

FOOD & WINE[®]

THE ART OF SUMMER



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GRAB A NAPKIN—IT'S PEACH SEASON. (GET THE RECIPE FOR GRILLED STONE FRUIT WITH MASCARPONE ON P. 77.)

Grilled Corn with Chile-Lime Butter

Michelle Bernstein's grilled corn has stood the test of time—just like her career.

By Amelia Schwartz



◆ Husks double as handles for grilled corn with spicy compound butter (recipe p. 90).

IN 2005, Michelle Bernstein took a leap of faith. After building her career cooking at other people's restaurants, she and her husband, David Martinez, opened a place of their own, Michy's. "We were leaving the comforts of working at fancy hotels and restaurants and making our own mark on hospitality in South Florida," she says. "It was scary."

She was already highly regarded in Miami as the former chef of Azul at the Mandarin Oriental hotel and a host of Food Network's *Melting Pot*, but as a female chef, Bernstein felt like she had more to prove. "It was hard to be accepted for a long time. There were very few other women in the industry, especially in Miami."

Michy's was a risk in more ways than one. The cuisine was entirely unique to Bernstein's cooking



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The June 2006 issue featured easy grilling recipes from barbecue expert Steven Raichlen, plus beer pairings and a guide to Minneapolis.

style: an eclectic combination of her Latin and Jewish heritage with Asian and French influences from her time cooking abroad. And the location, Miami's Upper East Side, was at the time very much under the radar. But the couple had faith. They pooled their money and put it all into Michy's and a house next door, where they still live today.

Although it was a daunting time in Bernstein's life, it also marked an exciting era that was captured in the June 2006 issue of *Food & Wine*. In the feature "Miami's Hottest Latin Party," she celebrated her new accomplishments with a yacht party on Biscayne Bay, serving vibrant dishes like mixed-seafood ceviche and grilled corn with queso fresco and lime compound butter, her take on elote.

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A lot has changed since then. Michy's was an instant hit. It remained open for eight years, during which time Bernstein won the 2008 James Beard Award for Best Chef: South and became a recurring guest judge on Bravo's *Top Chef*. "It gave me the confidence to know that, number one: I could cook," she says. "And number two: People would come in, and as long as I continue to cook well and honestly, hopefully, they would continue to."

But by 2013, the restaurant became a victim of its own success. The Upper East Side, once a sleepy neighborhood, was suddenly a hot spot—and Bernstein and Martinez's landlord quadrupled their rent. She closed the restaurant but kept working, building her legacy in South Florida through other projects.

Bernstein currently owns Michelle Bernstein Catering and four restaurant concepts: Caribbean eatery La Cañita, cocktail bar Sweet Liberty, Spanish-influenced Sra. Martinez, and Cuban dining destination Cafe La Trova (a partnership with world-renowned bartender Julio Cabrera). She also has a presence at Nu Stadium, home of Inter Miami CF, through Mercado MIA, a grab-and-go market featuring items like ham and cheese croquettes and choripán.

Bernstein credits this ever-growing hospitality empire to good cooking and incredible service and avoids using her fame as a crutch. In the 2006 *Food &*

Wine feature, she said, "When people ask me to come out into the dining room, I think, 'Wouldn't you rather taste my food than see me?'"

She still makes television appearances on shows like *Today* and *Tournament of Champions*, but they come with a grain of salt: People often imply that she has passed her prime—that her time for growth has come to an end.

So please don't call her "OG." "I'm proud of the fact that I've opened the doors for a lot of people, and I still love teaching. But don't put me in that little box," Bernstein says. "I consider myself [to be] evolving constantly."

Bernstein feels that her technique is better than ever and that she's more efficient and way more open-minded. "I learn from everybody. It's kind of like I've opened the blinds in the last few years and let everybody come in."

That shift is evident not only in her restaurants but also in the way she cooks and entertains at home. Her gatherings are far more laid-back than what they used to be—small backyard barbecues with grilled sausage, ensalada rusa (a Russian-style potato salad popular in Argentina), and, of course, grilled corn. It still gets lime butter, but today, instead of tarragon and queso fresco, it's finished with Cotija, fresh chiles, and Tajín (recipe at right). "I was always afraid of heat," Bernstein says. She's outgrown that, too.

Grilled Corn with Chile-Lime Butter

PHOTO P. 92

ACTIVE 25 MIN; TOTAL 1 HR; SERVES 6

Wrapped in their husks, these ears of corn turn sweet, juicy, and lightly smoky on the grill. Soaking them before grilling keeps the husks from charring too quickly, helping the kernels stay tender and plump. A compound butter spiked with fresh chile, chile-lime seasoning, and lime zest adds brightness and tang.

6 ears fresh corn with husks (about 3 lb.)

½ cup unsalted butter, softened

1 jalapeño chile or serrano chile, seeded and finely chopped

1 Tbsp. chile-lime seasoning (such as Tajín)

1 tsp. grated lime zest

¼ tsp. kosher salt

Crumbled Cotija cheese and chopped fresh cilantro, for serving

1. Trim off ends from each ear of corn. Place corn cobs in a large bowl filled with water; submerge for at least 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, preheat grill to medium (350°F to 400°F). Add softened butter to a small bowl; fold in chile, chile-lime seasoning, lime zest, and salt until combined. Set compound butter aside at room temperature while corn cooks.

3. Place corn directly on grates; grill, uncovered, until charred in spots, about 10 minutes per side.

4. Remove corn from grill, and let stand until cool enough to handle, about 2 minutes. Peel back corn husks, leaving attached to cobs; discard silks. Use husks as a handle, or tie husks in a knot if desired. Spread compound butter over corn; top with cheese and cilantro. Serve.
—MICHELLE BERNSTEIN

MAKE AHEAD Wrap butter in plastic wrap, and store in an airtight container in the freezer for up to 3 months. Thaw in the refrigerator overnight.



Chef Michelle Bernstein poses for a photo shoot in Miami in 2022. That year, she opened her fast-casual burger concept, Little Liberty, and her Cuban-inspired bar, Cafe La Trova, earned the No. 21 spot on the World's 50 Best Bars list.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MICHAEL PISARRI