

Food

...For Here And There

anatomy of a foodie

BY
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Foodie: def'n: "A person with a discriminating palate and who is knowledgeable in fine food and drink. The word is a corruption of the French word gourmet, a valet in charge of the wines. It is often used as an adjective for meals of especially high quality, whose makers or preparers have used especial effort or art in presentation or cooking the meal, or for facilities equipped for preparing such meals, such as a restaurant. It should not be confused with gourmand, a person who eats and drinks in large quantities, even to excess." (from Wikipedia)

If you thought you recognized yourself in the above description, then congratulations...maybe. It seems that the word "Foodie" has some fairly negative connotations to it, mostly to do with the certain smugness or arrogance which is also associated with the mostly self-descriptive adjective. Heather Hutchison is a food lover, well known for her stylish dinner parties within her circle of friends, yet shuns away from the terminology. "It is a pretension to make one feel cool and important by implying you have more interest in and knowledge of food than others. In reality it is often about being able to say you have eaten in the latest restaurant. The people I know that actually do know about food, and its provenance, and being 'critical' (and to me that is in the classical sense of informed assessment faculties) to the discussion of food do not talk about themselves as 'foodies', they just enjoy it and learn through experience." Strong words. Why then is the terminology used so frequently and why now, after its start was in the early '80s?

Perhaps it is the proliferation of reality cooking shows, thanks to specialty cable television channels totally devoted to cooking (The Food Network), and many other mainstream channels who have created and held up the celebrity chef a la Jamie Oliver, Rachael Ray, Nigella Lawson, The

Barefoot Contessa...the list goes on. Lori Smith of Mississauga watches many different cooking shows, "Opening Soon, Ramsey's Kitchen, Chef at Home, Everyday Italian, Jamie Oliver... I watch them to learn about easy and tasty recipes." But not everyone is watching the shows for the recipes. So says Doreen Lett of Mississauga, "I watch the food network whenever I get a chance. My favourite is Ina Gartner's Barefoot Contessa because it's set in her house in the Hamptons and I love her kitchen. She's a very cool and laid back version of Martha Stewart. She's also a little plump and is unapologetic about cooking things that are 'hearty.' She always sets a lovely simple table and sometimes takes you shopping to these cool little local shops." The personality and the character of the chef is just as important as the food they are preparing. To take it one step further, how important is the actual preparing and tasting of food, to begin with, in the world of a "foodie"?

The cookbook used to be more of an instruction manual, probably first developed and distributed to help "new wives" in their introduction to this daily domestic chore. Just getting good food on the table was success enough. But through the years the cookbook has developed into an entire literary genre. At the time of press, there were 66,991 entries in the "cookbook" section on amazon.ca. Cookbooks are often bought "just to read"; a sort of culinary porn, if you will. Josey Vogels, sex columnist and host of "Messy Bedroom", falls into this category. "I drool over these things...love the recipes and just the way they're photographed...I don't even make the recipes half the time but I love to imagine making them...and think about what a sexy, beautiful perfect life I'd have if I just wined and dined like they suggest I do and make everything in my life look as luxurious as they do." Beyond the voyeuristic, however, many are plunging in for the real experience of trying out new foods,

and a whole industry has been borne in order to help teach non-foodies how to fake a little "foodiness", through gourmet cooking classes.

Nadine Hughes, owner of Oakville based The Cooks Companion, (www.thecookscompanion.ca) teaches classes on the art of throwing dinner parties, cocktail parties...well any kind of party, as well as "everyday" cooking for during the week. Nadine is enjoying the recent interest in putting together great meals, and feels that cooking classes such as hers are popular not only for the recipes and cooking instruction. "It's part entertainment value and part people wanting to learn the skills to cook more efficiently whether it be for their family or friends. Entertainment wise, it's fun to sit around with your friends, have a glass of wine, a good meal and also pick up a tip or two for cooking or entertaining."

In a world of fast food "Supersizing", hotdogs eaten in mini-vans on the way to hockey arenas, and even the \$44.00 hamburger served at in-for-the-moment restaurants, the interest in good food, prepared simply, (to quote the one woman who could be credited with starting it all; Martha Stewart) can only be "a good thing." One last bit of advice, direct from chef Teresa Albert-Ratchford, author of "Cook Once a Week and Eat Well Every Day", and host of The Food Network's new cooking show, "Just One Bite": "Serve your good wine first, turn the lights down low to hide the dust, and spend more time on the presentation of the food than the preparation itself, and you'll have thrown a successful dinner." Now that kind of foodie we can all relate to. ☐

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