



In the Kitchen with Tina Nordström

How the small-town girl became one of Scandinavia's star chefs while remaining true to her roots.

BY TAYLOR HUGO

PHOTO BY RAPHAËL GAGLIANO / DOWNT BLINK

You could say Tina Nordström is

the Scandinavian counterpart of America's Martha Stewart. Between her restaurant appearances, cookbooks, television shows and kitchen products, there are few areas of the food industry the celebrity chef has left untouched. But despite her success today, there was a time Nordström wasn't sure a career in cooking was the path for her. Here's how a girl from a small town in southern Sweden came to be one of the country's most celebrated personalities

Destined to Cook

"I was probably made in the kitchen," Nordström says with a laugh, recalling her early introduction to cooking. Her parents owned and operated the restaurant Ramlösa Wårdshus in Helsingborg, Sweden, where Nordström was born and lived with her parents and grandparents. Though she wasn't old enough to work at the restaurant, she would come by every day after school, snagging bites of food from the chefs and getting help on her homework from the waitstaff. "It was kind of a huge family," she says. "I couldn't compare my life to my friends. They had parents who worked Monday through Friday. I had my parents around because we lived next to the restaurant."

Nordström's childhood was filled with family recipes, old-fashioned techniques and traditional ingredients, but even though she had a front-row seat to the inner workings of the business, she didn't see cooking as her lifelong career. "It was more like my everyday life," she says. "I didn't realize then that it was a gift to actually see everything in the kitchen. I saw everything and I tasted everything. But that it should be my work when I grew up ... I didn't know. It wasn't something I wanted, I guess."

That changed around age 15, when she needed to make a decision about her future. Her mandatory schooling would end at 16, after which she could attend upper secondary school to prepare for college or participate in vocational training. Admitting to

not being "brilliant in school" when it came to subjects like Swedish and English, Nordström opted for the latter and enrolled in a three-year cooking program.

Upon graduation, she took a job in the pastry section of a Denmark restaurant—a choice that would launch her career and offer her the opportunity to showcase her craft at renown eateries like Petri Pumpa in Sweden, Restaurant i Ålsgårdel in Denmark and The French Laundry in California over the years.

The Turning Point

Prior to 2000, Nordström was not yet a household name. She had been cooking in various restaurants around Scandinavia for the past decade when she was named one of eight finalists for Sweden's Chef of the Year Award, a prestigious honor a woman had not achieved in 12 years.

"I love to compete in everything," she says of the annual event, which was started in 1983 to draw awareness to the cooking profession, and today attracts more than 4,000 chefs, producers, politicians and spectators for the final held every December. "I don't know if I realized that I was the only woman at the time, but then it was a big issue. I was standing on the stage with all the men, and I loved it."

Though Nordström didn't win, "it was the beginning of everything—it was the springboard," she says. Shortly after the competition, she was contacted by television producers looking for a Swedish female chef to host her own



What to drink

In this light chicken dish, the beets' sweetness is very prominent, so choose a beverage with a touch of sweetness and acidity, such as a pale lager, or a slightly full-bodied white wine.

Lemon-Roasted Chicken Hindquarters with Spinach and Beet Salad

Serves 4

4 chicken hindquarters, skin on

Spinach and beet salad:

2 large beets, cooked
1 bag (approx. 2½ oz./70 g) ready-to-use spinach leaves
2 salad onions
2–3 Tbsp. fresh horseradish, grated
1 Tbsp. olive oil
Salt
Black pepper, freshly ground

Marinade:

3 Tbsp. olive oil
3 Tbsp. lemon juice, freshly squeezed
3 Tbsp. mirin
Salt
White pepper, freshly ground

1. Preheat the oven to 350°F.
2. Mix all ingredients together for the marinade.
3. Place the chicken pieces in an ovenproof dish and pour the marinade over them. Set the dish in the oven and let the chicken bake for 40 minutes. About 3 to 5 minutes before time is up, turn on the oven's broiler to let the skin crisp.
4. Peel and slice the beets thinly with a kitchen mandolin. Put the slices in a bowl along with the spinach. Slice the salad onions thinly and add to the beets. Season with grated horseradish, olive oil, salt, and freshly ground black pepper.
5. Serve chicken warm with the salad.

Vanilla Ice Cream Bars with Almond Crumble and Caramel Sauce

Serves 4–6

1 ¼ lb. chocolate chip cookies
5 ¼ oz. almond flour
4 ½ oz. butter, melted
2 pinches sea salt
4 cups vanilla ice cream
1 ¾ cups (1 jar caramel sauce)
dulce de leche

1. Line an 11¾ x 7-inch baking pan with parchment paper.
2. Crumble the cookies and, using your fingertips, combine them with almond flour, melted butter, and salt until the mix looks like crumbs. Press half of the crumbs into the bottom of the pan and place the pan in the freezer for 15 minutes.
3. Remove the pan from the freezer and spread the ice cream over the crumb base. Smooth out the surface with a palette knife or a spatula. Place the pan in the freezer for at least 30 to 45 minutes to give the ice cream enough time to set.
4. In a saucepan, carefully heat the caramel sauce until it is soft enough to pour. Remove the baking pan from the freezer, and drizzle the caramel sauce over the ice cream.
5. Cover the ice cream and caramel sauce with the remaining crumbs, and put the pan back in the freezer for at least another 3 hours.
6. Cut the ice cream into bars, and maybe wrap them in nice parchment paper before serving. Of course, the bars will be just as lovely if served simply on dessert plates.



For another great recipe
from Tina Nordström, check out
sonsofnorway.com/blog
on March 1.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLIE DIEVSTA

show. “They wanted a girl from the middle part of Sweden who had a more proper Swedish accent,” she recalls. “I’m from the south part of Sweden, and our accent is kind of rough. I told them I could change my accent if they gave me the job.”

Producers must have recognized a spark in Nordström that would attract viewers, because it wasn’t long before the chef had her own TV show, “Mat med Tina Nordström” (“Food with Tina Nordström”). In season one, which debuted in 2001, 17 percent of the Swedish population tuned in to watch.

“I remember they told me, ‘Enjoy the time when we record this, because when it’s on the air, you won’t be able to go through restaurants and eat on your own.’ I didn’t believe them,” Nordström remembers. “Well, they were right. I loved to go to different restaurants, and I didn’t care about sitting there on my own. But when the show came out, everyone wanted to say hi and talk to me. I was recognized every time I went out.”

Celebrity Chef

Thanks to her bubbly personality and approachability to her recipes, audiences fell in love with Nordström and her cooking philosophy that favors fun over formality. “I want you to relax in the kitchen,” she says. “There are no dos and don’ts. There’s just happiness. I always say, put on some good music, and it’s alright to make mistakes and then do it better.”

After the success of “Food with Tina Nordström,” Nordström went on to host shows such as “Hela Sverige Bakar” (similar to the popular “Great British Baking Show”), “New Scandinavian Cooking” and “MasterChef Junior”; compete on the Swedish celebrity dancing competition “Let’s Dance”; produce

her own wine label; and publish myriad cookbooks, including “A Culinary Tour of Sweden,” “Tina Nordström’s Scandinavian Cooking” and “Weekend Cooking” (see the recipes on pages 15 and 16). Even with her busy schedule, she still cooks at home every day for her husband, Martin Holmqvist, and their two children, Elise and Albin.

Through each new endeavor is the belief that everyone can and should know how to cook. “I try to teach people how to think,” she says. “I’m not the one to point my finger and say, ‘This is the way you have to do this.’ No. I want them to find the solution on their own. And I’m around the corner saying, ‘Good work.’ I push them in the right direction. The best compliment I can get is when people say, ‘I did it on my own.’”

Next for Nordström is a kitchen space where people can host cooking events, and she can entertain the brands and companies she works with. “I don’t like when it’s too much,” she says of the intimate venue that will hold up to 30 people. “I want to put my hands and arms around everyone and say, ‘You are so welcome to my place.’” ♡



**“Tina Nordström’s
Weekend Cooking”**
is available at
skyhorsepublishing.com.