

Erin French, Chef and Owner of The Lost Kitchen, Shares How Martha Inspires Her

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The owner and chef of the popular restaurant grew up clipping recipes from *Martha Stewart Living*, years later she became FaceTime friends with Martha.



By [Bridget Shirvell](#) July 30, 2021



Credit: Con Poulos

Stepping into The Lost Kitchen in Freedom, Maine, feels a bit like walking into your best friend's living room. Wild, dramatic flower arrangements catch the eye, beckoning you in and setting the tone for the entire evening. They're a nod to Martha. "Filling the space with flowers, the fact that the restaurant doesn't feel like a restaurant when you walk into it, that inspiration came from Martha," says owner and chef Erin French. "She wasn't a professional chef. She was a home cook, having people at her home and that's the way I want people to feel when they come into my restaurant."

We've been enamored by French, her story and her gift for entertaining, for quite some time now. A self-taught chef, French would have been a doctor in another life, but after her son was born, she began a catering business, eventually turning it into a supper club called The Lost Kitchen and then a restaurant. After losing everything in a 2013 divorce, French moved home to Freedom, Maine, where her parents lived, eventually reviving The Lost Kitchen in a former grist mill.

Like all great hosts, French is a storyteller, and at the intimate 40-seat restaurant, she shares the story of Maine and its people, showcasing produce, meat, and seafood from the state's farmers and producers. The incredibly popular restaurant has resulted in a show by the same name from Magnolia Network, a cookbook (\$22.80, amazon.com), and French's recently released memoir, *Finding Freedom* (\$14.93, amazon.com). But before she was Erin French the chef, French was a young girl growing up in Maine, pouring over *Martha Stewart's Hors d'Oeuvres Handbook* (\$3.99, amazon.com), the first cookbook she ever got, and collecting *Martha Stewart Living* magazines, pulling out the perforated recipes and trying them out with the ingredients she found in her mom's garden.

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"Martha was one of my biggest role models," French said. "She taught me a lot about so much more than cooking, but also entertaining and how to be a hostess, how to set a table, how to arrange flowers, and that caring for people is so much more than just making a delicious dinner," French says. To this day, French says she continues to be inspired by Martha's sense of style, her color palettes, and the way she thinks about caring for people. "Whenever I have any jadeite that's all Martha," says French.

Over the years, French has gotten to know Martha, planning a special lunch for her and some staff at the restaurant several years ago, featuring duck confit, heirloom tomatoes, oysters, and more. Still, even these days, French is surprised that a young girl who grew up in Maine turned into a world-famous chef and gets to talk to one of her idols.

"She would FaceTime me and sometimes I would think she was butt dialing me but then I would answer and realized she wasn't," French says. "You wouldn't imagine these things were happening. Someone you looked up to when you were 12, 13, and 14 and is just this goddess in the world is all of a sudden inspired by what you're doing."