**Episode Title:** Antoni Porowski and the Dream of Chickens

**Episode Summary:** In our third episode, Food & Wine's executive features editor Kat Kinsman speaks with her friend Antoni Porowski. His rise to fame may seem meteoric, with a star-making role as *Queer Eye*’s food and drinks expert leading to bestselling cookbooks and tours, and a Netflix competition show of his own. But Porowski has been preparing for this moment since he was a multilingual, food-fixated, Martha Stewart-loving kid in Canada with his eye on the silver screen and beyond. Antoni and Kat chatted about panic attacks, Red Lobster, meeting his idol, and the beautiful, dog-and-chicken-filled future he's finally daring to dream.

**Episode Type:** Full  
**Episode Rating:** Clean  
**Season Number:** 1  
**Episode Number:** 3  
**Episode Date:** Jun 27, 2023

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**Episode Transcript:**

**Music: Tinfoil Swans Music begins**

**Kat Kinsman (VO)**

Welcome to Food & Wine's Tinfoil Swans, a weekly podcast serving up inspiring, touching, hilarious, revealing conversations with some of the biggest names in the food and beverage world and — we hope — giving you plenty to savor even after the episode is over. I'm your host Kat Kinsman, executive features editor at Food & Wine, and I'm eternally fascinated by how successful, creative people become, well, themselves. What are the moments, influences, missteps, pep talks, and decisions — big and small — that got them where they are today?

This week, I got to catch up with my friend Antoni Porowski. You may know him as the food and drinks expert on *Queer Eye*, now in its 7th heartwarming and ugly-cry-inducing season. Maybe you've had the pleasure of seeing him onstage on tour for his cookbooks *Antoni In The Kitchen* or *Let's Do Dinner*, or hosting his highly entertaining (and I'm not just saying that because he let me come on as a guest judge) Netflix competition show *Easy Bake Battle*. Maybe you thirst-follow his Instagram? (It's cool, he knows.)
But before all that, Antoni was a multilingual, multicultural kid living in Canada, in awe of Martha Stewart (who he now HANGS OUT WITH!), dreaming of a life on the stage and screen, overanalyzing every bite of food that crossed his plate — and every decision in front of him.

Welcome to Season One, Episode Three of Tinfoil Swans, Antoni Porowski and the Dream of Chickens

Kat Kinsman:
Hi, my friend. (laughs) I am so happy that you have come to join us today on Tin Foil Swans.

Antoni Porowski:
Hi, Kat.

Kat Kinsman:
It is a delight to see your face. I have banked the new season of Queer Eye to binge over the weekend. I keep hearing people, people say that it is the best one yet, which has got to feel-

Antoni Porowski:
Wow.

Kat Kinsman:
Well, that's got to feel great, right?

Antoni Porowski:
That's high praise, I'll take it.

Kat Kinsman:
And the funny thing is, I've known you since before this started-

Antoni Porowski:
Uh-huh.

Kat Kinsman:
But what we want to start out with is what I ask every guest at the beginning, because it goes way back before I knew you at all. Antoni-
An toni Porowski:  
Mm-hmm.

Kat Kinsman:  
Who were you when you were 10 years old?

An toni Porowski:  
Okay, so I was 10 years old. I was a very picky eater, I did not like fresh tomatoes.

Kat Kinsman:  
Mater hater?

An toni Porowski:  
I was a mater hater. (laughs) I only liked them cooked, or in a stew, or sauce, and I was going to St. Lawrence Elementary School, and I was swimming several days a week for SAMAC which was this, like, swim club. And in the winter, we would have to sell Florida citrus to pay for, like, to travel to go for our swim meet, so we had these beautiful, ruby red grapefruits, and full disclosure, my dad would just sell them. He's a physician, and he worked at a hospital, so he would just sell them to all the other physicians. I did nothing.

Kat Kinsman:  
I went to Catholic school, and I was in Girl Scouts. I was made to go door to door, 'cause my dad was like, "I am not putting that on my colleagues." (laughing) But all the people who were the super top sellers, you know, their parents just took care of it.

An toni Porowski:  
I would have much preferred quote, unquote, "Selling/consuming cookies" than grapefruits, but the grapefruits were delicious, they were very good. My dad would cut one for me every Saturday before Polish school-

Kat Kinsman:  
Oh.

An toni Porowski:  
And he would make the little incision so that I wouldn't eat any pit, then he would put just a tiny little bit of sugar on there, and that was, like, part of my morning breakfast.
Kat Kinsman:
Okay. So actually, let's go to that. You were going to Polish school, so at home, are you speaking Polish and English? Where were you living?

Antoni Porowski:
In Canada, in a suburb of Montreal called Brossard, or if you're French Canadian, Brossard.

Kat Kinsman:
Ooh.

Antoni Porowski:
Which was basically right off the island, it was like the first exit when you took Champlain Bridge in our sector, 'cause all the streets are divided into street names. I would say especially when I was even younger than that, when I was a little kid, we only spoke Polish exclusively, and then I started to learn French at school, and English I kind of learned from my sisters, and from Sesame Street, and just being out and about. So English kind of, like, infiltrated, and started to take over the Polish a little. So literally, I would have sentences in three different languages at first, so it was kind of all over the place a little.

Kat Kinsman:
I'm sure that made you fit really well at school.

Antoni Porowski:
(laughs) Yeah. Well in Montreal it did, because all their parents emigrated from somewhere, so it wasn't out of the norm. My friend Andrew [Last Name], his mom was Portuguese, his father was Iranian. Nicola [Last Name], his mom was Greek, his dad was Italian, so it was very normal to have all these different ethnicities all over the place.

Kat Kinsman:
that's really, really lovely, that you were able to find that rhythm, and imagine everybody's picking up each other's speech, and picking up words from other cultures that they're not from, and that's kind of-

Antoni Porowski:
Totally, and all the weird, awesome foods that you would see at lunch, and different things you would get to experience because they were very strict. No junk food, no potato chips, no chocolates, no candy, no soda, anything like that. So kids brought real food to school which was so cool.
Kat Kinsman:
So when you're 10, and you're looking out. Our world is tiny when we're 10 and we're looking out at the bits of the rest of it that creep into it. Where did you maybe see where you wanted to be, and was food appealing to you, was being on screen appealing to you? What did you want?

Antoni Porowski:
(laughs) So I always wanted to be an actor. I always wanted to be in movies. I think I wanted to be in movies 'cause I loved movies so much. And with food, I mean, I wasn't thinking necessarily about a career... I was just very focused on being a kid, and seeing what I could get away with-

Kat Kinsman:
Mm. (laughs)

Antoni Porowski:
but I will say that even though as a picky eater, I was definitely very obsessed with food. That was, I would say, 90% of the conversations that went around At our table whenever we'd be enjoying a meal together. It was always like, "Oh, we went to this restaurant, and we had lobster prepared this way, wouldn't it be nice if we grilled it instead?" "Wouldn't it dry out?" "Oh, no. You would have to add more garlic butter." And, and so, I heard my parents would talk about these things. They traveled a lot, and they went to all kinds of really interesting places. So when they'd come back from Morocco, and suddenly we were eating tagine for a while, or when my mother would go to Poland to visit her mother at the time, while she was still alive. She would come back with all of these, like, crazy little,yogurts

Kat Kinsman:
Ooh.

Antoni Porowski:
They're like a hybrid between yogurt and a farmer's cheese, so they were really dense, and they were really well flavored, and then she would bring back a oscypek, which was like this smoked, kind of like a mozzarella-y type cheese that you heat up on a pan and then it melts, and then you serve it with lingonberries, and some little toast squares, or melbas, or something. So, food was definitely central, but it was never anything that I thought I would pursue professionally, literally until Queer Eye kind of came about. Or actually, maybe, you know what? That's a lie because I dabbled in it, when I met you, when you were at Tasting Table, and I did my first ever food demo on camera, which I was like, "Oh, this is really interesting."

Kat Kinsman:
Which we will be linking to in the show notes.
Antoni Porowski:
Mm, great.

Kat Kinsman:
It's so charming, And the dish you made is fantastic on that.

Antoni Porowski:
Aw.

Kat Kinsman:
At this point, are you mostly eating at home, are you going to restaurants?

Antoni Porowski:
I would say 90% of meals were at home.

Kat Kinsman:
Mm.

Antoni Porowski:
And then the trips that we would take, like, an overseas trip a year. They had one Caribbean trip a year, which then they would come from that trip, and we would basically have, it was all based on Great Chefs of the World. It was a show on Discovery.

Kat Kinsman:
Yes.

Antoni Porowski:
It was my favorite show 'cause it, it aired right before Oprah when I would come back home from school. And so, my mother would get inspired by recipes from there. We went through a phase where, like, every single week, we would have some kind of white fish or salmon that was a baked situation. She wrapped it in mango, and then would put a slice of brie on top of that with a papaya, black bean, red pepper, mango salsa situation. So, we would eat a lot of Caribbean food in the winter-

Kat Kinsman:
Yeah.
An toni Porowski:
'Cause they would typically go during the winter, and then we had a Caribbean trip with the family where we'd go to some kind of an all inclusive situation. Everything was kind of inspired by their travels, I would say, and a lot of like, hearty Polish food, and incredible soups. During the winter, the restaurant ritual. Okay, so going to Red Lobster was a big deal because we were all seafood nuts. And when Red Lobster came to the south shore, those biscuits, and that treasure chest where you could pick out these little (laughing) alien finger toys, or weird necklaces, and I was always like, "Why would anybody pick a necklace? Why wouldn't you want to collect all of the little alien finger toys?

Kat Kinsman:
With the, like, little rubbery arms?

An toni Porowski:
Yeah, exactly, and they would, like, wiggle.

Kat Kinsman:
Yes.

An toni Porowski:
Yeah. So Red Lobster was a big deal. We would go there a couple days a year, and then there was a chain called Casa Grecque, which was Greek food. It was bring your own wine, and they had a lobster festival every summer, and we would have two lobsters each 'cause they were like, $10, which was a steal for a lobster. And so, we would go have that every summer. We would go at least once a week. It was mandated, the whole family.

Kat Kinsman:
You know, people rag on chain restaurants, and yes, there are issues, but it can really speak to where you're from, and to these communal experiences. And, I travel a lot of places, and I'm sure you do too, where it's only chain restaurants, really.

An toni Porowski:
Totally.

Kat Kinsman:
And it's still people who are employed there, and it's still these very specific memories, and it just sort of irks me when people sort of auto bag on these places that growing up, we didn't go out to eat a whole lot, and if we'd gone to Red Lobster, I would have thought that was so incredibly fancy.
Antoni Porowski:
It was so fancy. It was the most special place in the world. It literally had lobster in the name.

Kat Kinsman:
I remember a friend of mine wrote this incredible essay, and saying how she felt like a little queen. She had won the spelling bee, and her family went there, and you get the drawn butter and the tiny fork.

Antoni Porowski:
Oh, yeah, the little fork was so fancy. You need those to get the meat out of the smaller arms, and off the claws, 'cause that's what we prized, 'cause that meat was so delicate and tender. We weren't allowed to waste a single bit of lobster meat, no, no, no.

Kat Kinsman:
No, again, I grew up Catholic, and the nuns would disembowel me if I wasted any more food (laughing) But so, with fancy, did you like fancy things? Was that part of your cosmos, or did you just like interesting things?

Antoni Porowski:
I definitely had a taste for caviar from a very young age. (laughing) My parents would bring it back from Poland, and it was Russian at the time, and that was a thing. And so, I definitely loved that from a very early age. I loved all shellfish, all seafood. Cheeses I definitely was introduced to at a pretty young age, 'cause on Friday nights, we had this ritual when we would watch TGIF, and then Dateline, and then 20/20 with Barbara Walters and Hugh Downs-

Kat Kinsman:
Oh, yes.

Antoni Porowski:
And we would have this crazy cheese platter situation, and they were like 90% of them were unpasteurized 'cause the laws were different in Canada than they were in the US, so I had epoisses was like, a normal thing from a young age. And for anybody who doesn't know, it smells like a kid's hockey bag after a month of not cleaning it. That's literally it, and it was prized, and we loved it.

Kat Kinsman:
A friend of mine has a restaurant, where he serves epoissicale. So he dips the spoon in there, and hands you the spoon. (laughs)
Antoni Porowski:
My gosh.

Kat Kinsman:
So you're having these experiences, and you're watching Great Chefs. It's amazing how many of the people who I've spoken with for this podcast talk about watching chefs on TV, or watching Jacques and Julia, and all these people, and that was how they learned to cook. Who was that for you? Did you have that?

Antoni Porowski:
Jacques and Julia 100%.

Kat Kinsman:
Mm-hmm.

Antoni Porowski:
Martha Stewart was very big in our home as well, my middle sister was particularly obsessed and had a subscription. My sister made sushi for all of us the first time that I ever had it not in a restaurant because of Martha Stewart Living magazine because there was an issue dedicated to that, and then I remember how excited I was when I learned that she was Polish, 'cause she would have her mom [inaudible] come and show her how to make cabbage rolls, and they would do pierogis, and I thought it was so interesting that she would, add apples to the cabbage rolls for, sweetness 'cause we didn't have that. So, yeah, we watched a lot of that. My mother loved those shows as well, and she kind of ran the house. We weren't really allowed to watch anything that we wanted except for Saturday morning cartoons. So it was a lot of Oprah, a lot of cooking shows, but particularly, I would say Great Chefs. That, for me, was quintessential youth because there were great chefs of America, great chefs of the Caribbean, great chefs of the world. And these were chef de cuisine. There was no charisma, there was no charm. (laughing) They were literally in their stainless steel kitchens with their white hats, and their chef coats, and they were just, mumbling away, kind of like, doing their thing. It was so exciting. It was like an opportunity to travel in your own living room, and see what these people were making. And then very often, my mother would actually go and recreate a lot of these dishes, and put little spins and twists on them.

Kat Kinsman:
So picture in your head a little 10 year old you and tell that child that that child will get to speak to Martha Stewart, How's that conversation going?
**Antoni Porowski:**

It's so strange. It's just really weird. I think the past six years has just been filled with these, like moments where I'm experiencing things, and especially when you meet somebody like her. It's so loaded because without knowing it, she was part of my upbringing 'cause we would watch her, and we had her books, and her magazines, and then when you meet the person, it's kind of, like, you have a moment, and you're like, "Oh, you're actually a human being." And so I try to lean into that, but every once in a while, I leave my body, I have this moment where I feel like my soul is escaping my body. And then you're like, right back into it, and it's very surreal. Even now, we've been doing this for six, seven years, and I still kind of have these aha moments of like, that's just... That's bonkers.

**Kat Kinsman:**

So, it's been an interesting thing because I knew you before this, and I know you now, and people have that reaction to you. Where there is a public avatar of you, you're still a real human person, but I'm always so curious about what that feels like on your side, on the side of anybody who's famous enough to be a character in somebody's head, and having to balance that with a reality of your own emotions, and every day being.

**Antoni Porowski:**

Okay, so it really depends on which day you get me. (laughing) If I have a day where I'm, you know, I woke up on the right side of the bed, I had a workout and I meditated, I got to play with my dog, I'm able to be present, and I just feel grounded, and like myself, then I can behave normally. But I'm quite aloof, and so, I even have moments where sometimes I kind of forget. It's interesting, 'cause I go to the park with Neon, my rescue, and my fiance, Kev, it's like our ritual at the end of the day. Whether he's working from home, or at the office, or if I just came back from traveling, and it's something we really enjoy doing. And one day, we'll go and not a single person stopped us, I feel like a completely normal person. And then for some reason, I call it electricity, often it's when a new season of Queer Eye comes out and then suddenly, I'll get stopped so many times. And then you'll have people who will come, and then there'll be a little shocked. And then it's like, okay. I have to lead this conversation. "Hi. How are you? What's your name?" You try to have a little moment. And then other times, they'll be across the street, and just, like, screaming my name, and Kev, my fiance, is always like, "I could have sworn that person knew you." I didn't realize how much I valued anonymity, until it was taken away from me. (laughing)

**Kat Kinsman:**

Well, you and I had recorded another podcast before the pandemic and we were sort of double dog daring each other to go out to lunch solo without the phone, and 'cause that's a protective device. You can go and look at your phone, and be in that world, and it's almost like a little safety blanket, and it's hard to be naked out there to the world. But then, we couldn't go out to eat for a long time. Did those muscles atrophy at all for you?
Antoni Porowski:
Definitely. Because of the pandemic, I was in Austin for a significant portion of it 'cause we were filming Queer Eye there.

Kat Kinsman:
You stayed.

Antoni Porowski:
And so... I stayed. Yeah. New York was the literal epicenter. I just didn't feel right coming back, and, and we came back right after George Floyd was killed.

Kat Kinsman (00:25:13):
Mm, yes.

Antoni Porowski:
We did the drive back with my dog. I think it's something that I'm still trying to adjust to. I've definitely become a lot more of a homebody, in some ways for better, and in other ways, for worse. I've been kind of neglecting my extroverted side. It's getting better and better, but this something that I bring up therapy a lot, but you already know this about me, that I've been bringing up with my therapist, and it's like, I actually have to put on my calendar now, even if it's, like, getting toilet paper, or paper towels, or days where I'm like, working a lot from home and I'm on a lot of Zooms, or whatever it is.

Kat Kinsman:
And I really appreciate that you talk so publicly about mental health, and, and therapy because, Along with my whole host of (laughs) other things, the leaving the house thing can be so hard. I get sort of almost situation agoraphobia, or sometimes it just descends upon me. And just getting out that front door can be a really incredibly difficult thing, for folks listening to this who don't go to therapy..

Antoni Porowski:
Go. (laughs)

Kat Kinsman:
I swear, I will help you find a therapist, low or no cost. I'm really good at this. I love to help people find therapists and stuff. It saved my life, literally-

Antoni Porowski:
Mm-hmm. Same.

**Kat Kinsman:**
It's the best. (laughing) Shout out to Terry, my therapist, who is-

**Antoni Porowski:**
Shout to Carol.

**Kat Kinsman:**
So I want to get to little bit later in your life. Maybe your early 20s or so because I feel like that's a period when a lot of people are figuring things out. At that point, do you know you want to be an actor? That, and that you're really doing it? Not, like, just a childhood dream of, "Hey, I'd like to be on the screen." But actively pursuing it?

**Antoni Porowski:**
Definitely taking it more seriously at this point, so in my early 20s, I was in college and university at Marianopolis, and then at Concordia, and studying psychology. The pure sciences just weren't for me. Even though we have a lot of physicians in the family, and so I felt like that was kind of a happy medium. All the while knowing that I still wanted to be an actor, so I was taking acting classes at night with friends of mine. I was slowly but surely making a plan to go to New York, and I didn't quite know how it was gonna go down yet, but I was figuring it out. A lot of, just so much angst. (laughing) The amount of journaling that I did.

**Kat Kinsman:**
Do you still have those?

**Antoni Porowski:**
Oh, of course. When I'm feeling a little sad is usually when I go to the journals, and I am quickly reminded, like, "Oh, you were actually a lot more sad in your 20s then, then you are for whatever the, the thing that's bothering you today is." I definitely still wanted to be an actor, but I kind of had these two sides to me, and I was a big compartmentalizer. And so there was a part of me that was like, "Okay, play the university student. Go to the study groups. Have that whole experience with the backpack." And then there was the side of me that wanted to basically be, Jack Kerouac and, like, the extra member of, like, The Libertines, or the Strokes, and trying to live that rocker life.

**Kat Kinsman:**
Were these at war with each other, these sides?
Antoni Porowski:
I think so. I wanted so badly to kind of conform. 'Cause everyone in my life was making plans for their masters, and that was something that, well, I didn't have the grades for, but I also didn't have the excitement, or the ambition for as well, I'm so glad that didn't happen, 'cause it just, it wasn't the path for me. I remember I took a Greyhound to New York, and I went to The New School, because they had an open house for their, I believe it was an MFA actor's program, that I wanted to go consider doing, and I actually went to Pastis, the old location-

Kat Kinsman:
Oh. Yes.

Antoni Porowski:
And had dinner by myself, at the bar, where I had, a liter of red wine, and a nicoise, and I wanted to say escargot, but I don't know if they had escargot on the menu. I've always loved escargot. And then I went to New York to try to figure out how I can be an artist, and so, it was kind of like these two things going on simultaneously, so I was definitely in conflict with myself. I think I still am.

Kat Kinsman:
I think that's how we just keep on moving forward, 'cause if we're done and dusted at whatever we age we happen to be, then, what more do you do?

Antoni Porowski:
 Totally.

Kat Kinsman:
I've got to think we're all works in progress. (laughs)

Music: Tinfoil Swans theme fades in

Kat Kinsman:
We'll be back with more from Antoni after the break…

(AD BREAK )

Kat Kinsman:
Welcome back to Tinfoil Swans. Today I'm chatting with Antoni Porowski!
Music: Tinfoil Swans theme fades out

Kat Kinsman:
As a young artist, trying to figure out, like, what route you’re gonna take. If you’re gonna lean into the discomfort, if you're gonna go with the comfort, and there's not necessarily a wrong answer, but you're telling yourself, "Am I selling out if I'm doing such and such?" I'd love to hear about, like, some, moments along the way where, those were kind of switches that flipped, like, yes, I did the hard thing. Yes, I did the easy thing. Can you think of any of those sort of moments, like, as you’re going, you’re auditioning, or whatever it is?

Antoni Porowski:
Oh, yeah. I mean, with, like, with acting, for example, so, I've been to more auditions than I've done episodes of Queer Eye.

Kat Kinsman:
Yeah.

Antoni Porowski:
And it always felt like I was fighting against something that I kind of… I didn’t know if I was good. I still don't. It's hard for me to confidently say, like, "Oh, you know what I’m really good at?" But I felt that there was kind of a block, but I knew that I wanted to head into that direction, and what Carol taught me is that apparently, the youngest kid usually in families of multiple siblings is often the one that wants to be seen. So there is a relationship between people who pursue a career in entertainment, and being the youngest 'cause they feel like they weren't seen when they were growing up, so they want to be seen by the world. It's not not narcissistic, (laughing) but that really hit me when she said that. And so, there was this, this kind of stubbornness because for me, it was the only path, was, like, I want to be on Boardwalk Empire, and I want to be on, like, an HBO show. And then I had these people in my life, and like, close friends who come over for dinner, and I would make something to eat, and they would be like, "I'll just like, stand in the kitchen and you'll be making something, and you'll be talking about it, and like, before we know it, we have a lesson, and I, like, learned a thing. And then when we're sitting down, you're, like, taking apart the dish and critiquing it, and saying how, like, the pasta could have been cooked a minute less, or like, you put too much pasta water, and you should have let it reduce a little more, but you were worried that the noodles were gonna get gummy." Or whatever it was. And so, I had these people that just started kind of pushing me in the direction of food, but I was so stubborn because I thought I had this very specific concrete plan of what it was that I wanted to do. Then it was kind of unavoidable when Queer Eye came about and when a friend of mine, Jameson, who's a manager at the time kind of told me that it was being rebooted.
Kat Kinsman:
What is your mindset as you're coming into film this demo that you were doing with me, which is the first time you were doing, like, a food demo on camera? What is that feeling? Are you nervous? Is that a sort of moment of, like, "Yes, somebody finally sees both parts of me." What, what are the feelings on the way in?

Antoni Porowski:
I remember exactly the layout of the table, and where I was standing, and where the light was hitting in from the outside, and I was so terrified. I had no clue what I was doing, and I felt incredibly naked. At that point, I'd taken all these acting workshops, I'd graduated from the Neighborhood Playhouse in New York. I'd been in New York for a moment, and I'd gone to a lot of auditions, and I always had the comfort of in some ways, showing a very vulnerable side of me with acting, but at the same time, being able to hide certain parts as well, right, through a name, and through a character, and a demeanor, whatever it was. And for this, it was literally just, like, "Hey. This is just me cutting up a bunch of crudité and trying to do a Martha spread, and doing, it was like [unknown word] lobster saffron situation that was like, a riff off something that I'd discovered at Dean & DeLuca-

Kat Kinsman:
Yes.

Antoni Porowski:
way back, when I was a kid with my parents, and I thought it was the chicest little dip I'd ever seen in my life. I couldn't believe that there were chunks of lobster in something that could be consumed as a dip. And, I remember I was just so nervous, 'cause I was like, "Oh, I have nowhere to hide, I'm here to show people how to make this thing that I really love, that I've been making for my family, and for friends every once in a while."

Kat Kinsman:
Yeah.

Antoni Porowski:
Usually without the lobster, 'cause I couldn't afford it. And I think I used lobster in that one. Did I?

Kat Kinsman:
I think we had some cold poached lobster and drawn butter with it.
Antoni Porowski:
Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay, okay. Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Kat Kinsman:
And I think we may have had that on the side, but, I remember you had come in, and I was thinking, "This man is too pretty to have anything interesting to say." And you opened your mouth, and you knew exactly what you were talking about, and you had me at the word proper because I knew that we had the conviction, you clearly knew what you were talking about, but I don't know if you knew that.

Antoni Porowski:
I'm still not sure that I know, but that's what keeps me going, you know?

Kat Kinsman:
And then, a few years after this, you're on Queer Eye, and as your, your own name, the word Queer is in the title of the show. There is nowhere to hide, 'cause it's all just right on there, so how's that all feeling, how did you psych yourself up for this, for this grand reveal of self?

Antoni Porowski:
Again, paralyzing fear. (laughing) Those were the two things that I think scared me the most about the show because on one end, it was like, "Oh, finally. I know what it's like to book something, but at the same time, it was like, again, showing a personal part of our lives. I was working in a lot of different restaurants at the time, and, and so many of them, people didn't even know that I had a partner who was male at the time, and some of them just assumed that I was straight. I still have this debate with myself, I don't think it was pure shame, I don't think anything is every black and white and that simple. I wanted people to keep guessing and to not really fully have me figured out, and then, as soon as I was in a situation where I could disarm someone by telling them, "Oh, like, You know, my boyfriend, you know, at home loves it when I do this." And then that was a way to kind of like, have them warm up to me, to make somebody more comfortable, to show them that I wasn't a threat. I liked having that control, and with Queer Eye, there was just no hiding behind any of it, and it was also food, which was something that was so personal.

Antoni Porowski:
And again, I know I did that demo with you as I was testing things out and trying different things, but that wasn't my music video that played in my head. That wasn't the thing that I was fantasizing about every single day that I wanted to be in Pet Shop Boys being boring or any of those that would keep me up at night 'cause my whole life is music videos. I play everything as like a movie in my brain. That wasn't part of the plan, and that's what I was fighting against
because it was one of the first times where I actually, I really did feel like, "Oh, I got the job that I needed and not the job that I wanted."

Kat Kinsman:
It's kind of incredible sometimes how those things come to pass, and other people, other things make those decisions for you. Are you able now to look at your performances on screen, or on stage, and feel like, "Yes, I feel good about that. I feel like I am representing my full self on there." Or are you just in a constant state of self critique and fear?

Antoni Porowski:
The self critiquing has gotten a lot better because I watch myself a lot less.

Kat Kinsman:
Okay. (laughs)

Antoni Porowski:
At the beginning, it was, like, "Oh, what am I doing? Like, why is my head sticking out so much? Why isn't my head above my shoulders?"

Kat Kinsman:
I do this.

Antoni Porowski:
I would just constantly lean forward like I'm trying to listen to someone who's whispering, or saying the word like a lot. There were all kinds of memes about me saying the word, like, "And I usually just plonk this into the pan, and I would 'like this." So I would say, "Like this," The way some people say like a lot, and then plomp, apparently, is a word that I'm very comfortable with, 'cause I love just plonking things. it's very self descriptive, I wouldn't look at anything and be like, "Oh, yeah, I really crushed it there." But at the same time, I'm definitely a lot more gentle with myself. One thing that, that I think I've gotten comfortable with, and as I'm kind of learning what my secret sauce is whenever I do get anxiety. Even in Queer Eye, all these seasons in, I just tell myself, "Okay, Ant-... Like, you didn't sleep well, you're tired. You're either over caffeinated or under caffeinated, or you're missing Kev, or your dog, or whoever it is, or you had a weird therapy session." And I always just try to tell myself, "Okay, like, just be a human being, just for the next few hours, and just focus on the person that you're with, and go in as you would, meeting somebody at a party. "I'm very curious, I ask a lot of questions, I always want to get to know people, and I just try to focus on that, and then the rest of it hopefully ends up going away. I'm definitely more gentle with myself than I used to be, and now it's sort of like if I see myself wanting something silly, and I'm like, I used to be mortified, and be like, "Why did I wear a suit jacket with nothing under it at this awards ceremony with this crazy necklace?" And now, I'm
just, like, "Ah, it was a moment in time. I tried it out, it didn't work out. All right, life goes on. I'm not here to save lives." I don't take myself as seriously, which has been really nice, but that took a lot of, a lot of practice and desensitization of seeing my face in a whole bunch of different places, and saying things, and, and, and all of that.

**Kat Kinsman:**
Humans weren't built for that.

**Antoni Porowski:**
No. (laughs) None of it's normal, none of it. Absolutely none of it.

**Kat Kinsman:**
But what's scarier, being out there on a show like Queer Eye, or writing a cookbook, where it's all in print, written down for the ages?

**Antoni Porowski:**
Queer Eye is scarier because yes, there are editors, but there's no script, so it's really just me and my thoughts in the moment, and, it's the spontaneity that is a little more terrifying for me. Writing a cookbook is terrifying in many other ways, 'cause I'm always battling, trying to relay my POV and trying to be as authentic as possible, but then questioning, "What if my authenticity as seen as basic, or just wrong, or dumb, or something that doesn't necessarily make sense?" And actually, as I'm thinking about it, I get that on Queer Eye as well, where like, I'll... You know, I made a gumbo once in an episode, and for, a restaurant, and the daughter really wanted to have corn in the gumbo, and, even though I very specifically said, "Oh, we're putting corn in this gumbo because your daughter wanted it that way." And he was like, "Yeah, sure. Let's do it." And the amount of flack that I got. Again, 'cause I was reading the stupid comments, and people posting, like, "We need to teach this boy how to make a proper gumbo. Corn doesn't belong in there." I think the fear is always, it's the vulnerability part. It's kind of like if I put myself out there, I'm not saying that I want praise, but I, I don't like getting clobbered.

**Kat Kinsman:**
You're human.

**Antoni Porowski:**
It's painful. When you're honest, and you're open, and you're vulnerable, and that doesn't work for somebody.

**Kat Kinsman:**
So let's say you're not human. Let's say you're a Muppet. Which one are you?
Antoni Porowski:
Oh, I love Animal for so many reasons.

Kat Kinsman:
So what is it about Animal that appeals to you?

Antoni Porowski:
Animal is just unabashedly chaotic, and all over the place, but then I like Fozzie Bear too. Fozzie Bear has a nice, comforting sweetness, maybe it's just the whole teddy bear aspect.

Kat Kinsman:
So when we're talking again when you're my age, 50, (laughs) where, where are you hoping you're gonna be? What is the thing you want?

Antoni Porowski:
I want to have a place in the country-

Kat Kinsman:
Yeah.

Antoni Porowski:
With a big fence so my dog can run around freely and I don't have to worry about her nose taking her to anywhere that she doesn't need to be 'cause she's very much controlled by her nose, strong sense of smell. And I want to have a place in the city. I want to have kids, and have, all the books that I like, loved growing up, like on their walls, and I want to teach them how to play the guitar 'cause I didn't learn how to play the guitar when I was a kid, and I want to play Cat Stevens' Father and Son.

Kat Kinsman:
Yes.

Antoni Porowski:
and by then, Kev and I are gonna have wedding bands, which is kind of crazy to think about.

Kat Kinsman:
You're getting married soon?
**Antoni Porowski:**

Yeah. I want to have the kind of set up where I just have, I love my routines and my rituals, and I just want to have, the fresh juice from, a specific place, and I want to have, either my own chickens, or have, like, farm eggs delivered, or just have, a system in place of all the things that kind of bring me joy. I can't think about, like, work goals for me for long term are kind of hard, but I think more of my personal life, and I want to have a big U shaped sectional that's very deep that I can sit on, and just like, watch TV.

**Kat Kinsman:**

Curling up with a dog and a person, that's beautiful. As somebody who cares about you very, very much, it really makes me happy to see you, and hear you content, and to have all this love in your life. Now I'm getting emotional about this, but you matter to me, and I'm so grateful that you are on this, and I have one last question.

**Antoni Porowski:**

Yeah?

**Kat Kinsman:**

What is a tinfoil swan moment to you?

**Antoni Porowski:**

(laughs) Also, I love you to death, and you always check in on me whenever there's something going on, or something that's out there, I'm extremely grateful for your friendship. Tinfoil swan for me? The most recent tinfoil situation is kind of a symbol for this, especially since being a dog owner. I'm not crazy about fat caps on steaks. My dad loves them. It's not for me. I like good marbleized beef, or I like try to go a little leaner. I love a good, a strip, or a hanger, and so when there's a fat cap, I'm not gonna throw it out, so I keep it for my dog. She also loves carrots, I will ask for the leftover of the steak to be wrapped up, basically to go so that I can give it to my dog, and when I come home, 'cause she's been alone for a whole two hours, which is, that's an international incident for her-

**Kat Kinsman:**

Oh no.

**Antoni Porowski:**

because she has a busier social calendar than me, not even kidding. Walking you through it would be a whole episode. But when I come home and it's like, I've been gone for a couple hours, and she knows that I'm coming there, and I have some pieces of steak, I'll cut it. I'll chop it up finely, I'll put it in a container so I can mix it in with her food the next day, but I give her a
little bit then, and it's like, I love bringing back to gos, little tin foil swans, for my dog, so it makes me think of my pup. Sometimes some bread as well, if there's no garlic or onion in there, and if it's like, a nice sourdough, or, um, I think pumpernickel is fine for her, but she's, she's a big fan of a Parker House roll, loves a buttery roll.

**Kat Kinsman:**
I think half the audience wants to be your dog now. (laughing) Living the dream, my friend. Thank you so much.

**Kat Kinsman (VO):** Thanks for listening to my conversation with Antoni Porowski. Be sure to follow Tinfoil Swans on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen. And we’d love your feedback. If you could rate this podcast and leave us a review, we’d really appreciate it. You can also find us online at foodandwine.com/tinfoilswans. Thanks to this incredible production team, Lottie Leymarie, Dominique Arciero, Michael Klasek, Amelia Schwartz, Ashley Day, Sean Flynn, and Hunter Lewis. Make sure to come back on July 11th for my conversation with Shota. Take care of yourself until then.