

The Zest S13E1

Abby: [00:00:00] The thing with yachting is like no matter how crazy the request, maybe you don't even have the means to do it. You're gonna find a way to do it and make it look effortless.

Dalia: I'm Dalia Colon and this is The Zest: citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor, and southern charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State.

Today it's our season 13 premiere, lucky 13, and we are celebrating with a trip around the world on get this a private yacht.

For most of the year, Abby Cheshire teaches culinary arts for Florida Virtual School, and when school lets out, she works for summer job, but Abby's not delivering groceries or leading arts and crafts at day camp like some other teachers. The Brevard County native works as a chef on a private yacht. She shares her high seas adventures with her more than 1 million TikTok followers, where she's known as Abby in the Galley and now she's sharing her [00:01:00] recipes too. Chef Abby's new cookbook is *Passport to Flavor: 100 Global Dishes You can Make Anywhere*, and she literally means anywhere. She is working in a small galley kitchen on this yacht and she's limited.

To whatever food and equipment she has on hand. Abby recently chatted with me about the highs and lows of cooking on the high seas.

Abby: My name's Abby. I am a chef on a yacht, and somehow the job found me. I feel like things just kind of appear, opportunities appear, and you know, you can't say no. So I was not in search of this job, working on the yacht. It's a privately owned yacht, so I work for the same family. They grew up with nothing and he's just built all these businesses and became something big.

So they're [00:02:00] well-rounded people. So I always like to say they're the perfect type of rich, um, because like, they're, they're rich, but they're not famous. So, you know, they have all this money, but they can go anywhere and not be recognized and, you know, have their, their evening ruined. They know how. The others live the 99% live, so they're, they're an amazing family to work for.

Dalia: Oh, that's so cool. Are you just like sailing around the world? I mean, I can barely plan dinner for my family, like on land. So talk through the logistics

of sort of planning those meals and cooking and, okay, I'm at port, so now I can buy the ingredients that I need. How does that all work?

Abby: Yeah, so the family's been doing the trip for.

Going on 20 years, they started doing the same trip every summer. Same exact trip for ever since they had kids. So they normally go down to The Bahamas, just, you know, island hop around The Bahamas. But each year it just becomes a little more grander. So like I feel like [00:03:00] every year it gets a new boat bigger and better.

So five years ago is when they finally brought a chef on board, and that was me. It was a lot to think about because once you're on. Yeah, there's really, in The Bahamas, especially with us going to like these remote islands, there's not like a grocery store that you can just like pop into and, oh, I forgot eggs.

No. If you forget eggs on the boat, you're, you're done, you're, you can't make a cake or whatever. Yeah. So I would have to provision the boat. I would provision the boat for a two month trip with about \$20,000 worth of inventory, and there's eight freezers on board. I got two in the galley and then six in like this.

We call it the hole. It's like in the bow of the ship. There's six freezers down there. So we had half a cow that we brought on board. We had it butchered into like the different types of cuts of meat that we wanted. Um, so there's about six, 700, oh my gosh, 6, 7, 6, 700 pounds of, of protein.

Dalia: I have a 9-year-old. He's going to love that.

Abby: No, it's everywhere. No, 600, [00:04:00] 700 pounds of protein that, that is in the freezers because. I can't buy all these proteins on the islands in bulk like that. So we provision everything outta Miami, all the proteins and all the dry storage. And then when we do get into these islands, we'll go into the, the grocery store and, um, get any, any fresh produce that we can.

Oh my gosh. I just wanna like, I don't know, invite you over to dinner and talk to you for five more hours.

Dalia: Okay. How big is this yacht if it's got six, seven freezers and. Uh, do you have any help? Are there other staff members helping you, like wash the dishes? I'm assuming there's maybe somebody cleaning, like, like, talk to me about the, the rest of the hired help.

Abby: We're on a hundred foot Ocean, Alexander. Uh, it's a gorgeous boat. There are four of us. We've got the captain and we've got the stew, and then we've got the first mate. So the stew is in charge of cleaning the inside of the boat, all interior work. And the first mate is all. [00:05:00] Exterior cleaning the boat, which is every single day.

I could not do it. Like it's such a hard job. You're doing the same exact thing over and over. So cleaning the outside of the boat for the first mate, and also just listening to whatever captain tells you to do. And then the chef and I am in my own little world, in my galley. It's, it's wonderful.

Dalia: So what are the biggest challenges of cooking in a galley kitchen?

And I know you already talked about even supplying the kitchen with ingredients, but are there any other differences between cooking on a yacht and cooking in your home kitchen?

Abby: Yes, I'll bring up. A scenario I was in this past summer, I went down to the British Virgin Islands, and we did something a little different in that we didn't take their privately owned yacht.

We chartered a yacht out of the British Virgin Islands. So both of the people that I was cooking for, they're both captains, so they can just pretty much rent a boat like you rent a car and take it out. [00:06:00] And we were out there for a week. So the, the struggle with that catamaran is that I not only had to be a chef, but I had to be like an electrical engineer because.

Considering like the load of electrical stuff, I had to like make sure the AC was off and the light downstairs was off on the breaker For me to be able to run the toaster and the microwave at the same time. It was like all about balancing the load and I learned a lot on the seven days, but you'll trip breakers a lot on a boat.

Dalia: That makes sense. And people who have an RV might be used to that. Or even like during hurricane season here in Florida, when you have to switch to your generator, you realize I can't run the microwave and the dishwasher and you know, the TV all at the same time. Yeah. So, okay. I know you wrote a cookbook sharing some of your culinary journeys.

It's called *Passport to Flavors, 100 Global Dishes you can Make Anywhere*. So tell us a little bit. More about the cookbook and some of [00:07:00] the dishes in it that maybe are your go-tos when you are, uh, cooking on the yacht.

Abby: Yeah, so the book has 14 countries that we travel to, and it's like you are on the yacht with me and we are traveling around the world pulling into these different port cities from that country.

And then when we get to that port, the chapter is based on like a day. In the life, like if you were on the yacht with me. So we would be cooking, it's a breakfast, lunch, cocktail hour, which would include a, a drink and or cocktail and an appetizer, and then dinner, which is either a soup or a salad. The main dish and then a dessert.

Dalia: Wow. Okay. And I'm just reading some of the countries featured in the book: Vietnam, Ireland, Bahamas, South Korea, Germany, and then United States, France. So what's left on your bucket list?

Abby: I never got around to taking my trip. I had a two month trip [00:08:00] planned to all of like the Asian countries, and that's my specialty.

I love Asian food. So that's, those are probably my favorite countries that we travel to in the cookbook, but I've never gotten a chance to actually go there. I've only learned from, I was kind of like a nerd, um, in college. I guess I could still call myself a nerd, but I would literally just go to the library and read about Asian cuisine. So that's where I've learned, but I wanna like be hands on. I wanna be there. So that's my bucket list, getting to Asia and um, just enjoying the cuisine there.

Dalia: Yeah, tell your boss, let's go to Asia. So what do you do during your downtime? Because the closest thing I can even think that comes remotely close to what you're talking about is like when I was a teenager and this family asked me to go on vacation with them. It was a family that I had babysat for and they wanted me to be there to babysit their kids so they could go do grownup things. But then I thought, well, even when I'm like off the clock, I'm still at a hotel [00:09:00] with you, like I kind of can't get away from you.

So when you're not cooking, what are you doing on the yacht? Where are you on the yacht? Like do you have your own space? How does that work?

Abby: So, yeah, being on the yacht, it's you. You're always in everyone's business. Even though it, you know, it's a fairly big. Boat, but there's nowhere to really go. So it's a long day.

We started at six in the morning and end sometimes at 10 or 11 o'clock at night, so I need a little nap in there. So after lunch, I'll take a nap and I do have a

shared room with the first mate. Usually he's cleaning the boat as I nap. I sleep on the bottom bunk, and I would say there's about a foot and a half above me, uh, before I hit the top of, of his bed.

So like, if I turn in the bed, I'll, I'll bump my head on it. Every single, every single time I don't learn. And the mattress in, there's like half the size of a twin. But I will say that I sleep pretty well when I'm on the boat. The rocking puts me right to bed.

Dalia: Okay. You mentioned [00:10:00] always being in everybody's business, and so I have to ask you about Below Deck, the Bravo Reality Show.

For people who don't know, it's a Bravo reality series about crew members working on a super yacht. So have you seen the show and how accurate is it? Because you know that meme that's like what my parents think I do, what my friends think I do and what I actually do. So like. What's the difference between the fantasy of working on a yacht and actually working on a yacht?

Abby: I would say there are a lot of similarities. Like some of the requests are, it's like comical, but you just, you, you do your best. The thing, the thing with yachting is like no matter how crazy the request or like. You, maybe you don't even have the means to do it. You're gonna find a way to do it and make it look effortless.

Like you never, you're not gonna, you're not gonna show any, like, oh my gosh, I'm not, I can't do this. Or you're not gonna show how hard it is to do it. You just, it, you get it done and it's there and it looks [00:11:00] like magic. So yeah, those, those similarities in that regard. With like, you know, meeting guest requests, but I like to say the yacht that I'm on is like below deck without the drama.

Dalia: So does this family ever bring guests with them, and I'm thinking maybe it would be the guest who would have the more like off the wall request because they don't [00:12:00] understand the limitations of cooking on a yacht. Like what's the most over the top request a guest has made and could you pull it off you?

Abby: Okay. This summer I had to, on the same catamaran trip, actually, I flew in a daily, I think I was on some like business trip or something, and I had to get in to the British Virgin Islands a daily, so they provisioned the boat for me with no sugar, with nothing from the provisioning lists that I had, like literally.

I had nothing to work with. But again, it's one of those things where you're like, I just gotta make it work. I've gotta show that I can do this. And it's just gotta, it's gotta happen like magic, so no sugar on board, and I get a request to make like a dessert. So I'm searching through all the cupboards and I see marshmallows.

I'm like, okay, those got, those have sugar and gelatin. I can melt this down. I'm gonna melt down the, the marshmallows. I'm gonna put a little bit of these limes that, because we had plenty of citrus. I'm [00:13:00] like, I'm gonna use the limes, I'm gonna use the marshmallows. Oh, and we got some, uh, vanilla wafers. I'm gonna use those too.

So I kind of made like. Vanilla wafer crust with marshmallows and lime juice, which set up beautifully. It was like a moose like, 'cause I, the gelatin and the sugar from the marshmallows. I got the sweetness, I got the, the stability from the gelatin and the marshmallows. It was, honestly, it was pretty great.

And like, like I said, it was like magic. It's like we had sugar on board miraculously.

Dalia: Oh my gosh. But when you pull off things that are really difficult and you make it look easy, then people just expect more and more out of you. Which is incredible. Yeah. Okay. So you have been sharing your adventures on social media.

You told us earlier that you barely used social media and now you're kind of like a social media darling. I mean, who doesn't wanna follow the adventures of a yacht chef? So how did that come about?

Abby: So, yeah, when I started my social media, it was during COVID times. I feel like everyone started just [00:14:00] scrolling on TikTok during COVID.

So I downloaded TikTok and I was like, I remember I was at the dinner table with my family and I was like, I'm just gonna start a TikTok. We're not gonna have wifi. This was like the first, it was a smaller boat when I first started, and there was no wifi on board. So it's like, I'm not gonna have wifi, I'm not gonna have data, I'm not gonna be able to call you guys.

So what I'm gonna do is I'm just gonna like. Make these videos and I'm gonna edit them, and that way I don't have to call, you know, my friends and family and explain the story every single day. It'll be a lot. So I'm like, I'm just gonna

record it. I'm gonna post it whenever I get to the island with wifi, and then you guys are gonna see what I'm doing every single day.

So that is so cool. I made, yeah, I made my, my profile public just because, and it started to take off and it didn't take very long. I think the, the video that went crazy, it got like 17 million views is me cutting up a pineapple and plantains. [00:15:00] And it just went crazy for there from, so that was a 27 day trip, and after I started on day one and after the 27 days, I was at half a million followers.

Dalia: Wow. What do you think it is? I mean, I was instantly drawn to this just for the, I guess the voyeurism aspect. Like you're on the inside. You said that your clients are like the right type of rich because they're rich, but they're not famous, so they have that anonymity. It's kind of cool, like I have a friend who's a doula for, um, some professional athletes, and she gets to see how they live from the inside.

What do you think the attraction is there with so many people following what you do?

Abby: Being on a, on the ocean, on a yacht, so hard to grasp. It's like dreamlike. And a lot of the time these, these chefs on yachts sign an NDA 'cause they're normally working for the rich and famous where, you know, they're, they don't want their, their lives being shown like that or don't want photos of the yacht or pictures or videos of the yacht.

So [00:16:00] yeah, thankfully the owners are like, yeah, yo, no, create your business. Grow your brand. 'cause he's a businessman himself. So he was supporting me all the way through. Yeah, I think it's just niche. Not many people that work on yachts have the ability to film and I do. So it's just one of those, one of those few people that can show their life.

Dalia: That's so way. That's so cool. There's a book called The Haves and the Have Yachts about the Super Rich because it is, it's like the 1% of the 1%. Okay, so obviously you have all these followers who are into what you're doing, and then you go back to school, which must just be like wild because you know the budget of the yacht and the budget of the school are nothing alike. What do your students think about your summer job?

Abby: It is funny. So I, so I worked at Merritt Island High School as a culinary arts teacher. Then I transferred to another school in Brevard County that had an even bigger culinary arts program. And then once COVID hit, I was like, man, we're not gonna be able to cook at the [00:17:00] school anymore.

Like literally they shut down the kitchen. I'm like, what's the point of culinary arts if you're not cooking? So a job opened up on Florida Virtual school. So I took the job, I built the culinary courses there. We have three courses on Florida Virtual School. So I'm teaching these, these students online and you know, they see me in the live lessons where I'm on camera and they see my little photo when they go onto their announcement page for the course.

But. I would say 90%, maybe 95% of them don't even know that I'm a yacht chef. I don't wanna share it. You know, like school, school and yacht chef is yacht chef. So I have some that, you know, email me and they're like, I think I saw you on TikTok. Are you a chef on a yacht? And then they get so excited because they're like, I wanna be a chef too.

So they just like start asking me all these questions. But it's just, it's funny because it's like. You know I'm a teacher at AT school and a chef at on during the summer.

Dalia: Oh my gosh. You're like Clark Kent and [00:18:00] Superman. Yeah. That's cool. I have a friend who teaches for Florida Virtual and she didn't realize that one of her students was Coco Gauff,

the tennis player. Yes. Because she went by her name found Corey found too? Yes. Mm-hmm. And, and and she did not realize it until, um, some family members turned on Wimbledon and Coco had said, you know, I'm gonna miss a couple days 'cause we're going outta town. It's like, oh, I'm going to play in Wimbledon. So you have like two different lives that way?

Abby: Totally. Yeah. I have a student that's gonna be sailing for the, the US Olympic team. It's so cool. Like they're, the students are so cool because usually they're doing something. You know, during school hours where they have to do school at night, so yeah.

Dalia: Wow, amazing. The students are amazing. The teachers are amazing.

Okay, so what do you love about this life of yours? You said you've got the three jobs, you're a yacht chef, you're a teacher, and you're a social media influencer. What brings you joy about. Living this life and, and sharing this content with people.

Abby: Oh gosh, everything that, that is, that conversation could go on for [00:19:00] hours.

But I love teaching because I get to share like my passion of food to the younger generation and I just, I get so excited when. They share the same passion. I have students that I taught from 10 years ago, they'll email me and they'll say, chef, I got my EF position at this restaurant. And it's just so cool, um, to kind of be their mentor through that.

And I would say is the social media creator, just building a community that shares in the same love of cooking and, and the water. It's so funny because on social media, nothing, it does, nothing's tangible and I'm all about like. I, I am a people person. Um, so not having like the people that I can like talk to and shake their hand and just say thank you for the support.

It just, it almost feels unreal. Like there's, you know, 1.5 million followers I have on TikTok and I'm like, that's just, I can't even conceptualize that I. Whenever I get something that's tangible, like [00:20:00] I was in the New York Times and I held the newspaper and I was like, oh my gosh, this is real. Holy cow.

This is real. And like I had an event where I was on a riverboat and like a hundred little chefs came out on the riverboat and I'm like, this is, this is just a hundred people, but like this is the most regal it's ever felt. And like holding this cookbook in my hands. There was another experience where I'm like, oh my gosh, I'm holding it.

I'm touching it. This is, this is real. So it's cool to see. You know that community coming into real life now and then the yacht chef, like I said, the kitchen finds me, so I get my two months of. You know, being back in the kitchen, I know it's temporary. I, I love it. I'm not saying like, I'm glad it's over, but just the temporality of, you know, working really, really hard.

It's not my whole life. I still go back to my nine to nine to five during my, my real, um, you know, during the school year. But there's still, I'm, I'm always cooking. I [00:21:00] got a, I got a, a new smoker for my patio, so I've been trying different meats to smoke and. I'm cooking all the time, always around food. It's, it's my love.

Dalia: Oh, I love that. It always finds you. I didn't really think about that because you have all these followers, but then you are on the yacht and you're kind of by yourself. So there is a little bit of a disconnect there. This has been so fascinating. I know everybody wants to get your book *Passport to Flavor: 100 Global Dishes You Can Make Anywhere* and it's literally anywhere.

Is there anything else we didn't talk about that you wanted to mention?

Abby: I think the biggest thing with the cookbook, because it's international food, maybe you'd call yourself a picky eater. I just would encourage everyone to open their minds, explore different spices and herbs. There's some spices and herbs and sauces in there that might sound a little unique, but I give.

Recommendations to like make substitutions to try to make it authentic as as possible. 'cause you know, some people might not have an [00:22:00] Asian grocery store around. I just think that exploring the world through food is such a beautiful thing. And, and in the book you'll, you'll see that.

Dalia: I love it. Oh, I can't wait to get my hands on a tangible copy of the book.

Thank you so much for your time. What a treat.

Abby: Thank you so much for having me.

Dalia: Abby Cheshire is a culinary arts teacher for Florida Virtual School. She's also a TikTok star. You can follow her at Abby in the Galley, and she's a newly minted cookbook author. Her book is *Passport to Flavor: 100 Global Dishes You Can Make Anywhere*.

You can find a link to her TikTok and her cookbook in the show notes of this episode or on our website, the zest podcast.com. I'm Dalia Colon. I produce The Zest with Andrew Lucas and Alexandria Ebron. The Zest is a production of WUSF, copyright 2026, part of the NPR network.