

A full-page photograph of Antoni Porowski in his kitchen. He is wearing a white t-shirt and blue jeans, smiling as he cooks. He is using tongs to handle meatballs in a blue pan on the stove. The kitchen is filled with various cooking items, including pots, pans, and a sink with a faucet. A wooden cutting board is visible on the counter.

Antoni Porowski, a star of *Queer Eye* on Netflix, making spaghetti at his Brooklyn apartment/
Karsten Moran

FEATURE

QUEER EYE'S ANTONI POROWSKI CAN COOK

Get to know the food and wine expert from Netflix's hit series
by Bonnie Wertheim

Antoni Porowski never said he was a chef, but he definitely knows his way around a kitchen. As the resident food and wine guy on “Queer Eye,” which had its premiere on Netflix in February, he is responsible for imparting humble lessons in home cooking to men who are undergoing weeklong transformations. Mr. Porowski’s food demonstrations are just part of a series of self-improvement seminars the show’s subjects attend. They go shopping with Tan France. They get groomed by Jonathan Van Ness. They experience “culture” with Karamo Brown. And the show’s interior designer, Bobby Berk, makes their homes livable and often gorgeous.

But the cooking classes have brought out the worst in viewers, many of whom feel that Mr. Porowski’s dishes are overly simplistic. Their loud critiques have fueled what The New Yorker’s food correspondent Helen Rosner called a “culinary conspiracy theory.”

continued on next page

On a recent Wednesday afternoon, at his Brooklyn apartment, Mr. Porowski whipped up a minimalist spaghetti and meatballs that proved that sometimes simple is anything but simplistic.

The tomato sauce was an adaptation of Marcella Hazan’s recipe: San Marzano tomatoes; one onion, halved; and a stick of butter. Mr. Porowski threw in fresh basil and Parmesan rinds for an added kick.

“It’s such a beautiful thing that you don’t have to waste,” he said of the oft-discarded end of the cheese block.

While the sauce simmered, Mr. Porowski, wearing a thin white T-shirt and slim-fit jeans, prepared ground turkey meatballs with crushed fennel, chili flakes, honey and more cheese. Behind him, a bowl of fresh spaghetti sat below the mouth of an extruder. He would have to make more for a dinner party that night, where he was to feed his boyfriend, Joey Krietemeyer, and three of their close friends.

FROM KITCHEN TO SCREEN

On “Queer Eye,” a reprise of Bravo’s “Queer Eye for the Straight Guy,” which ran from 2003 to 2007, Mr. Porowski shares recipes that are useful for easy entertaining. He teaches Tom, who has been divorced three times and is trying to rekindle love with his most recent ex, how to make a creamy guacamole with Greek yogurt. He fries up grilled cheese for Neal ahead of a release party for his app. He shows Jeremy, a firefighter, how to dress up hot dogs to serve at a fire station fund-raiser.

Think pieces criticizing these “basic” recipes swiftly followed. Out magazine called Mr. Porowski’s use of Greek yogurt in guacamole “absolutely blasphemous.” Bowen Yang, a writer at Vulture, wrote that Mr. Porowski prepares “food a child would make when they’re old enough not to need a sitter. Any queer loves a grilled cheese, but it’s not a revelation to cut it into four triangular pieces.”

“It’s usually like, ‘I’m Antoni Porowski, 5’11¾.” Here’s Polish Terrorist No. 2,” he said. “And then you scream when you leave the room, and it’s done. And you never hear back.”

His luck changed at a book signing for Ted Allen, who was the original “Queer Eye” food and wine expert on the Bravo series. The two became fast friends, and Mr. Allen hired Mr. Porowski as a personal assistant and became his mentor. A little over a year later, when one of Mr. Porowski’s friends who works at Untitled Entertainment alerted him to the Netflix reboot, Mr. Allen was the first person Mr. Porowski called for advice.

“He’s like, ‘Antoni, do you really want to do this?’” Mr. Porowski recalled. “I was like, ‘I don’t know, but I think that I should try.’” Mr. Allen put in a call to the show’s co-creator David Collins, and after a grueling series of auditions and chemistry reads, Mr. Porowski was welcomed into the new Fab Five.

Though the show required him to relocate temporarily to Atlanta, Mr. Porowski lives with his boyfriend of seven years in Brooklyn. The walls of their Clinton Hill studio are covered with portraits of three patron saints of Americana: Bob Dylan, James Dean and Lana Del Rey. He and Mr. Krietemeyer, who works for the online marketplace 1stdibs, collect vintage modern furniture. Their first big purchase was a white marble Eero Saarinen tulip table, which is wedged between two birds of paradise and a banana tree.



WHO IS ANTONI?

Mr. Porowski also telegraphs his taste through novelty shirts, including concert tees from the National and the Strokes, and three Helvetica-ampersand T-shirts that list the names of the main characters in “A Little Life,” the relentlessly sad homosocial novel by Hanya Yanagihara, the editor of T: The New York Times Style Magazine. Talking about the book’s protagonist, whose dark history is revealed in doses, Mr. Porowski was reminded of one of his favorite figures in psychology, Viktor Frankl, who theorized that all people must have a “will to meaning,” or a motivating reason to live.

“With Jude, with all of his circumstances, I think he felt like he didn’t have a reason to continue living,” Mr. Porowski said of Ms. Yanagihara’s main character. “He really went through some really terrible stuff. And to have people like Willem and his friends just show up,” he said, fighting back tears, “just to choose to love him. I will forever be touched by anybody who has a choice to love someone, and they make a decision to.”

The story has particular resonance for Mr. Porowski, who describes himself as “very boundaried” but has been forced to contend with a spotlight on his sexuality since joining the cast.

“For the most part, it was never assumed that I was gay, and I’ve had people be sort of surprised that I was gay or act apologetic like they didn’t know, which would just make me really uncomfortable,” he said. “And I never had shame for it, but I never felt like introducing myself as, ‘I’m Antoni, I’m gay. How are you?’”

Mr. Porowski eschews labels generally and prefers to think of himself as a student, a human and, if he must, a self-taught home cook.

The pasta was good, by the way.

photos by Karsten Moran



“I NEVER
FELT LIKE
INTRODUCING
MYSELF AS,
‘I’M ANTONI,
I’M GAY. HOW
ARE YOU?’”