

The Zest S13E6

Jerrelle: [00:00:00] When you start to make space for cooking at home, you're really telling yourself that you are worth it.

Dalia: I'm Dalia Colon and this is The Zest: Citrus, Seafood, Spanish flavor, and southern charm possessed, celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State. Today, everyday fancy.

When you think of fancy food, what pops into your head? Maybe it's white tablecloths, tuxedoed, waiters, and a sky high dinner bill. But for Jerrelle Guy, fancy is a state of mind. It has less to do with pretentious restaurants and more to do with taking time to nourish yourself using what you have on hand.

Jerrelle was born in South Florida and now lives in Dallas. Texas. She offers a blueprint for creative everyday fancy moments in her new cookbook. It's called *We Fancy: Simple Recipes to Make the Everyday Special*. Her previous [00:01:00] cookbook, *Black Girl Baking: Wholesome Recipes Inspired by Soulful Upbringing* was a 2019 James Beard Award finalist. I recently caught up with Jerrelle. In this conversation, she offers simple ways to elevate home cooking.

Jerrelle: I think reframing when you're stepping in to the kitchen as this nourishing act that you get to do. That that, I think that's as, it's as simple as that. But there are tips throughout the book that can help you make tiny tweaks to get there. I think like little things like putting on music, lighting a candle, putting on an apron, these all kind of like.

They're like little physical adjustments that shift your mindset, like on a subtle level. All of it goes a long way. Cleaning up your space, you know what I'm saying? Like just making sure that if you're [00:02:00] entering and you find yourself like, it's like checking in with yourself, right? And you find yourself feeling overwhelmed and you find yourself feeling really tired.

It's almost like. When you're going to the gym and you don't want to go right, like I, I, I make that connection a lot. You don't wanna go to the gym, but you know that once you start, then you get past that initial like resistance of not wanting to go at all. Then you start to get more energy and you start to feel really good about yourself and you start to just go all in.

I feel like it's really just getting yourself there, you know, and kind of like holding your own hand.

Dalia: Oh, that's good.

Jerrelle: Throughout the process. Yeah.

Dalia: Yes. Because you're right. And people will say to themselves like, okay, I don't feel like working out. I'm just gonna walk around the block, and if I'm sick of it, then I'll come back home.

But once you Right, right. Get your blood pumping, you're like, I'm gonna go a couple miles, and just

Jerrelle: a little bit like, yeah, yeah, I can do this. Yeah,

Dalia: yeah, yeah. You

Jerrelle: start to like believe in yourself. Yeah.

Dalia: Yes. Absolutely. Holding your own hand. I love that. Okay. But for a lot of people, sort of being good to [00:03:00] themselves.

Being fancy feels like it should come from a restaurant, it should come from some outside place. So why is home cooking even more of a love letter to ourselves than eating out?

Jerrelle: I mean, I think. Cooking for yourself at this point does feel like a luxury, right? Because I think the ability to slow down feels like, oh my gosh, do I, do I have this resource?

Do I have time as a resource right now? So I feel like, you know, when you start to make. Space for cooking at home, you're really telling yourself that you are worth it. You know what I'm saying? You're telling yourself that caring for yourself is a non-negotiable, and I also just feel like, yeah, like it is easy to just order Uber Eats.

It is easy to just DoorDash things, and so when you're taking the extra care to like. Chop something or, I mean, so much of this book, like I've [00:04:00] encouraged just like building cheese boards, like snack boards, because I mean,

I feel like snacks are, they're a legitimate dinner sometimes I don't wanna make like a full dinner.

But you know, making myself a thoughtful snack, like even just popcorn popping popcorn feels like this really joyful thing and experiment that you could do. And then like putting some seasoning on it, like you're just. Having this moment to yourself, this like little love letter to yourself. Yeah. It might take a little bit of time, but I feel like that's the gift to yourself.

Dalia: Yeah, you're right. It's being rich in time. And not being in a hurry. Okay. Now you mentioned that you're a mother. So tell me about your little one. I have two kids at home. And time does not always feel like a luxury. I mean, you gotta lock yourself in the bathroom just to make a phone call. So how has becoming a mom shifted your relationship with cooking?

You've talked about snack boards, which I think is brilliant because I feel like cooking is a spectrum [00:05:00] and some people wanna do all or nothing. It's all from scratch or I'm ordering out. And when you sort of lower the bar, that's when you can cook more at home. So how has having this new life to manage affected the way you approach cooking?

Jerrelle: So I have to like strap him to my body while I'm cooking, which makes me really slow down. He, he gets so fussy if I'm not holding him because he wants to be in the mix. He wants to see everything that I'm doing.

Dalia: How old is

Jerrelle: he? He's, uh, seven months. He's about to drink seven

Dalia: months. Oh, he's teen.

Jerrelle: Yeah.

Dalia: Wow.

Jerrelle: Yeah, he's really.

Dalia: How are you even talking to me right now? Honestly? That's amazing.

Jerrelle: Yeah, no, it's fine. But yeah, so like I'm even slower in my movements than before. I think everything with a newborn makes you just, you know, like

everything just takes so much more time, which is wild. But um, just. Being more mindful about everything that I'm doing, but I think a lot of the book I've included, [00:06:00] like these garnishes because, and that's a really important thing.

It's like you don't have to go all out to kind of add a little like sparkle to your plate to make it feel like you are, you know, like, like elevating it a little bit in some way. And so there are ideas, you know, like for my, one of my favorite ways to garnish my plate is if I'm like. Eating with, if I have celery in a dish, the inside of the celery stock is like a leafy green that I chop, and then I sprinkle it on the rest of the plate, basically looking for.

Ways to use what you already have in new ways, kind of like trains your brain to see the abundance in oh, the resources that you have, you know? So a lot of this book is like that. Like for instance, the tiramisu cheesecake, like I'm just using graham crackers. For the crust, but I'm inserting them in vertically into the pie.

And I feel like it's just like a [00:07:00] different way of looking at things. You know, it's a different way of approaching everyday ingredients so that they just bring a little bit of a like, wow, interesting. You know, like I feel I'm kind of like snapping out of my regular patterns, like my regular every day.

And it just, it makes it feel a little bit, you know, more alive.

Dalia: That's beautiful. When you were talking about cooking with a seven month old at home, it actually reminded me of a couple interviews we've done with Firehouse Chefs and how they're like, I have to be prepared to stop at any time because the alarm goes off.

I gotta go. So it's very

Jerrelle: simple. That's crazy. My brother is a firefighter, so I'm like very close to that lifestyle of him just needing to like on the go, like run, which is, that's. That's hilarious.

Dalia: Yeah, for sure. Okay. I love the graham crackers. I love the chapter that you have on homemade toppings that you can freeze because I'm a big proponent of like a homemade sauce, a homemade dressing, even if you're mixing it with something store-bought, you're right.

It elevates [00:08:00] everything. So what are some of those other hacks we can use if we're maybe not ready to go? A hundred percent? You know Martha Stewart?

Jerrelle: Yeah. I mean, you can use store-bought ingredients and just. Add like one of the main ingredients that are already inside of the sauce. You could just add a fresh element of that.

You know, like, so if you have like a soy marinade, you could just add fresh ginger. You know, if you're, if you're buying a Caesar dressing, you could just add a little bit of lemon zest to that, or a little like fresh garlic grated inside. Like just anything to kind of awaken the flavors, you know, and make it feel like, you know, this is a little bit more homemade.

Dalia: For sure, and those are things like ginger and lemon that you can just sort of add to your weekly grocery list and you'll find a million different ways to use them. Okay. I'm an Aldi shopper and I love that you have a recipe that uses chocolate from Aldi and you call it out by name. Like, listen, this is, this is very sortable.

[00:09:00] I think that's great. Okay. But I'm also curious, like how does the culinary community view you? I know you, your previous cookbook was right, a James Beard finalist. I think everybody that I know loves you, but do you ever get pushback for not being traditionally fancy enough?

Jerrelle: You know, maybe it's in my head, but yeah, I mean, I feel sometimes I feel like when I do recipe development for some of these other audiences out of context, I think I'm hard to understand and hard to kind of put into a box.

That's been an interesting experience.

Dalia: I love it. The, the masses love it. The everyday people.

Jerrelle: Okay. Okay, good. Okay. No, I mean, I do feel, yeah, I mean, I guess I can speak on it more, but No, I mean, yeah, it's fine.

Dalia: Well, no, I'm curious because you said you feel like it's in your head. I think we all suffer from imposter syndrome, um,

Jerrelle: right.

Dalia: At times. So what else? How do you [00:10:00] sort of navigate that?

Jerrelle: I mean, I, I kind of just have to stay true to what I like. I'm not somebody who I think goes out to dinner all of the time, and I feel very much in the know of all the, you know, new like, uh, ingredients that are out there. And, you know, I'm just, I'm really kind of in my own little world, you know, just like experimenting with what I do stumble upon.

And so I just. I've come to just be okay with that and let them kind of take it how they will. I don't know. I do, there's always a thought that, is this really gonna land with that audience? Is this new to them? Is this something that they already experience? Is this is this kind of old news? You know, because it's so new to me.

And I do think, I have moments where it's like that, where they're like, oh, we, we kind of know about this sauce. So we kind of know, you know, like you're, you know, not necessarily. Saying something new, but because I feel like I'm experiencing it like for the first time, it's like when you experience your child finding something, like seeing something for the first time, I still, I feel like there's [00:11:00] still something to gain from that, you know?

Even if you are well versed in an area, you know?

Dalia: Yeah, for sure. Like even the graham crackers.

Jerrelle: Yeah. Yeah. You

Dalia: mentioned the graham cracker. Every, every mom of a little kid has graham crackers, but not everybody thinks of these sort of creative ways to use them.

Jerrelle: Right. Love,

Dalia: love that. There's always a

Jerrelle: new, new approach.

Yeah. Yeah.

Dalia: There's

Jerrelle: always a new way to look at it,

Dalia: and I like the idea of just sort of staying in your own world. You don't write an award-winning cookbook by eating out every night. Right?

Jerrelle: Yeah. And you

Dalia: also said that cooking should help you feel more like yourself. So what do you mean by that and what are maybe some of the barriers?

That people encounter that make them uncomfortable in the kitchen.

Jerrelle: I think that there's just too many rules around. Yeah, and like pressure. And, I mean, that just goes back to your, your other question, which is like, you know, cooking should totally be a personal like journey, you know, and I think that when we're, when you're [00:12:00] following recipes to a tea or you're cooking because you wanna impress.

Somebody that's coming over for dinner. It really pulls you from, from this really intimate, I think, benefit that you can gain from just cooking for yourself, you know, and being really present in the kitchen and discovering what you like and honoring what you like and honoring how. It's best to nourish yourself.

You know, like getting into trends, getting into, you know, rules about what you should and shouldn't eat for your, if you're listening to your body, you know, I think you can get so much more information that could override like more logical, you know what I'm saying? Like. Rules, and then you can free yourself because you're actually listening to the feedback that your body's giving you in real time about whether or not it likes something.

You know, like it's such a per, there's so many layers to it, and I feel like it's just so personal that you can't really listen to other people about what. Makes what you should be doing in your kitchen, really. You know, there could [00:13:00] be guidelines and I feel like recipes and, and that was such a big point.

Part of this book is like, I didn't necessarily want people to just go and make my recipes. These were recipes that I love, you know, these are recipes that I enjoyed making and enjoyed eating, but. I think people should totally cook what they crave or what they're inspired to cook and make it their own.[00:14:00]

Dalia: So what are some of the recipes? That you thought, is this too far out there? Or, I put this together with this and I can't believe it worked. What are some of the more surprising recipes in the book?

Jerrelle: Oh man, that's a tough question. For the first time I made a, I think it's the first time I made a cake on the stove top and that felt like, you know, like I just wanna try this and I wanna see if it works because, you know, sometimes I don't wanna use the oven or I just wanna play with my tools and I wanna push these.

Recipes beyond, you know, the normal ways that we're approaching them. And so that was fun because that came out really great. Like, it was like a steamed cake and it was like more tender than just being baked in the oven. So that, um, I made this really good, just like cherry balsamic glaze, and I put it on ice cream and I just, I was just like, oh my hat.

And I, and it's just like this tiny little tip you would have to like [00:15:00] really search throughout the book. Like, it's hard to find, but it's just like this tiny little tip. And I just feel like they're kind of like these little, like hidden, I mean, I guess you could say like, yeah, they're like little hidden treasures in the book that if you really take a recipe far enough, you know, you'll find it.

And that feels really exciting to me. I mean, I, I love that recipe and. Just the savory, you know, kind of like tart umami flavor on top of ice cream is just, I love it. And I think that one's fun.

Dalia: I love it too, and I haven't even tasted it, but I love your description of it. Yeah, I love the little Easter eggs throughout the book too.

Jerrelle: Yeah.

Dalia: Okay, so you talked about steaming a cake and many of us know you from your previous cookbook, *Black Girl Baking*, which was a James Beard finalist. So. What can cooking do for you that baking couldn't,

Jerrelle: it could bring me balance. I think when I was given opportunity to make this book, I was [00:16:00] so out of balance because I was just recipe developing so much sugar.

And so with this, I wanted to course correct my lifestyle and I wanted to say, well, you know, like. I want to fill my cabinets with more vegetables and I wanna have more of a reason to eat vegetables. And so I kind of just like intertwined it into my work, you know? And like I made this excuse and like put this pressure on myself to like, yeah, eat more of a balanced diet.

Yeah.

Dalia: Yeah, and you can probably be more playful, like we talked about, you know, sort of feeling like yourself and not taking things too seriously. And I feel like that's easier to do with cooking 'cause baking is a science, you know?

Jerrelle: Yeah. I mean, I, like I said, I really do approach baking a little bit, like cooking because I'm thinking of it more like.

From a like flavor pairing place first, and then I just have, with all recipes, you have a rough eye understanding of how it can come together, right? Because you have a rough understanding of how a [00:17:00] brownie works or a cookie works, then you know, like you can start pushing the limits of that and then, you know, it's kind of like trial and error to see where it goes and, and I do a lot of trial in the air, in the kitchen because to me that's.

So fun. I just find that, you know, like your curiosity stays alive and you're just like, ah, I wonder if this and this, and like, it's just not as fun if you're just following this prescriptive, you know, like, like recipe. You're not really giving yourself like the flexibility to like think outside the box or play or be surprised by failures or any of that stuff.

Yeah.

Dalia: Well, I'm glad you did all the trial and error so that now we know there's a roadmap. If we wanna let go the opposite of what your GPS is telling us, that's fine. But if we want it to be a slam dunk Yeah. We already know it's gonna be good. Yeah. Okay. The photos are, I mean, on the back there's this cookie photo and it's.

It's 11:00 AM here and I'm just like salivating for cookies. And I know you did the photography for not only your own [00:18:00] books, but other cookbooks too, including I think Toni Tipton Martin's book.

Jerrelle: Yes.

Dalia: Yeah, that's amazing. We had her on the pod as well. So I'm sure you see all these people on social media trying to be food photographers, food influencers, cookbook authors.

So what don't they know yet? Why is this. Harder than it looks. Ooh.

Jerrelle: Oh man. I mean, it's just a lot. I think it gets undervalued, you know, the amount of work that goes into even recipe development, you know, so

there's a, there's just a lot. And for food photography, because we were. Doing, we were kind of wearing all of the hats.

You have, you know, food propping, you're, you're propping, you're buying the groceries, you're cooking the meals, you're setting the stage, you're lighting the set. You're, you know, like, I mean, it could, it could have taken us, when we shot Jubilee, we would shoot, sometimes we would do hundreds of. Before we landed on a single shot, and it was just [00:19:00] adjusting the set every time.

And then we'd sit and we'd stare at it and be like, Hmm, okay. And I know that other people can have a different process, but we really looked at the work, like paintings. You know what I'm saying? So for me, it had to feel a certain way and it had to have. Yeah, a certain atmosphere to it. And so it took a lot.

It takes a lot of like tweaking until you get right to that like sweet spot and you're like, okay, yes, it's done. And then you have to take it into post where you're editing it, you know, and you're adjusting it. You're like retouching all the little bits and like it's a very full process that, you know, like.

You have to be like just on from beginning to end. And, and, and that's for just one photo. So you're doing hundreds of photos like that for each book and it's, you know, it's just a lot. It calls a lot from you. But I mean, I don't know. Like I, I'm happy when I did, I love that I got to do it for my own book and not have an art director like telling me, [00:20:00] okay, no, this needs to go a little bit further.

And I got to really just ask myself, okay, do I, do I like this? And decide for myself when something was done. So that was the joy of shooting this book, you know.

Dalia: Yeah, it sounds similar after the other

Jerrelle: books.

Dalia: It sounds similar to your process with cooking, asking yourself, do I like this? So that's great.

Yeah. And it turned out gorgeous, but now that makes me think because just yesterday I spoke to, uh, Chef LaKisha Harris, who will be appearing at the Tampa Bay Collard Green Festival, and she talked about resourcefulness is a callback to our ancestors who were so resourceful. And so do you feel any of that?

I mean, you titled your other book *Black Girl Baking*. So you are sort of putting your identity at the forefront. You've talked about sort of improvising in the kitchen. Are you thinking in those terms when you're doing this?

Jerrelle: I've always described myself as just a resourceful person, and I think that's why I am where I am, you know, because I'm able to use [00:21:00] that like survival strategy almost to, to find solutions in, in tough times.

And I definitely attribute that to my, you know, to my family, you know, and my grandmother especially, it's a big part of my identity.

Dalia: Very cool. Well, thank you so much. I can't wait to dig into this cookbook even more.

Jerrelle: Yeah, thank you. This is fun.

Dalia: Jerrelle Guy is the author of *We Fancy: Simple Recipes to Make the Everyday Special*.

She shared her recipe for Olive Oil Brownie Pudding, and it's on our website, the zest podcast dot com. I'm Dalia Colon. I produce Zest with Andrew Lucas, and Alexandria Ebron is a production of WUSF, copyright 2026, part of the NPR network.