

ANTHONY BOURDAIN 2.0: A LEAN, MEAN, GLUTEN-FREE FIGHTIN' MACHINE

IT'S 85 DEGREES, midday on the island of Grand Cayman, and Anthony Bourdain is dressed in his usual garb — flip flops, a pair of well-worn jeans, linen shirt. But

something is missing — like, 30 pounds. At 6-foot-4 inches, Bourdain has never been a waif, but his sudden weight loss on an already lanky frame is startling.

"I'm not eating carbs or sugar," he later confesses to the crowd at the Cayman Cookout

— the only food festival to which he is attached. It's a three-day party headlined by his good friend and partner-in-crime, Le Bernadin chef Eric Ripert, who first organized the Cookout five years ago as a way to promote the island and his restaurant Blue at The Ritz-Carlton.

There's a rumor flying around the fest that Bourdain has also given up alcohol, and is only drinking and eating carbs and sugar when on-camera for his CNN travel show, "Parts Unknown." But when I placed a cold rum punch in front of him on the last day of the festival, after spending no less than 30 minutes striking repeated smiles with hundreds of Cayman Cookout VIPs, you're damn right he accepted it — graciously.

Bourdain says the strict and so-unlike-Bourdain diet is mainly to improve his training in jiu-jitsu, his latest self-confessed addiction. Recently on Instagram, Bourdain posted a photo of himself outside of a training facility that had yet to open. "Used to hang around cold stairwells first thing in the morning waiting for dope. Now I hang around cold stairwells waiting for jiu-jitsu," he wrote.

He was introduced to the sport through his wife, Ottavia, a professional jiu-jitsu fighter. Thanks to daily training sessions, at 58 years old Bourdain may be in the best physical shape of his life. And with a CNN Films bio-doc in the works, a street-food hall named Bourdain Market set to open in New York City this year, and more daring and further reaching episodes of "Parts Unknown, on the schedule, Bourdain is going to need his stamina.

ATW: You have a pretty strong no bullshit reputation in this industry. Is that something you've always had or acquired over the years?

ANTHONY BOURDAIN: Everything important I learned in life, I learned as a dishwasher. I spent 30 years in a business where there is no lying allowed. If you lie in your abilities as a cook, you will be revealed instantly. Bullshit is

fun. I enjoy it as an art form, but as grounds for any kind of lasting relationship or even informal agreement? I'm pretty merciless.

ATW: At this point in the game, what are you still getting from travel?

AB: Confusion. I'm constantly confronted with my own ignorance. The world gets bigger and bigger the more I travel, and the less and less I know, it seems. The more tolerant I am, or maybe the more expandable my belief system becomes, as well as my understanding as how quickly things can go bad and how randomly things can just go terribly wrong.

ATW: Speaking of things going wrong, what the hell happened when you visited Romania? It was one of your funniest episodes of "No Reservations," but also seemed like one of the most painful to shoot.

AB: It was just a show when everything went wrong. We made some fundamental mistakes, like using a not particularly dependable Russian as a fixer in Romania where they are not fond of being called "comrade" by a drunken Russian. The government and our contacts on the ground were obtrusive in their desire to make things look good for us, which means they tried to alter reality for us constantly to fit their narrative, which only made things hilariously awful. It's not the show I wanted to make, but we got a lot of footage and the edited stuff was pretty goddamn funny. The fact is, despite having the correct permits, we'd arrive on location and someone would be asking us for a bribe, and we'd film that. We'd show up at the local butcher and somebody had stepped in and moved them to a more "suitable" location. We weren't allowed to shoot ordinary things in Romania like Roma people or street food or

what it really looked like because they were constantly stepping in and threatening us with lack of pulling out cooperation if we showed those things. So, it became an unintentionally hilarious goat rodeo.

ATW: The closing of that show showed you having a pretty soaked night. What other memorable drinking experiences have you had while filming?

AB: You know, I hear memorable drinking experience, I think already something bad happened. Positive drink experiences, they're not the first things that come to mind. OK, memorable experience, it's germane to where we are (in Grand Cayman). We went to Haiti in 2010 to shoot, and I'm staying at Hotel Oloffson, which is this crumbling, sort-of-gingerbread, fantastic, ramshackle, super-eccentric, "Addams Family" hotel. It was the middle of a thunderstorm, in fact, they say a hurricane is coming and the whole island is hunkering down for it. I hear this roaring belly laugh from downstairs and I go, "I know that laugh." I go downstairs and it's José Andrés, entertaining the foreign correspondents/disaster journalists who were there for the oncoming hurricane. So we've got a hurricane going on around us, and there's José and he's having the poor waiters make Dark and Stormys and rum sours for everyone. We drank a lot.

ATW: What did José say when you came downstairs and he saw you?

AB: He said something like, "Of course you'd be here, motherf*@ker. Of course it would be you."

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