



THE
GOOD STUFF COOKBOOK

burgers, fries, shakes, wedges, and more

SPIKE MENDELSON

with Micheline Mendelsohn





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The Good Stuff Cookbook

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with Micheline
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To the dynamic duo, mom and dad, who make it all
possible. XO

Acknowledgements



Life has a funny way of repeating itself.

When I think back to some of the experiences I've had, the people I met along the way, the ups and downs of the constantly changing restaurant world, I realize you can't ever settle or relax. Everything is always in motion—I have a lifetime ahead of me of line cooks not showing up, the paper goods order not coming in, the vegetable delivery missing crates, and the revolving door of staff—there are still a lot of memories waiting to be made.

One thing that has never changed for me is that this business, the restaurant business, is the epitome of family.

Family that grows up together, lives together, goes through ups and downs together, day in and day out. A restaurant

family. It's a somewhat indescribable relationship if you've never lived it, but basically, you wake up at 6 a.m. to check in the inventory with a guy, and then bust your ass during a busy lunch and an even crazier dinner rush. You get out from cleaning around midnight and then turn to that same guy and say, "Hey man, let's go for a beer."

My parents started opening restaurants with their cousins in Montreal in 1989. After their first, they went on to open 32 restaurants across the country. They retired in 2001 and then came out of retirement to open Good Stuff Eatery in 2008 with some of those very same cousins. And like most ethnic families, our most recent project began with one telephone call that went through Greece, Florida, New York, Montreal, and Washington, D.C., faster than a car at the Indianapolis 500.

My sister, who had been living in D.C. for five years, walked past one of her neighborhood shops to find it had moved and the space was up for rent. Right then, she called my parents, who were in Greece, and convinced them to get off the beach and start calling the landlord. If you've ever been to Greece you know that this is an insane request, but my parents, being a little nuts themselves, started calling for the spot. So of course, we had to call Montreal to get some help; my mother's cousins Suzie Colivas and Peter Polatos were called simultaneously. This set in motion the big question, What type of restaurant do we open? After we settled that, I got a call about menu planning. I told Mike Colletti, my partner in crime at Mai House in NYC, that we needed help with a burger menu. The final piece was convincing my longtime friend Nic Georgeades to move from Florida to D.C. to launch the restaurant.

Dad—thanks for always throwing me out of the office.

We all lived on twin beds and couches at my parent's house for the first six weeks. No joke. During that time, I had also convinced Brian Lacayo of New York City to move to D.C. My mother was cooking for all of us, but then again, it never really mattered how many people were at my mom's house; she always cooked for an army. And this is how we came to launch Good Stuff Eatery.

So there's no particular order these thanks are in—it's the existence of these people, this family, that has come together to push me, to keep me grounded, to allow me all the opportunities that I hope continue to come my way, that I can't thank enough.

Mike Colletti, for sharing the same vision on what this business is all about and making that commitment to move to D.C. and begin the restaurant group with us because, in case you didn't realize it, you signed up for life. Also, for your dedication, opinions, and support in helping me test out all these recipes!

Nic Georgeades, for helping me peel 100 pounds of shrimp back in the day at Pepin's and for helping me peel 100 pounds of potatoes now at Good Stuff. We've both had ups and downs but it's nice to see you when I walk into the store, even if you're slacking out back on the phone.

Brian Lacayo, for saving me from all the line cooks who wanted to kick my ass! You're a pro on the grill, on the floor, in the office, and it's awesome to have you as part of the team.

Jon Malysiak, my literary agent, for seeing me on the show and getting on a plane from Chicago to D.C. to convince us this was possible. We made it! Your guidance along the way was invaluable, and you've been phenomenal to work with.

Alexandra Greeley, I still apologize for being an hour late to our interview (I would not recommend this with a food writer), but thanks for waiting and in the meantime talking with my sister, who asked you to help in the editing process. Your recommendations and editing skills were a welcome relief and absolutely necessary to finish on deadline!

Justin Schwartz and the whole team at Wiley, for believing in me and the Good Stuff philosophy and working to make this book happen. I'm so grateful for all the hours you've put in!



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Vince McCoullough, our architect, contractor, assistant designer, consultant, shrink, taster... who invested his heart in us.

Richard Patterson, our dear friend who showed a rare intuition and the confidence in us when we needed it.

Joe Shymanski, because what started out as a meeting at Eastern Market on Capitol Hill in Washington between my sister and this incredibly talented photographer has turned into the position I've dubbed "family photographer for life." From shooting pre-construction to me in NYC, to opening night and many more events, you are truly amazing, and I'm glad you came on for this project.

To my entire family for their help and support—I'm Greek so I have about 65 cousins; couldn't include everyone but here are a few of the key players along the way...

Suzie Colivas, for getting it all started and making sure we chose the tomato red instead of the plum red color for the awning and mushroom beige instead of smoky beige for the wall paint. For sacrificing your time, interrupting your life, and for the laughs we shared to make this all possible.

Peter Polatos, our partner and cousin, for believing in the concept and our abilities to make it work and grow the vision. I hope Andrew and Michael enjoy it as much as I do and we can eventually pull them in to make fourth generation restaurateurs. Pete—I promise I'll get around to naming a burger after you!

Alyssa Shelasky, for not putting me in the bachelor issue! Most importantly, for taking my ups and downs, accepting me for who I am, and making me a better man... I love you, Lys.

Auntie Dorothy, for showing us that your zest for life should never end, who told my dad when he sold his restaurant at 60 years old that he needed to find a job right away to keep busy and make a living. You are really Good Stuff!

Zas, my grandmother and the matriarch of the family. For teaching us what staying together and looking out for each

other really means. For doing everything with such grace and a smile and always being excited to hear from me.

"On a personal note to my brother Spike, I want to thank you for devoting yourself and your talents to Good Stuff and making the dream way more than a restaurant. Your moving to D.C. from NYC completed the family circle, and being able to spend most of our days together is really the best stuff."

—*Micheline*

To our Papou. My mother once wrote me that "A legacy means that you mattered, that you are remembered, that your warmth and love like an heirloom have been passed on. It will tell the future generation of our family what defines them!" I can honestly say that not a day goes by that I don't remember my grandfather's warmth and love towards life. Good Stuff to my grandfather was not a restaurant or a cookbook; it was a way of life, and I can only hope that one day my sister and I can pass on the Good Stuff family legacy on to our children and the people we meet along life's journey.

Mom, without you I wouldn't even know what the word *family* means. Thanks for always pulling us together, especially now, for this restaurant group and coming out of retirement to give Mich and me a way to make a living for us and our families. And for allowing me to pursue a path alongside that of the restaurant and believing in my skills—and just for being my biggest fan. I hope I made it as your good Greek son who still wants his bar mitzvah money back.

Dad, thanks for always throwing me out of the office! Every time you came upstairs, it seemed like there was always something: The busboy didn't clean the table, the trash was

too full, the line needed someone else... but all of those were lessons in being a restaurant owner—you thought I wasn't paying attention but I was. And thanks for the money talks, the lease talks, for all the business sense you took time to teach me. Most of all for being a loving father and such a loving husband. Don't forget, I'm the number one world's best GM.

Cliff, my brother-in-law, for his constant support and help, and for making my sister so happy. Most of all for jumping on the line those first few weeks when the insanity began! We've sucked you into the restaurant and I am so happy you're along for this ride.

Mich, my sister, my confidante, my partner in crime. To say "I could never have done this book without you" is like calling the sky blue. As everybody knows, I've never been able to do anything meaningful without my sister. Looking back at pictures from our childhood lemonade stands, I drift back in time, with me rocking the boom box and you rocking all the important stuff. Even then, you held my hand, you had my back, you let me be me. You've been the single most loyal and loving person in my life, whether I was a confused teenager or *Top Chef* wannabe (and *yes*, you get full credit for getting me on the show). I mean, you even found the location for Good Stuff Eatery! You've made so many of my dreams come true. Thank you, Michy. And now you're a mother and me, an uncle. So, on this book, our latest bro/sis collaboration, I swear to give your daughter all the unconditional love, support, patience, protection, comfort, and encouragement you've given me. Not to mention, she's also getting my Greek name. Calm down, people, she won't be called Spike, it's Evangelina, as in Evangelos. The fact that it's a middle name and she's really named after our mother, Catherine, is beside the point. One last thing, since I'm predictably past deadline—and

inevitably driving my beloved big sister up the wall... just remember... love ya.

To the casting crew at Magical Elves and Bravo who put me in the fourth season of *Top Chef: Chicago*, one of the most exhausting, grueling, and best experiences I've ever had. Particularly to Andy Cohen and Victoria (Tory) Brody and their team, who continue to support me along the way and have become part of the family.

A cookbook can't be written without giving thanks to the training in the kitchen, on the floor, and during those late night drinks when you're exhausted from service. To the greats who have helped me along the way:

Drew Nieporent and Myriad Restaurant Group; Michael Huynh of Mai House; Gérard Boyer and Les Crayères; Thomas Keller and Bouchon; the Maccioni family of Le Cirque.

Art Smith, whose success and accomplishments in the kitchen and constant generosity towards humanity are inspiring for any young chef. His warm personality is infectious and he's become family.

José Andrés, who gave me the best opening night gift for Good Stuff Eatery. Chef came in and took the time to see what we were doing and gave advice on how we could make our restaurant better for our staff and our customers—we loved it. Learning from a master is the best way. I hope that as my family opens more places, he'll continue to do that.

Thank you.



Gooooood Stuuuufff!



So, in order to enjoy my guilty indulgence and make everyone enjoy theirs, my family and I opened Good Stuff Eatery, a restaurant that focuses on farm-fresh ingredients right from the farm to your table.

How do I make this more challenging? Go into business with my parents, make my sister quit her job to do public relations, move my three closest friends to D.C., smuggle a cousin from Canada, and install a restaurant in what used to be a paper store and a bank.

But Good Stuff isn't just a burger place, it's a lifestyle, and the menu reflects that. We've thought out every single thing. We turn our own custard to make our hand-spun milkshakes; we researched many meat blends and picked the best; we use a potato for fries that no other restaurant

uses but can be found at your grocery store. None of this is just to be different, it's simply to be delicious.

What is close to us, as you will see, is our menu and this cookbook, which reflect our families' and friends' experiences and favorite memories. What I mean is that everything on the menu has meaning to us.

The name, Good Stuff Eatery, comes from my grandfather, Sunny Nakis. Whenever he enjoyed something in life he always gave a fist pump in the air (like those hockey players he grew up with) and said "Gooooood, Stuuuuuff!"

"Everything has a meaning to us."

What makes this restaurant unique is the constant striving for perfection for the good stuff. Not a day goes by that my mother doesn't tell me the fries are salted too much, or that they are not hot enough. Not a day goes by that Mike doesn't taste the custard to make sure its consistency and flavor is spot-on. Not a day goes by that Nic isn't reworking operations of the restaurant for better service. Not a day goes by that Brian isn't calling a supplier because he thinks the product can be better or that my father isn't running around making sure he's keeping us all on our toes. What I'm saying is if a family shows this much love to a hamburger, you're going to have a great time.

I'm going to bring in a little ego here for a sec: I trained in France, Vietnam, worked at some of the best places in the world, with some of the greats—Keller, Huynh, Nieporent, Maccioni, Boyer. Why a hamburger joint?

Because this style of restaurant embodies my philosophy: Give people simple, delicious, fresh American comfort food using local, fresh, farm-grown ingredients. We take

old favorites and make them new, different, and hip, giving them the "good stuff twist."

You know, "Good Stuff" is more than a descriptive title. It's a declaration, an inspiration, and a rallying cry. Because Good Stuff Eatery isn't just another burger joint. We're on a mission to bring together good food, good times, good people, and good-ness in a place where good stuff means more than just better-than-average food. We believe that good stuff should be a way of life. Eat up!

After three generations making food our life's work and passion, we offer Americans their favorite foods made with delicious farm-fresh ingredients, respecting our environment and sourcing our products from our local farming community.



These recipes won't take you all day to create. In fact, I hope you will prepare these delicious meals with family and friends, making your own very special memories.

So turn on the Beatles, throw on some cheeseburgers, and top them with some ruby red tomatoes and a lovin' spoonful of Good Stuff Sauce. Make a batch of Sunny's Fries and Sriracha Mayo for dipping, spin some Toasted Marshmallow

Milkshakes, and bring out the brownies you made on Sunday.

Now you just made the Good Stuff!

Introduction



If you just bought this book, consider yourself privileged to have come upon it, because you have now become part of the inner circle I call the Good Stuffers. Together, we are the voice of reason when it comes to the infamous hamburger, hand-spun shakes, and fries. You are now part of the movement that loves good food, good times, and good people.

My family, friends, and I have a mutual love we share with the rest of the world when it comes to comfort foods. When we first started conceptualizing Good Stuff Eatery in Washington, D.C., we all agreed that if we were going to take on America's favorite comfort foods, we would have no choice but to take them to the next level. After countless hours of cooking and tasting burgers, fries, wedge salads, shakes, and more, we finally had our epiphany: The secret to good food is a lot of things, but most importantly it is the people you choose to share it with. So make sure you are in Good Stuff Company!

The second best secret is your grocery list. Always shop for the freshest and in-season ingredients. When it comes to

your meat blend, develop a good relationship with your local butcher. This way, you can specify exactly what you would like, and he can have it ground freshly for you. If you're lucky, he might even have a couple tips for you—after all, he is a butcher! After you get your meat, the next thing you need to figure out is how you're going to cook it. Most people fire up the grill in the backyard, and I'm all for that method; there is nothing better than cooking outside. I also love the char-grilled flavor that develops when grilling, so don't forget your charcoal and grilling tools, and maybe a cute apron if you're into that kind of thing. I know my father is! At Good Stuff Eatery, we use a flat top grill because we love the way it sears the hamburger, developing great flavor and texture. Instead of all the juices dripping and marinating the charcoal, they marinate the burger. You can achieve this by pan-searing in a sauté pan or skillet in your kitchen or buying a plancha to put on your grill. Both techniques are great. Just make sure you have fun. One thing I do not recommend is poaching your burger.

In addition to love, blend of meat, and cooking technique, there are a few more things that distinguish my burgers from everyday burgers. I do whatever it takes to infuse maximum flavor into each of the components that make my hamburgers what they are—I use good sauces and toppings, cooking techniques, and seasoning. When you use this book, you will see that I pride myself on flavorful and balanced sauces, and tasty and textured toppings like our Colletti Smokehouse—the spicy, sweet, sour BBQ sauce with fried Vidalia onion rings that give it a great crunch. It wins them over every time! As far as technique goes, I love searing my burgers (which tightens up the meat), so make sure you rest the hamburger before assembling. This way, the juices redistribute through the burger, leaving you with a perfectly cooked juicy burger. Working on your

temperature also comes with experience. I personally like medium rare.

Let's not forget about seasoning. This skill also comes with experience, but don't be afraid of the S/P. That's what I call salt and pepper. Use it. It makes a world of difference, and I promise you by the end of this book, you will be a pro!

The only thing that can make a burger better at this point is what you serve it with. I'm talking about the side dishes, fries, and milkshakes. There are a million sides out there, so I won't get into that right now. At Good Stuff Eatery, we are as equally proud of our shakes and fries as we are of our burgers. We make fresh custard every day, and that is what we make our shakes with. Throw some creative flavorings and toppings in the mix, and you have the best shakes in the world.

Okay, so how do you make custard at home? Well, that's simple... you don't. Ice cream will work great too, but if you look hard enough at the grocery store, you will probably find frozen custard. I like it because it's thicker and creamier. And make sure you have a blender on hand, because you do not want to be whisking away on a Sunday afternoon.

This leads us to french fries. Now, it would be too easy if I told you what type of potato I use (and my mother would kill me), so here is some good direction. Who says you have to use an Idaho potato to make the best french fry? Who says you have to leave the peel on or not? My advice is, go to the store and buy a variety—red, yellow, and even purple potatoes—and just have fun. I will say, though, that aging your potatoes is a good trick. (Yes, I said aging your potatoes!) This means storing your potatoes for up to six months in a temperature-controlled cool environment. Aging allows the starches to convert into sugars, giving you a