a tall glass.

Fill the glass with ice.

Add in this order:

- 1 1/2 ounces premium white rum
- 1 1/2 ounces coconut water
- 3 ounces ginger ale
- 3/4 ounce blue curaçao

Shake and Serve: Flexible straw and umbrella optional!

This original cocktail recipe is created by The World Wine Guys, Authors of *The Fire Island Cookbook* (Simon and Schuster: Bestler Books, April 2012).

Mike's background is Sicilian, so he knows a lot of family Italian recipes that are adapted and included in the book, for example, chicken with pesto and raw tomato sauce. One of the desserts in the book is based on his grandmother's recipe.

"We use a lot of adaptations," said Mike. "We assimilated family recipes and made them our own. Other recipes are based on what we learned on our travels."

How did it work out with two guys writing a book together? "Mike just demanded top billing," laughed Jeff. "He has a degree in journalism and his languages are better than mine. He would ask the questions. As we worked, we would discuss the text. Everything was co-written."

Jeff, who is a trained sommelier, continued, "We had two book contracts within one week. Our next book is *Wines of the Southern Hemisphere* published by Sterling Epicure, a subsidiary of Barnes & Noble. We also wrote for *International Living* as the correspondents for Spain."

Mike and Jeff said, "We were on the road a lot while researching the Southern Hemisphere wine book. We spent 20 weeks traveling. The world of wine is very generous and giving. Unlike other businesses, 90% of the people are nice to deal with. We could not have written that book without their cooperation. People should never do anything without a glass of wine. Heads of state should open a bottle of wine before having their discussions and political meetings. Maybe the world would be a better place."



All during this conversation there was a sense that the three people working in the kitchen were doing what they love. "Let's do the pasta first and let the grill heat up," said Jeff. "We'll eat the two courses separately."

"I'll grate a little more cheese," said Kate. "We want plenty of cheese."

Mike said, "We'll cook the penne pasta *al dente*, then put everything in the pot. Then there is only one pot to wash." So into the pot went the prosciutto, fresh peas, and cheese. Jeff tossed everything together. "Let's get that grill started. Meanwhile, we eat the pasta." The meat, which had been marinating, was ready to go.

We moved into Kate's stunning dining room, where the sumptuously set table was a vision of cool white formality -- a grand setting for such a deceptively simple meal. "Presentation is very important," said Mike. "You eat with all your senses -- sight, smell, texture -- you want everything to be appealing."

Kate was in her element, beaming as she welcomed everyone to the table. "Let's have a toast," she said. "You know, cooking is my passion." ■

