

# The Zest S13 Bonus

**Bobby:** [00:00:00] There's definitely something I have in the book that I think absolutely should belong in the past, and, and I still put it in the book but it's called the Beef Fizz.

**Dalia:** I'm Dalia Colon, and this is a bonus episode of The Zest. Citrus, seafood, Spanish flavor, and southern charm. The Zest celebrates cuisine and community in the Sunshine State.

Today, retro recipes are coming to Tampa Bay

Retro food can mean different things to different people. For my kids, it's the Jell-O Pudding Pops and vintage Pizza Huts of my childhood. Hello, my fellow elder millennials. For Bobby Hicks, retro means tuna noodle casserole, chicken Kiev, and gelatin rainbow cake. In other words, the food of his parents' and grandparents' heyday.

But retro recipes are more than just a list of ingredients. They're a feeling. During the pandemic, Bobby shared this [00:01:00] nostalgia with a growing number of social media followers @RetroRecipesKitchen, where they watched him make these sentimental dishes, providing a much-needed sense of comfort. And now, Bobby has captured that feeling in a new cookbook.

It's called *Retro Recipes: Vintage Dishes with a Modern Twist*. I caught up with Bobby, who grew up on a farm in Central Florida, and now lives in South Florida, and lucky us, he's coming to Tampa Bay as a stop on his book tour. He'll be at Tomolo Books in St. Petersburg on June 30th, in conversation with yours truly, and the only thing missing is you.

So you can find a link to more information about that event in the show notes wherever you're listening to this episode or on our website, thezestpodcast.com. But even if you can't make it, we didn't wanna leave you hanging, so in the conversation you're about to hear, Bobby discusses how to modernize retro meals [00:02:00] for the 21st century.

He talks about staples of a vintage kitchen, so fun, and he tells us which recipes should stay in the past.

**Bobby:** The retro aspect of things, I, I personally just associate with the mid-century period, you know, like 1950, '60, '70s, kind of ish like that. Because in a

converse way, you know, it's just like that, that parallel of, like, kids today are looking at Y2K or '80s, '90s being vintage. For us, that was the equivalent period of time.

It was what our parents were into, it's what our, maybe our grandparents were able to relate to and tell us stories about. And so it's this fascination that I have with kind of a combination of history and nostalgia together, and how they're, they're so interlinked between just kind of our familial experiences.

But then at the same time, just this curiosity of just wanting to kind of, like, really learn more [00:03:00] about it, and just kind of deep dive and just be a little historical archeologist.

**Dalia:** Yeah. I found, um, the dish pattern that my parents had when I was growing up. I found it at a thrift store. Mm-hmm. And I bought myself a teacup and saucer, 'cause it just gave me such, like, good feelings.

I use it just to put, you know, jewelry in and stuff. But there is something about that. So what are some of the retro recipes in the book that stand out to you?

**Bobby:** I have some dishes in there that are delicious. Uh, I mean, like in fact, most of them are delicious, but you know, I, and I will say most because not all of them.

You know, most of them are really delicious, and, and, and, but not all of them are in very retro, like in, in like just the way it hits you in the face. For me personally, like I think things like the Burning Bush, which is this really absurd, kinda almost like atomic, you know, dish where it, it's, it's basically like a grapefruit that is impaled with like a dozen little skewers, and each of the skewers have, uh, a small cream cheese ball that's rolled [00:04:00] around in kind of like chipped beef or something like this.

**Dalia:** And- Oh, my gosh, all the words you just said sound like- All of them ... a Mad Lib.

**Bobby:** Y- yeah, exactly. It's a, it's like a fever dream. But this is, this is kind of what I associate with a lot of mid-century dishes, like gelatin towers or things like this. You know, like they were very visually interesting and, and absolutely absurd, but at the same time, there's something about that.

There's a whimsy to it that it's just like you just can't look away from. Like, it's kind of like a car accident, you know? Like, you know it's not good, but we're still looking at it.

**Dalia:** That's so true. So where do you even find a recipe like that? Were you going to garage sales and getting, like, old cookbooks?

**Bobby:** It was one of those things where I have always had kind of like a very deep connection with secondhand stores, thrifting, things like this. And so, like, I find almost everything that I get at, you know, a Goodwill or something else because this is, you know, just the, the, the, the lowest barrier of entry.

Instead of having to hunt something down on eBay and haggle with somebody, it's like I [00:05:00] personally like the idea of exploring, discovering things, and finding it. Because in an era of convenience, you know, it's like you can get anything you want, and we kind of forget these days, like, the importance of just, like, discovering something.

**Dalia:** For sure. I get almost all my clothes from the thrift store. I love the thrill of the hunt. So what were some of the recipes that either worked as is or that you updated in some way to make them work for today?

**Bobby:** Well, most of the dishes are actually pretty good as they were. Like, I'm surprised about this, actually, you know?

But what I did was I basically just improved upon things for our modern palate. So, you know, again, this is not in any way me trying to dunk on the past and being like, "Oh, well this is, you know, really stupid," or this and this. It's more the idea that it's just like they were working with what they had, and we're just gonna improve upon it a little bit.

So just using either things like, you know, volumetric and metric measurements. So th- that gives a lot of people right there alone just a little more flexibility. Introducing a little more salt. Like, seasoning in general is always, like, the [00:06:00] first mistake that most people always had. And, you know, I, I, I try to make it a point to kind of teach people how to actually cook.

You know, so in the event that it's like you grew up in a casserole family that may have actually just asked you to get cream of mushroom soup for your, you know, hot dish or something, I'm teaching you how to actually make the sauces and things like this from scratch. And, and j- simply just because it's like this is the way I think our grandparents would've wanted us to learn how to cook.

And I know it's a deviation from your question, but it's like this all kind of sparked and stemmed from, like, this moment of just realizing, like, why do we have dumb dishes? And then kind of looking at this timeline in a bird's-eye view and realizing that it's, like, kind of around the early '30s and '40s we had this scarcity that just completely took away the, the ability for family members to actually share recipes.

**Dalia:** Yeah. And bringing it back to our grandparents, that makes sense, 'cause we're of a similar generation. Yeah. And we were big on, like, Rice-A-Roni, Hamburger Helper- ... [00:07:00] all the convenience. If it had the word "cream of," then we probably- Yeah ... had it in our pantry. And now you're right, we're returning to actually, like, making things from scratch.

So what are a couple of the dishes... I'm f- I'm trying to think of what a dish from that time period would be

**Bobby:** Yeah, I mean, for me personally, it's like there's so many things that you and I would've also grown up with that, that have like these similar parallels. So for example, like, you know, I grew up with similar kind of like, uh, frozen microwave convenience meals and things like this, right?

And so we grew up with, you know, things like Chicken Kiev, you know, or, or even like Mrs. T's Pierogies- Yep ... was like a box that I always had in our house and stuff. I didn't know what a pierogi was, but it was something I was really connected to. And then as I was doing more research and like all these books behind me in my bookshelf, you know, like I came to realize like, oh my God, like all of these foods that I grew up with that I loved, like they actually had their, their start, their, their peak performance kind of during that mid-century period.

You [00:08:00] know, post-World War II when we had a lot of incredible immigrants that are coming into the country and bringing their culture with them and introducing it into maybe like the Midwest or other parts around the world or other parts around the country. And all of a sudden now it's like it's starting to travel because the roadways are opening up, convenience, you know, and all this stuff is happening, and we find things like pierogies, you know, which is not necessarily something that most people would think of as like a retro mid-century food.

But it's in my book because of two reasons. One, it actually has a huge significance along with some of the other dishes, like for that period of time. But two, you know, for me personally, this book is equal parts love letter to my

own childhood and my own upbringing in a, in a home that didn't know how to cook, and then at the same time embracing the history and showing people that it's just like these dishes are important even if you don't realize it.

**Dalia:** Where did you grow up?

**Bobby:** I grew up in Central Florida in Orlando. I grew up on a farm, you know, and so it's a very interesting, weird spot because I grew up like a mile from UCF, you know, the, the university. And it was [00:09:00] before there was ever a university there. It was just like this small little dirt road, and we had a horse farm.

And so my mom boarded horses. I, I, and as a kid, like I cleaned up around the farm and drove a tractor at like the age of 12 or something and like mowed a 12-acre property. I didn't have a lot of culinary exposure. You know? I was, I was in a pretty weird area. I, I didn't have a lot of friends. And so it's like the things that I knew were convenience foods, and my parents did not know how to cook.

So

**Dalia:** That's fair ...

**Bobby:** you know, I learned, I learned everything on my own later.

**Dalia:** Yeah. I, my parents cooked, but we've all evolved, even my- Yeah ... parents. Mm-hmm. Yeah, and do you live in Coconut Creek now?

**Bobby:** Yeah, yeah. So now I'm down in South Florida, and, and I, I love Coconut Creek because it's just so small. You make a left, you're in Boca Raton.

You make a right, you know, you're in Coral Springs. And it's Coconut Creek I feel like is like a two-mile long little bubble.

**Dalia:** What do you think is unique about Florida, and I know there are many parts of Florida, when it comes to [00:10:00] retro foods? Because you said you didn't grow up with pierogis, but I'm from Cleveland and- Oh, okay

I very much grew up with pierogis and like corned beef sandwiches 'cause we had like- Mm-hmm ... a big Polish community. We also had a big Puerto Rican community. So it's interesting because retro can change depending on your geography.

**Bobby:** Absolutely. You know, down here I consider like a Cuban sandwich in a way kind of like a retro thing because even though I was in Central Florida, like a Cuban sandwich or key lime pie, things like this, it, it's, it's the heritage food that like our families could tell us about.

You know, it's like we... I, I mean, honestly, at the end of the day it's like I think anybody, if you, if you were hearing about a dish that your parents or your grandparents ate, it's retro, you know? And, and that's all that really is the definition we need these days because, you know, pizza could be retro for the right person.

But I, I think Florida itself is just so fun because despite the fact that sometimes it can be a bit of a garbage fire, you know, it's like Florida does have this really strong grasp of like preserving the weird [00:11:00] Florida, which I love. You know, it's like we've got in s- far South Florida and far in like the, the Gulf Coast, you know, like so many weird heritage restaurants that have been around for 100 years or like Mai Kai, which is like my favorite place in, in Fort Lauderdale, which is kind of like a tiki place.

It's been around since the '60s, I think, you know? These places are so immersive, and they're so... They, they stick together, and they keep it because they understand that like the kitsch is what people want. And so I just, yeah, like the things like that I kind of associate with, but-

**Dalia:** Yeah Why do we want the kitsch?

**Bobby:** I think it always comes back, like I said, to nostalgia. The way that I at least like try to look at it is that it's like companies spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to figure out ways to make content and advertisements and products that we are not only like i- incentivized to purchase, but almost addicted to the idea of getting.

Like, you, you have a reward-based system with purchasing a lot of things. And I think that, like, Coca-Cola and, and, you know, like some other companies, like they just nailed it when they [00:12:00] understood that it's just like we can make something one time and share it over and over and over, and people will buy this product every single time when they see it.

And like, so I think of the M&M commercials where it's like the Santa Claus and it's like you- the two M&Ms and they, they see Santa and they're like, "He's real." And then Santa's like, "They're real." You know? It's something like that,

that is nostalgia and in some sense because that advertisement came out 20 years ago, I feel like, and it still is effective today.

And th- what I get at with this is that it's like we are drawn to kitsch. We are drawn to this weird kind of this familiar but strange thing th- because it's a feeling that you can't really quantify. If you can find a way to actually take this nostalgia and make it into something that is relatable and marketable People feel safe with it.

And I think the most important thing about nostalgia, especially right now, and probably why I got into it as well, like w- making this channel, is because I was motivated to do something different during the COVID lockdown, you know, in 2020, during one of the most difficult [00:13:00] period of times that I think most of us e- experienced, you know?

And now we're kind of going through a similar period of time where we're having a lot of either political unrest or, you know, economic instabilities and other things like this. And so right now, I think more than ever, nostalgia is in, and, you know, doesn't matter, really matter what you are nostalgic about.

When people see the book and they, they actually will get these little flicks of dopamine and memories that just kick in there, and it just, it makes you feel warm inside, and I think that's so important in an era where we are kind of constantly not feeling great.

**Dalia:** Yeah. No, I think that's such a great point, and the book is beautiful.

I mean, you've got the retro font. You've got, like, the sort of daffodil yellow aesthetic with... And you know what else? I'm looking at it now. Mm-hmm. Like, they didn't care what the food looked like. They weren't trying to pretty it up, church it up. It was just like- Mm ... here's some beef with the gravy running all over the plate with the mashed potatoes, like, thrown on there, [00:14:00] and that-

**Bobby:** Mess is best.

**Dalia:** Yes, and that looks so good. I think what you said was really important when you said, "We feel safe." Somebody asked me recently what my favorite food is, and I was like, "I don't know, maybe macaroni and cheese," which is such a basic answer. All day. But like, my mom has been making macaroni and cheese my entire life, and we've sort of evolved our recipe, but it is, it's pasta and cheese.

Like, what's not to love? Or I even think about, you know, like, the success of, say, Bruno Mars. He has a very retro vibe to his music and his look. Mm-hmm. But, like, we all, maybe not all, but a lot of us like it, you know what I mean? No,

**Bobby:** we all like that.

**Dalia:** It feels... Okay, fair. 10 out of 10 for Bruno Mars. Yeah.

**Bobby:** 10 out of 10.[00:15:00]

**Dalia:** Entertaining has changed. I mean, we talked about the food and how there have been phases where, like, salt was out, which is crazy. It's so great. Um, and we, we definitely season our food better today, but how else has entertaining changed over the years?

**Bobby:** Unless you were very wealthy, you know, like, entertaining itself was something that was kind of reserved for more, like, smaller occasions and stuff like this.

But in the mid-century period of time, around, like, the 50s, 60s, and then obviously onward, that's when entertaining became not only just kind of- More of an exciting thing, especially kind of in like a working class scenario. You always hear about, like, company dinners, and the boss might come home to dinner [00:16:00] tonight kind of thing.

And this is where, like, entertaining went from being this thing where it had to be a large banquet with dozens of people to you could entertain a smaller group of people, like let's say four or five. And just the mid-century period in particular was such a fun and interesting period of time to do these parties and th- this entertaining, because it was so over the top.

And it was one of those things where you could, you could get away knowing that your food wasn't very good, but it was really exciting. Most people don't look at the food and eat the food. They, they really eat the food. They just look at it. I think, like today, we're starting to kind of, like, wind ourselves back to this point where it's just like entertainment was a novelty that was really exciting and it was fun, and it's like you honestly could go into someone's home and not know what you were gonna get.

And so I think that th- this book is filled with so many different ideas of ways that you can actually, like, do something kitschy and fun for your friend's house

party or something like this that people will not stop talking about. And y- you may get invited back again, depending on the [00:17:00] dish that you're, you're sharing.

**Dalia:** That's hilarious. Yeah, that's a good point, and even the architecture of homes, kitchens used to be- Mm-hmm ... sort of in the back. I think about- Mm ... my grandfather's house, and the kitchen was, like, almost in the backyard. Mm-hmm. And so nowadays, the kitchen is front and center. Everyone's watching you make the dish.

You're chatting. You're not super dressed up. You're not wearing, like, heels and pearls. So what's an example of, of how we can-

**Bobby:** Speak for yourself.

**Dalia:** Okay, fine. You, you do you all day. I'm wearing my Free & Fair T-shirt. What's an example of how we can add that wow factor? I mean, one thing we do have now is social media, so we do wanna have a little bit of surprise and delight.

How can we do that today without serving, like, a Jell-O mold?

**Bobby:** I, I think at the end of the day, entertaining is something that really comes back to just one key element. And, and this is how I feel, honestly, about just food and everything else in general, is that, like, you know, I, I, I am not trying to write a book about recipes.

You know, my whole thing is, is [00:18:00] nostalgia and hospitality. I genuinely came up in a hospitality environment. When I moved to New York City from Orlando, you know, I, I had no real work experience, and I was thrown into a world of just people that were like-minded like me that wanted to take care of others.

And when you realize just how broad hospitality can stretch, it's not just making sure somebody has a, you know, a glass of water or something that's full. It's about giving everything of yourself- To the people that are around you and taking care of them, knowing that it's like, if I love this, I'm pretty certain they're gonna love this even if they don't like it.

I don't, I don't know if that makes as much sense as it sounds, but it's, it's, there's something about the idea of, of presenting yourself in a way that's vulnerable and open to the people that you are taking care of, that I think it just transcends

whatever, whatever you're doing. So it could be a kitschy party, it could be a really serious party.

It could be delicious food, or it could be, you know, Domino's. It doesn't matter. It, [00:19:00] hospitality, I think these days, is going to be kind of more important than it has been in a long, long time, especially in home settings. And I think that people are just now, with social media, having more fun opportunities and, and more creative ways to kind of get information quicker.

So, you know, like we have Pinterest for all these really silly ideas, now you have a book for it.

**Dalia:** Yeah. And that fits right in with your tagline, which is "vintage meals, modern values." So are there any staples of the retro kitchen that we should be stocking up on?

**Bobby:** I'm on a bread kick right now. You know, it's like I've been, I've been making a ton of Japanese milk bread, and it's, it...

I know, it, it, a little hyper fixation that I'm just, like, all in on. And so, like, I kinda think some of the staples that I've found myself reaching for that a lot of people don't normally have would be, like, some bread flour, cake flour. I think it's actually really great to have those options. Is it necessary?

No. You can get away with using all-purpose [00:20:00] flour for a lot of things, but i- like, if you wanna do it the right way, if you know, you know. I always have a little bit of the heavy cream in my fridge because, A, fat is flavor, and, and B, you know, like, if I run out of butter, I can, I can make it, you know, if I, if I'm in a pinch.

**Dalia:** It's funny, I do have heavy cream because my daughter requested it. She likes to zhooosh up her ramen. Mm. But it, but bread and heavy cream, I feel like for our adolescence, those were persona non grata, you know? Yeah. Fat was bad. Carbs were bad. I know. And now, now we're kinda bringing back the good parts of the past.

**Bobby:** I grew up with, uh, in a household that was filled with nothing but Diet Cokes and SnackWell cookies. Do you remember those?

**Dalia:** Oh, yeah. You know what? The green box. Those, those come up a lot on this podcast.

**Bobby:** No. No.

**Dalia:** Yeah, yeah. Okay, so for the kids listening, the SnackWell cookies were these, like, fat-free-but-loaded-with-sugar, tasted-like Styrofoam cookies.

Yeah.

**Bobby:** But they were filled with oils. It was [00:21:00] like... Well, it's like they were supposed to be fat-free, but they were just filled with all these other things that weren't necessar- like, they were just not good for you. They didn't taste great. And- Right ... but, but they were, like, oddly addictive.

**Dalia:** Yeah.

**Bobby:** Like, I couldn't stop eating them.

**Dalia:** You know why? Because they didn't have any fat. If they... One cookie with fat would probably satisfy you more than, like, a whole container- Yeah, I know ... of fat-free cookies. Okay, that is something from the past that has been left in the past, rightfully so. Is there anything else from that mid-century time period that you think, you know what?

They didn't really get it right. We do it better today.

**Bobby:** Oh, we do it better today. I'd have, I'd have to think on that a little more. There's definitely something I have in the book that I think absolutely should belong in the past, and, and I still put it in the book. But it's, it's a, it's a drink that, uh, s- like, I had dozens of people on social media send this to me, and I, and I refused to do this for about a year and then eventually gave in, and I was like, "Oh, this is too bad to not include", but it's called the Beef Fizz, [00:22:00] and it is an actual beverage that came out around the beginning, the genesis of kind of like that kind of like diet life.

And it was this thing where people were Basically taking ginger ale, mixing it with beef consomme, and, uh and it's just truly as horrible as it sounds. That's something I absolutely should stay in the past, but it's a really fun prank if you wanna do it to your friends, or, like, a double dog dare, so.

**Dalia:** Oh, if people could see my face right now.

Yes. Beef fizz. I'm, I'm swiping left on that. Oh my gosh. Yeah. But I'm swiping right on you and your book because- Thank you ... I'm so excited. You're

coming to St. Pete soon, and we're gonna get to chat it up even more at Tombolo Books. We love Tombolo. Is there anything else you wanna talk about today?

**Bobby:** I, I've had so many conversations with so many different people in such a short period of time, and it's funny 'cause I feel like, uh, I, I'm, I'm constantly juggling between the idea of saying the same thing over and over with this redundancy, and then at the same time trying to kind of keep, like, fresh, creative ideas.

I think some [00:23:00] of the questions you asked were just so fun and fresh, and it caught me off in a, in a way that made me think in a fun, creative way again. So I just really appreciate that. And, and honestly, you know, I'm, I'm just really excited. This is my first book. This is obviously my first book tour. And, you know, it's one of those things where I've, I've just been really excited about the idea of getting out there and actually finally meeting so many people that are gonna be, like, coming to these events, and just, I don't know, you know, getting to sh- shake some hands and, and just, you know, say hi to you in person, to other people in person.

And so I guess if there was anything I was gonna say, it's just s- simple gratitude. It's just, you know, I'm, I'm just very, very lucky and grateful to be in this position, and I'm just trying to kind of embrace every moment of that.

**Dalia:** Oh, I love it. Your COVID baby is out- ... walking around in the world. It was so much fun to talk to you.

I am looking forward to meeting you. Leave the beef fizz at home. But I will see you at Tombolo Books very soon. [00:24:00] That's Bobby Hicks, author of *Retro Recipes: Vintage Dishes with a Modern Twist*. Bobby and I will be in conversation at Tombolo Books in St. Petersburg on June 30th, and we would love for you to join us.

You can find a link to more information about that event in the show notes wherever you're listening to this episode or on our website, [thezestpodcast.com](http://thezestpodcast.com). That's also where you'll find a link for pink coconut layer cake. This is Bobby's very retro-looking recipe. So fun, so Florida. If you make it, save me a slice, won't you?

I'm Dalia Colon. I produce The Zest with Andrew Lucas and Alexandria Ebron. All right, we're getting back out of the kitchen. I already told you, but we may

be back with some more surprises this summer, so until then, hope you eat well.  
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