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Essential Viewing: Toques In Black, The Kitchen Sessions

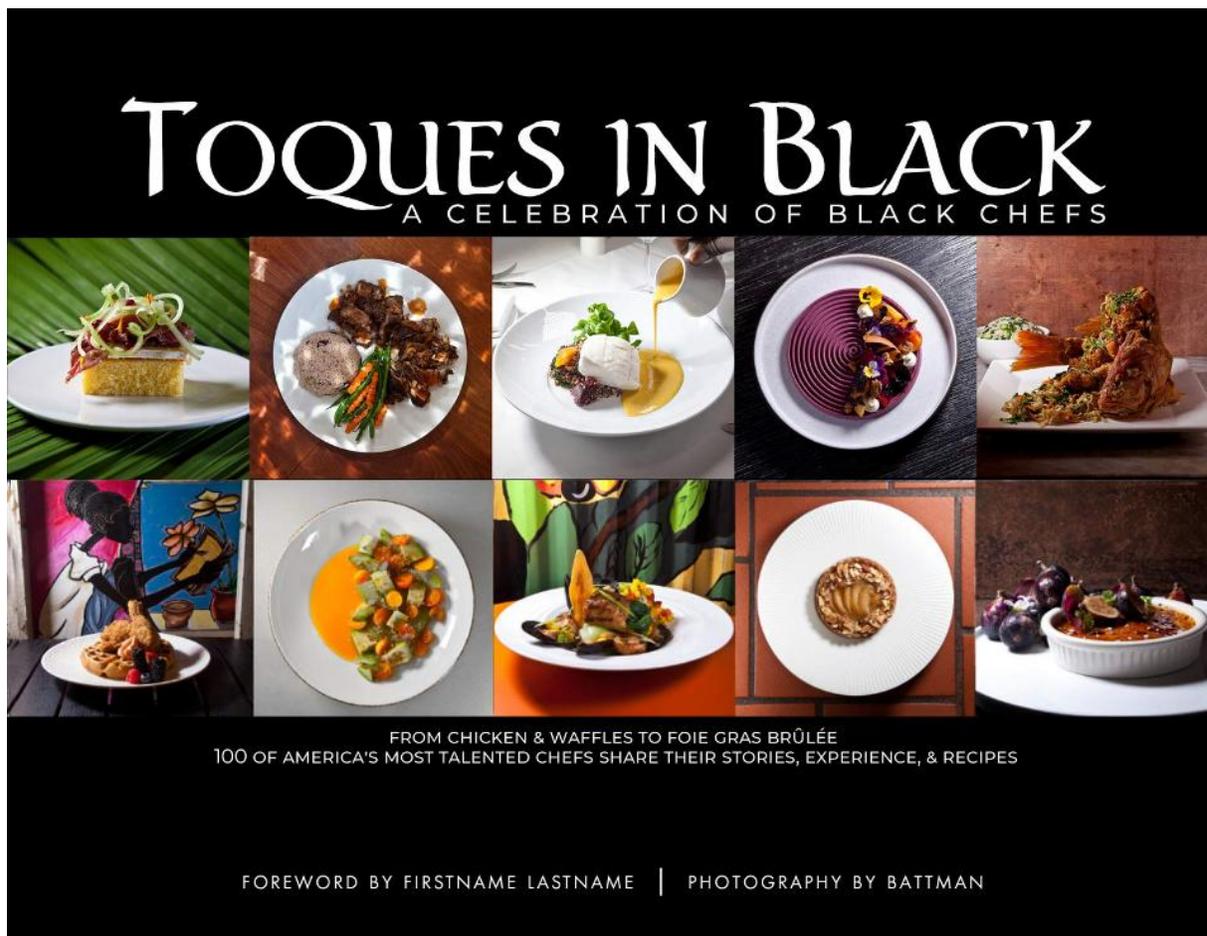


Leslie Kelly Contributor

Dining

I write about food and travel while roaming around the U.S. in my RV

These entertaining online classes were cooked up after the pandemic brought in-person book promotions to a screeching halt. Chefs featured in *Toques In Black, A Celebration of Black Chefs* bring sassy star power and incredible knowledge to hour-long celebrations of food. Here's why you really need to watch.



Toques In Black inspired a series of online cooking classes, starting the chefs featured in the ... [+]

TOQUES IN BLACK

Inspiring stories

The book project driven by New York City-based photographer [Alan Battman](#) started with an exercise in networking. When the word got around the culinary community, more than 100 chefs got on board with the mission of sharing stories of how they found their way to the professional kitchen.

Many of the heartfelt introductions to personalities working in various roles across the country begin with shout-outs to mothers, grandmother, aunties and other family members for sharing their secret ingredients and instilling the importance of collaborating over the stove and gathering around the table.



Chef Greg Collier from Charlotte, N.C., recently gave a grits workshop on Toques in Black's Kitchen ...

[+] THE CHEF'S COLLECTIVE

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Toques in Black: Kitchen Session - Greg Collier's Grits Workshop

Greg Collier, who owns an all-day breakfast cafe called [The Yolk](#) in Charlotte, N.C., said some of his first memories are of cooking beside his grandmother, making butter rolls. “She never revealed her recipe to me, but she left me with so much more: A desire to make people happy with good food,” said the native Memphian, who operates the restaurant with his wife, Subrina.

The eclectic collection of recipes showcases regional cuisines with roots in the African diaspora from fine dining to down-home food trucks. Mouthwatering preparations wander all over the map. Think cornbread topped with delicate slices of duck ham, cashew creme over pink beet pasta, spring pea mint and white chocolate tart with lavender gelato.

For the showcased chefs in Toques in Black, some paths to the kitchen were straightforward, while others turned out to be tasty twists of fate. Get ready for some real talk about making the radical pivot from dabbling in illegal activities as a kid to being energized by cooking and the high-energy culture of the kitchen.

Thumbing through this beautifully photographed book, it becomes clear creativity extends far beyond the kitchen. [Jackie Gordon](#) is known as The Singing Chef, first performing her “Fried Chicken Theory According to Jackie Gordon” in Australia in 1999. Halie Thomas is a motivational speaker, inspired to go vegan after her father was diagnosed in 2009 with Type 2 diabetes. (A changed in diet thanks to his daughter’s efforts helped him turn that around.)

When the book made its debut in December, there were plans to promote it, but then the pandemic made in-person events impossible. So, plans for

Kitchen Sessions began to percolate.



Cornbread and duck ham is one of the inspired recipes featured in Toques In Black, A Celebration of ...

[+] BATTMAN

The setup

Chefs and cooks and culinary pros are gifted at turning lemons into... well, something fancier than lemonade. A citron tart, maybe. So when the in-person appearances weren't possible, a pivot to virtual options seemed like the right direction to head.

“It started as an idea for these chefs from around the country to get to know each other,” said Scott Alves Barton, a veteran chef who has moved into academia. Barton acts as moderator for Kitchen Sessions, also occasionally jumping into the mix.

Don't expect high production values when tuning into these free courses. These segments are DIY authentic and unscripted cool, done in chef's home

kitchens. There's casual and serious conversation between the two chefs featured in each session, as dishes are cooked and techniques are explored.

When Collier did a deep dive on grits, for instance, he explained that cooking his custom-blend of three types of grits in cream and half and half from the start of the process — rather than adding the rich note at the end — helps create a texture that's ultra-velvety. "Grits don't get the respect they deserve," he said.



Ilesha Williams, owner of The Salty Heifer in Brooklyn, N.Y., recently made Pistachio-Rosewater ... [+] TOQUES IN BLACK KITCHEN SESSIONS

During another session, [Cassandra Armstrong](#) and [Kimberly Brock Brown](#) focused on ingredients likely to be found at food banks during these budget-challenging times and collaborated on a recipe.

VIMEO

Toques in Black: Kitchen Sessions - Chefs Kimberly Brock-Brown & Cassandra Armstrong

Ishea Williams — pastry chef in Michelin-starred restaurants before launching [The Salty Heifer](#) bakery in Brooklyn — collaborated with entrepreneurial chef [Jesse Jones](#) for a feast. He made Moroccan Spiced Shrimp and she finished the meal strong by deftly preparing a lovely Pistachio-Rosewater Halvah.

These sessions are a genius way of promoting sales of the book. Forty percent of the proceeds from sales of this title go to a fund to help those chefs featured in the book who are now unemployed due to the COVID-19 crisis. You don't have to order to participate in the Kitchen Sessions, yet having access to the book makes the sweet and savory even more powerful. For information on ordering, visit [The Chef's Connection](#).

To view the Toques in Black Kitchen Sessions, check out the details on [Eventbrite](#).

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By [Leslie Kelly](#)

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Leslie Kelly

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